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"LEADING STUDENTS": CREATING A STUDENT-RUN PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL

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Abstract

A reflective study of one higher education institution's endeavor to create an academic peer-reviewed journal managed by students for students. The article examines the aims and challenges of developing student leadership by authoring, peer-reviewing, and editing a scholarly journal, especially in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural country like Kazakhstan, and offers a methodological framework for investigating and improving the development of student leadership in similar multicultural higher education settings.

Key words: Peer-reviewed journal, student leadership, multilingual education

РЕЦЕНЗИЯЛУУ ИЛИМИЙ ЖУРНАЛДЫ ТҮЗҮҮДӨ СТУДЕНТТЕРДИН ЛИДЕРДИК САПАТТАРЫНЫН КАЛЫПТАНЫШЫ

Кыскача мазмуну

Бул макала жогорку окуу жайда студенттер көзөмөл кылган рецензиялуу илимий журналдын долбоорун түзүүгө арналган.

Ачкыч сөздөр: рецензиялуу илимий журнал, студенттик лидердик, көп тилдүү билим берүү.

ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЛИДЕРСКИХ КАЧЕСТВ У СТУДЕНТОВ ПОСРЕДСТВОМ СОЗДАНИЯ РЕЦЕНЗИРУЕМОГО НАУЧНОГО ЖУРНАЛА, УПРАВЛЯЕМОГО СТУДЕНТАМИ

Аннотация

Данная статья рассматривает проект создания академического рецензируемого журнала, управляемого студентами, одним из высших учебных заведений. В статье рассматриваются цели и проблемы студенческого управления в форме авторства, независимого экспертного рецензирования и редактирования научного журнала, особенно в такой многоязычной и мультикультурной стране, как Казахстан, а также предлагается методологическая основа для изучения данного опыта и способствования формирования лидерских качеств у студентов в аналогичных поликультурных сферах высшего образования.

Ключевые слова: рецензируемый научный журнал, студенческое лидерство, многоязычное образование.

Introduction

The trends of internationalizing and globalizing education have not slowed in the past decade. Rather, more and more universities worldwide are finding and implementing new ways to reinvent and reinvigorate the educational systems in which their graduates will work (Lee, 2014; Rivza, Bikse & Brence, 2015). Master's programs in educational leadership serve as a platform for shaping future teachers, administrators and policymakers and ultimately, the educational institutions they join. We, educators in HEIs, should be re-examining our leadership programs, asking: what type of leaders do we want, and how can we develop those leadership skills and qualities?

This working paper presents an argument for, and a reflection of, the use of a student-led peer-review journal as one relatively new means to develop educational leaders and scholars. The crux, however, lies not in the journal itself-although role of faculty in establishing and managing the journal is paramount – but in the perceptions and understandings the students themselves hold. More to the point, those perceptions and attitudes toward assuming leadership roles vary by country and institution. The particular graduate program in this study finds itself in a multicultural, multilingual environment, characterized by English-medium instruction, diverse international faculty, a homogenous student population, and the complex dance between western, post-Soviet, and traditional cultural values typical of Central Asia.

The following literature review begins by defining educational leadership and its variations from program to program, and examining their specific intended outcomes in an ever-growing competitive job market. Given this foundation, the focus turns to the role of student and faculty working relationships as an insight into the unique characteristics of global communities, followed by the challenges and benefits of multilingual interactions and their application to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction. Finally, I present an overview of the mechanism through which these interactions take place: a student-led peer review journal.

The final section lays a qualitative methodological framework for investigating the following questions: 1) How can HE faculty facilitate the development of student leadership in the context of a student-led peer reviewed journal? 1a) How do the student participants view the concept of leadership? 1b) How do the student participants see their own role in the journal as leadership? 2) How do student views of leadership relate to theoretical views of leadership, both internationally and in a multicultural context? 2a) How do these experiences of student leadership translate into best practices for developing and sustaining a student-led peer reviewed journal?

Conceptions of student leadership

The various iterations of educational leadership reflect multiple styles and approaches, from "transformational," to "distributed," to "strategic," among others. Bush (2011) differentiates between formal, collegial, subjective, ambiguity and cultural models of leadership. Despite this complexity, these versions hold two common goals: "helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in those directions" (Leithwood et. al, 2004, p. 6). This basic definition allows us to focus on the more problematic questions of which models present the most significant challenges to multicultural environments (addressed in a later section) and which competencies should be developed in leadership programs. Research points to several key competencies that leaders must have, including effective communication, learning ability, adaptability, and cultural awareness (Van Velsor & Wright, 2012), a list that unsurprisingly mirrors the competencies desired by knowledge-economy employers, like critical thinking, cooperative working, and problem solving (Simons, Braeckman & Elen, 2008).

