

# MountainRise

Volume 8, Number 2 (2014)

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There is a story about Hui-neng, one of the primary figures of Zen philosophy, and the legendary Sixth Patriarch of the Chan tradition. One day, a nun came to him and said, "Oh, great master! I have been studying the sutras for many years, yet there are parts that I still do not understand. Can you enlighten me?" Hui-neng said, "Of course. Since I myself cannot read, if you will read these passages aloud to me, I will do my best to reveal their truth to you." The nun was shocked. "How can you know what the texts mean if you do not even know the meaning of the characters?" she asked. Hui-neng replied, "Truth has nothing to do with the words. The truth is like the moon in the sky, and words are like a finger pointing toward it. It is helpful to have the finger to point out the moon, but the finger is not the moon. To see the moon it is necessary to look beyond the finger."

This story illustrates what SoTL scholars grapple with every day: how do we bridge the gap between what is taught and what is learned? How do we make sure our students are seeing the moon, and not our finger? How do we cultivate students' autonomy so they can use the tools that we give them to forge their own path toward true knowledge? This issue of Mountain Rise presents articles by teachers wrestling with these questions.

Our first article by Janelle Wilson and Carmen Latterall explores the gap between teaching and learning by investigating the experiences of non-mathematics students in general education math classes. Engaging students with the subject matter and asking them to participate in their own learning process, both key to effective learning, can be challenging in required general education courses. The gap between teachers' perceptions of their subject matter and students' perceptions is often wide. In order to make mathematics more relevant and engaging to their students, Wilson and Latterall set out to discover what exactly their students think mathematics is. The study they design and administer on the first day of class reveals not what knowledge students bring into the classroom, but what students think the purpose of that knowledge is. Their research finds a starting place, solid ground on which to build a bridge across the gap between how students understand math and how mathematicians understand math. By deepening their students' understanding of the relevance of mathematics, these researchers hope to engage their students and invite them to participate in their own learning process.

Actively using students' experiences outside the classroom to bridge the gap between teaching and learning is the foundation of sending students abroad to study. By surrounding students with a new

language and culture, these programs aim to expand the classroom beyond its walls. When students study abroad, their experiences outside the classroom should support and deepen their experiences inside the classroom. But what happens when it doesn't work this way? Claire O'Reilly, a German language teacher who sends Irish students to study abroad, finds that her students don't meet their goals regarding language acquisition and cultural competency. By carefully evaluating student feedback and her observations, she diagnoses a set of barriers to student success. Then she considers what can be taught to students prior to, and during, their study abroad to overcome these barriers. O'Reilly's proposed curriculum encourages students to reflect as they learn both inside and outside the classroom. She wants students to stretch beyond their comfort zones to actively engage with the culture of their host country. Her research suggests that having former students who share their experiences prior to the year abroad and faculty mentors who work with students during their year abroad are key to helping students meet their self-selected learning goals. To help her students reach their goals, O'Reilly recruits peer and faculty mentors to help students bridge the gap between their daily experiences and classroom experiences.

The practicum year of student-teachers is specifically designed to help them bridge the gap between their course studies in pedagogy, content, and classroom management to their work in a K-12 classroom. Fostering successful, collaborative relationships between student-teachers and their mentor-teachers is important to helping new teachers reflect on what they are teaching and what their students are learning. Shanna Graves studies the efficacy of using dialogue journals between student-teachers and mentor-teachers to enrich the student teaching experience. While this focused study found some differences among the mentorships it studied, dialogue journals hold great potential for enriching the learning experience of student-teachers by developing alternative communication paths between student-teachers and mentors. The dialogue journal also produces a valuable written record of effective teaching strategies. By codifying anecdotal information usually exchanged in informal conversations, student-teachers have valuable information at their fingertips. Interestingly, Graves' study suggests several aspects of the mentorship relationship that could use further study. First, the varied responses to her study suggest that there is no singular form of communication that will work between all mentors and student-teachers. Further work must be done to match students and mentors appropriately. Secondly,

mentors' responses to this study implied that the dialogue journal also enriched the mentors' teaching, bridging a gap in their own learning processes as well as their students'.

The importance of building bridges across campus in order to serve student learning was an unexpected, but crucial, insight in our final article. Jie Zhang, Barbara LeSavoy, Lauren Lieberman, and Leah Barrett began their work by exploring what faculty can learn in order to identify student leaders and help them fully realize their potential. They used a Faculty Learning Community, a cross-campus collaboration involving faculty and staff from more than eight different departments, to identify 20 students who they mentored for a year. Exploring what Faculty Learning Communities can do to foster student leadership, they found that extending learning beyond the classroom through extracurricular activities and internships was essential. Again, a strong mentoring program, with both peer mentors and faculty mentors, benefitted both the student leaders and the mentoring faculty as well. The Faculty Learning Community identified a need to make mentorship a more common part of the academic experience. They also found that building collaborative relationships among faculty members opened up new avenues to help students bring their learning experiences to more aspects of their lives.