The term *student leadership* is often conflated with the term *participation*, resulting in a poor understanding in which activities lead to the development of leadership skills. Bush's (2011) collegial model clearly draws the connection between participation and leadership, emphasizing that participation is the opportunity to help make decisions (p. 87). Thomson and Holdsworth (2003) showed that the different participatory and leadership-building activities range from passive to active, and from implicit to explicit. They argue that active, explicit leadership development is often only found in special extracurricular project and "elite forms of student leadership" like student government and exclusive clubs (p. 372). On the whole, the literature emphasizes the benefits of the participatory, democratic leadership-developing activities to improve organizational effectiveness.

In maximizing the development of leadership skills in students, the role of the institution and the faculty is central. Osteen and Coburn (2012) explain the steps towards this interaction: "Once we accept our role, we must align with our university/college mission, gain institutional support, and actively collaborate with internal and external partners" (p. 13). Rosch and Anthony (2012) extend this idea to include the importance of explicitly teaching leadership. Educators, according to them, "…must be intentional in matching their intended program or course outcomes with relevant student and leadership development theory, and then apply effective strategies for the delivery of material to a diverse student population" (p. 38).

Learning outcomes

Most educational leadership programs tie together these themes into program outcomes. San Diego State, for example, lists eight areas of development: theoretical understanding, critical and analytical approaches to thinking, organizational and group dynamics, cultural competency, self-awareness, application to HE, and trends in educational policy ("Student outcomes", 2016). The University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education ("Distinctive elements", 2016) describes its educational leadership program this way:

"To instill the cross-cutting skills that today's leaders must master, our faculty foster effective habits of mind, emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and responsive communication practices and professionalism. Our integrated program of study focuses on comprehensive leadership – instructional, organizational, public, and evidence-based." (para. 5)

These programs focus on the components of leadership that are individual in nature–like thinking skills, understanding context, and recognizing trends in research–but also the collaborative, interpersonal, cultural and reflective components that, as we will see next, present multiple challenges in a multicultural setting.

Multiculturalism and contrasting models of leadership

Sustainable and distributed leadership are two of the most commonly taught leadership styles in international higher education (Ingleton, 2013; Webster et. al, 2011), sharing a common focus on collaboration and capacity-building. Sustainable leadership is not only built to last, but also promotes diversity, is socially just, resourceful, activist, and integrated in the system (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). In multicultural settings, however, these goals can be in direct or indirect conflict with cultural norms and expectations. Conceptually there arises a broad binary between more formal, positional models of leadership–characterized by hierarchy and rigidity–and participatory models that emphasize collaboration, collegiality and a distribution of decision-making responsibilities. It is within this binary that many of the rich experiences between faculty and student cultures play out.

Concerns about multiculturalism often go hand in hand with internationalizing processes in HEIs. There is a tendency for universities to see internationalization as a

way to level the playing field, giving them a competitive edge over regional HEIs (Lee, 2014). This tendency, however, does not equate with promoting diversity or cultural competencies. As Lumby and Foskett (2016) suggest, "internationalization risks extending the perennial role of education in sustaining unequal power structures" (p. 96). In other words, HEIs with international faculty may likely experience a conflict in the goal to teach leadership styles that do not align with the prevailing culture of the student's home country.

To illustrate this better, Hofstede's (1980) *models of culture* can be mobilized. This conceptualization of culture dynamics involves quantifying various elements of value. *Power Distance*, for example, is a measure of acceptance of hierarchical power structures. *Collective versus Individual* rates social integration into groups. *Uncertainty Avoidance* describes the relationship people have with ambiguity and free flowing ideas that differ from cultural norms. *Masculinity* refers to the preference for men to hold positions of leadership. Conflicts in leadership style are easily predicted if individuals who prefer a distributed, consensus-building leadership style (low power distance) are taught to be authoritative leaders that delegate tasks. Similarly, individuals raised in an environment that expects rigid rules (high uncertainty avoidance) will be uncomfortable in an organization that does not clearly define the roles of its members. Clearly, cultural competencies and emotional intelligence play a central role in developing leadership in multicultural settings.

At this stage, my view is that the convergence of, and dialogue between, these contrasting traditions of leadership form the central basis for understanding how students experience leadership through a student-led journal. Their participation in the decision-making processes, as well as their role in taking responsibility for the journal's content and vision, may be something new and uncomfortable for them. Even more importantly, once they adapt to this distributed leadership model, complete the program and enter the local workforce, they will likely face a similar difficulty in applying that model to the formal, positional work environment.

Multilingualism and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

In brief, the issues addressed above become the lens through which all faculty-student interactions take place. I have previously argued that student autonomy, engagement and fluency are increased through hands-on, application-based learning activities like blogging communities and authentic communication (Montgomery, 2014; see also Mulling, 2007, Savignon, 1987). A peer-reviewed journal, in which students are authors, reviewers, and editors, creates innumerable interactions and opportunities for development of fluency in English, ethical research skills and critical thinking. At the same time, the relative inexperience of students presents specific challenges, such as the added time needed to teach academic literacies, and then to revise and proofread student writing if the final produced version of the journal is to be competitive on the international scale.

Academic publication and open access (OA) journals

Publication culture itself has democratized, mirroring the vast changes in media with the growth of the Internet and web 2.0 in particular. The same decentralizing forces that drive the growth of blogs and social networking have created space in the elite field of academic publishing. OA journals have proliferated and gained a largely reputable status despite the number of predatory journals in circulation (Kaba & Said, 2015). They offer many benefits to researchers and authors who want equal and free access to current ideas, but they also present complications to publishers and the industry of academic publication (Gardner, 2013; Pinfield, 2007). Jacobs (2006) offers an extensive investigation into the strategic, techni-

cal and economic aspects of OA publishing, but very little literature addresses OA publication as a pedagogical tool. The main advantages of OA publication–free access, open-source technological platforms, ease of dissemination–are the driving elements behind the choice to use this format for this student-led journal.

Research site

The research site is an educational leadership program in one HEI in Central Asia with a largely international faculty and English-medium instruction. The student journal was an idea suggested by faculty on the research committee as a way for students and alumni (hereafter I use the term students to include alumni, or former students) to learn and publicly apply research skills. The faculty then gathered interest from the students and selected a core of interested students to create the vision, scope, procedures and organization of the journal.

The editorial board consists of six current graduate and postgraduate students, two alumni of the program and two faculty members. After their formation, the editorial board met weekly to define the journal and their roles within it. One faculty member chaired the meetings and set the agenda, as well as managed the process of requesting institutional support from the university. The student members took responsibility in promoting the journal to their peers, who then became the pool of peer reviewers and authors. Other responsibilities included managing an email account, co-leading a workshop to train peer reviewers, and making decisions on the various technological and content-based requirements necessary for an online journal.

The editorial board adopted an organizational structure in which one faculty member became the chief editor, with four student managing editors who remained outside of the blind peer review process. The other four student members remained editorial board members and participated in reviewing papers. The students and faculty work in a collaborative manner, with the faculty driving the discussions and asking for student feedback. Faculty members also serve as advisers for student questions. The relationships formed in this context are essential to understanding the interpersonal and cultural elements of developing student leadership.

Methodology

This final section proposes a methodology to investigate the student experience of participating in the journal. The participants have been selected purposefully due to their participation in the editorial board of the student journal. Neuman (1997) explains that purposive sampling is best used in "…unique cases that are especially informative… [or in order to] identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation [where] the purpose is less to generalize to a larger population than it is to gain a deeper understanding…" (p. 206). This group has worked together for six months developing the journal and should offer this special insight into the question at hand.

The data collection instruments consist of focus groups and one-on-one interviews with the participants in the journal. These largely non-quantitative methods "…permit creativity, self-expression, and richness in detail," and "reveal a respondent's logic, thinking process, and frame of reference" (Neuman, 1997, p. 240). Despite Hofstede's and others' attempts to quantify dimensions of intercultural relations, this study will aim to offer a deeper qualitative understanding of the reasoning, risks, challenges and benefits students experience through their leadership roles in this project.

Conclusion

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are a deeper understanding of how student leadership is facilitated and developed in HEIs. The findings of the study may directly impact how this student journal is run, and may indirectly impact how other universities develop and facilitate student leadership through similar projects.

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