Mentorship, dialogue, and collaboration help bridge the gap between teaching and learning. As evidence supporting this pours in from across disciplines and departments, we have been wondering how we can use these tools to benefit the development and publication of SoTL research. With this in mind, we are revamping our publication strategies here at Mountain Rise. Rather than reviewing submissions with the old "accept or reject" paradigm, in which accepted submissions are returned to authors with a set of (often cryptic) notes and an injunction to "revise and resubmit," we are changing things up.

Our dynamic new peer-review model will incorporate collaboration between authors and SoTL mentors. Contributors will submit abstracts for completed, in-progress, or future SoTL projects and be matched with a team of dedicated SoTL scholars and editors. This group will collaborate to develop, refine, and produce the final article to be published in the next issue of Mountain Rise. This will open the field of SoTL scholarship up to new contributors, and discover new methods for refining research and producing excellent scholarship. We are confident this work will benefit the authors, mentors, and the future of SoTL itself.

Join us in this exciting new approach to academic publishing! We are assembling an amazing group of collaborators, and looking for authors eager to deepen their scholarship, improve their teaching, and help propel our discipline to new heights.

What Does The Non-Mathematics Intensive Major Think *Mathematics* Is?

**What does the Non-Mathematics Intensive Major Think *Mathematics* Is?**

Janelle L. Wilson and Carmen M. Latterell

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**Abstract**

This study explores the myriad definitions and conceptualizations of mathematics, with a particular focus on how undergraduate students in a mathematics course designed for non-mathematics intensive majors define the term. Students enrolled in this particular course at a regional university in the Midwest were asked the open-ended question: "What is math?" The researchers employed content analysis in their analysis and interpretation of the data. A number of categories emerged, with the modal category being the conception of mathematics as problem solving that occurs in mathematics classes.

**Keywords:** mathematics, problem-solving, definitions

**What does the Non-mathematics Intensive Major Think *Mathematics* Is?**

Why is mathematics important? Should all secondary students have to take mathematics? What kind of technology should be used in the teaching of mathematics? What are the goals of mathematics education? What are best practices in the teaching of mathematics? How should students be taught to study mathematics? Is the mathematics learned in academic courses applicable to life outside of the classroom?

While each of these questions (and more) are important questions in the field of mathematics education, we suggest that the answer to each of them is dependent on what is *meant* by mathematics. What one thinks mathematics is informs and shapes one's answers. If one thinks mathematics is a collection of arithmetic facts studied in school, then one might view appropriate mathematical study as the memorization of those facts and may not turn to mathematics to help solve situations in one's own life.

There are numerous answers to the question, what is mathematics? Some people define mathematics as a *study*, and then include various aspects that they understand to be a part of some mathematics classes. For example, mathematics is the study of numbers. Mathematics is the study of shape. Mathematics is the study of motion. The definition of mathematics under this view is constantly changing as discoveries are made. Mathematics, then, might be the collection of topics that mathematicians produce.

Others define mathematics as a *tool*. Some believe that everyday people use mathematics in everyday life. Perhaps this view defines mathematics as mainly arithmetic, or perhaps it includes areas of statistics and data analysis which might also be used in everyday life. Describing mathematics as a tool may also mean a tool that engineers and scientists use.

Others go so far as to say that the whole world is mathematical, and thus mathematics is an *explanation of how the world works*. In this more philosophical view, mathematics is a study that develops critical, logical, and/or quantitative thinking. Mathematics might be viewed as a study that instills the power of abstract thought into its students. Mathematics uses symbols and abstraction to generalize from arithmetic, and so some people define mathematics as a special language. Others emphasize the structural nature of mathematics, and define mathematics to be the study of structure, while still others think of mathematics as a work of art, or a formal game with very precise rules.

### Literature Review

Even among mathematicians, there are differing views on what mathematics is, and there is no one right answer. Elementary children believe that mathematics is arithmetic, counting, and/or the four operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing (Kouba & McDonald, 1991). Pre-service elementary teachers view mathematics as conducting calculations (Latterell, 2012). Mathematics majors who are going to be secondary teachers view mathematics as much more than just calculations in that it includes following rules, problem solving, searching for patterns, and thinking (Latterell & Wilson, 2002). Current teachers view mathematics as numbers (Duatepte Paksu, 2008).

The questionnaire included in *Conceptions of Mathematics* (Crawford, Gordon, Nicholas, Prosser, 1994, 1998a, 1998b) was designed to measure what university mathematics students think mathematics is. The conclusion from their studies was that students thought mathematics was one of five things:

1. Math is numbers, rules, and formulas.
2. Math is numbers, rules, and formulas, which can be applied to solve problems.
3. Math is a complex logical system; a way of thinking.
4. Math is a complex logical system, which can be used to solve complex problems.
5. Math is a complex logical system, which can be used to solve complex problems, and provides new insights used for understanding the world.

The first two responses were labeled by the researchers as fragmented conceptions and the last three as cohesive. In addition, the researchers classified students as having a surface approach or a deep approach to the learning of mathematics, and found that 91% of those with a fragmented conception of math had a surface approach to learning math, while 90% of those with a cohesive conception of math had a deep approach to learning math.

Lim Chap Sam (1999) surveyed 548 adults as to what they think mathematics is. The answers emerged in five categories:

1. An answer concerning an attitude towards mathematics (e.g., Mathematics is boring.).
2. An answer concerning mathematics ability (e.g., Mathematics is hard.).
3. An answer concerning the process of learning mathematics (e.g., Mathematics is problem solving.).



4. An answer concerning the nature of mathematics (e.g., Mathematics is numbers and equations.).
5. An answer concerning the values and goals in mathematics education (e.g., Mathematics is beautiful, fun, a mystery, and/or a challenge.).

Fida Atallah (2003) surveyed 238 female students at a university in the Middle East and found that 37% viewed mathematics as a school subject used in everyday life and at work; 18% viewed mathematics as a mental exercise to develop intellectual ability; 10% viewed mathematics as numbers and rules for doing calculations; 9% viewed mathematics as a school subject used in learning other subjects; 5% viewed mathematics as a symbolic language; 4% viewed mathematics as a form of art; and finally 1% viewed mathematics as a language of science. Over 80% of the responses viewed arithmetic as the most useful subject within mathematics.

A group of international colleagues (Wood, et al., 2011) found that university students' perceptions of mathematics was hierarchical, with students viewing mathematics as "an approach to life and a way of thinking," or "about building and using models," or as "a toolbox of individual components and procedures, perhaps only numerical calculations" (p. 101). In an extension of their study, they also interviewed students to see what students thought their future use of mathematics would be. Many students simply had no idea, and others mentioned some type of procedural skills (a view of mathematics as a toolbox), and others mentioned conceptual skills (a view of mathematics as a way of thinking). A few students mentioned mathematics as playing a major role in their career (e.g., someone who wanted to be a statistical consultant answered this way).

### **Method**

This study asks how students from academic majors that do not require mathematics courses view mathematics. At this regional university in the Midwest, many majors require at least one course in mathematics. For those majors that do not, the university requires a course in a category that includes mathematics, logic, and critical thinking. If a student whose major does not require mathematics wants to take a course such as Calculus I, he/she may do so. But, many of these students do not have a very strong background in mathematics, and prefer a course that does not require algebra. The institution offers a course entitled *Contemporary Mathematics* that looks at uses of mathematics in the world, but requires very little previous mathematics ability (basically only pre-algebra ability). The students enrolled

in this course might be majoring in art, sociology, or history, among other majors in the liberal arts or humanities.

The researchers asked the 58 students enrolled in *Contemporary Mathematics* on the first day of class to write an answer to the question, "What is math?" It is not part of this study to attempt to influence their answers, and thus, the researchers presented the question on the very first day. The two researchers separately categorized the responses. Each researcher placed together those responses that seemed similar and created titles for the resulting categories. The researchers then met and compared the codes and the placement of answers into those codes.

Before discussion, the researchers were in 83% agreement. That is, on 83% of the responses, the placement of the responses with other responses matched. At this point, the researchers agreed to category names (which was usually a combination of the names that the researchers were separately using) and the researchers discussed one by one the responses for which there was disagreement. Eventually, there was 100% agreement with the following categories and placement of responses in them:

- Mathematics is a vehicle for discovering and explaining the world.
- Mathematics is a subject that deals with numbers.
- Mathematics is problem solving.

One response was left uncategorized. These categories will be discussed in detail in the results section.

The problem-solving category originally caused the most disagreement. It was decided to attempt to separately re-categorize the responses in this category into three sub-categories:

- Mathematics is problem solving that is needed on a day-to-day basis to make life work.
- Mathematics is problem solving that is used by professionals, such as engineers.
- Mathematics is problem solving that occurs in mathematics classes.

In essence, the researchers believed that students were using the term "problem solving" in fundamentally different ways. Some students used it to refer to the problem solving that occurs in daily life. Others meant that only certain professionals do problem solving, while still others thought that problem solving occurred only in mathematics classes (and had no real-life applications). The researchers attempted to go back through the problem solving answers and separate them into these three

categories, but unfortunately, the researchers found this difficult to do, as student responses were often difficult to interpret.

In an attempt to better understand what students thought problem solving was, the researchers surveyed the students a second time. This second survey occurred approximately two weeks into the class. The researchers asked each of the students to select one of two responses given below, whichever one they thought was the most true.

1. The purpose of mathematics is to learn real-life skills. When we solve problems, we solve them so that when we later encounter these problems in real-life, we can solve them then. School mathematics is for problems that most people encounter in life. More advanced mathematics solves more advanced real-life problems, such as occurring in engineering or science.
2. The purpose of mathematics is to solve problems whether they have an application or not. When we solve problems, we solve them for the sake of learning to solve them. Some of the problems do not even have a real-life application.

Three-fourths (75%) of the students selected the first choice. Based on this, the researchers decided to go back through the problem solving and separate it into just two categories:

- Mathematics is problem solving that is needed on a day-to-day basis to make life work, including being used by professionals, such as engineers, to solve problems.
- Mathematics is problem solving that occurs in mathematics classes.

The researchers had a 77% agreement rate the first time through, and a 100% agreement rate after discussion. Thus, our coding resulted in four categories. In Table 1, the categories are given, with the percent and number of responses in each category.

Table 1: Categories with Percent and Number of Responses

Category	Percent of Responses	No. of Responses
Mathematics is a vehicle for discovering and explaining the world.	8.6%	5
Mathematics is a subject that deals with numbers.	34.4%	20

Mathematics is problem solving that is needed on a day-to-day basis to make life work, including being used by professionals, such as engineers, to solve problems.	17%	10
Mathematics is problem solving that occurs in mathematics classes.	38%	22

## Results

Only one response was left outside of a category, and it stated, “mathematics is intended to help issues/or problems of money.” This response might have been placed in the everyday life problem solving category, but it was so specifically about money that the researchers left it in a category all on its own.

Five students (8.6%) gave responses that the researchers categorized as viewing mathematics as a vehicle for discovering and explaining the world. Mathematics solves the “world’s mysteries,” and answers “bigger questions.” A representative response states, “Math is humanity’s way to explain the world. Mathematicians solve the world’s mysteries.”

Twenty students (34.4%) believe that mathematics is a subject that deals with numbers. Two typical responses follow. “To me math is all about gathering a group of numbers to get more numbers, either a larger or smaller number.” “When I think of math, I think of it as the study of numbers. Adding, subtracting, multiplying numbers. Math is numbers.”

The final two categories viewed math as solving problems. Ten students (17%) viewed mathematics as problem solving that is used on a day-to-day basis by regular people and certain professionals (e.g., engineers). For example, one student stated, “Math is a process of using numbers to solve problems or create something that is useful and not just numbers without a meaning.” Another wrote, “Math is something most people use on a daily basis, usually it is very simple. Math is used to solve problems, whether small or large.”

The remaining 22 students (38%) viewed mathematics as a class in which one worked on problems, attempting to solve them, but these problems seem to have no application to real-life. The purpose for solving the problems is a bit of a mystery, as few of the responses connected this solving to some purpose, such as developing reasoning skills. Those who did discuss a purpose or reason seemed to claim that the purpose was simply to do it. For example, one student wrote, “The purpose is to come up

with a result.” Another student wrote, “For the reason of finding a solution of some kind.” The following response comes close to viewing mathematics as a game, “Math is using strategic methods to solve numerical problems.” The lack of purpose and circular nature of this category can be seen in this response: “Math is solving problems that in order to solve these problems one needs to use math techniques.”

In sum, most students view mathematics as the solving of mathematics problems ( $n = 22$ ), and close behind is the view that mathematics is a school subject that studies numbers ( $n = 20$ ). Fewer students view mathematics as having everyday value in problem solving ( $n = 10$ ), or even explaining the entire world ( $n = 5$ ). The researchers left the one response about math intending to help with issues of money as unclassified. Thus, 42 of the students, which is 72% of the students, view mathematics as a classroom subject.

### **Limitations, Implications, and Further Study**

Two possible limitations arose in this study. The second survey had a slight time lag, and it is possible that course instruction influenced responses. However, the second survey was only used to determine whether problem solving should be split into two or three categories and should not have had significant effect on our ability to paint a picture of mathematics beliefs.

The more significant limitation is the obvious one that the sample was one class at one point in time, and study participants were not randomly selected. It is certainly possible that these students are unique in a variety of manners. While a sample size of 58 respondents is not overly small, it nevertheless remains a snapshot in time.

Assuming repeated studies would give similar results, the natural question is where this study could lead. The main point of the study was to describe what majors in non-mathematics-intensive fields think mathematics is. Although this is philosophically interesting in and of itself, are there possible practical implications of knowing this? The researchers suggest that knowing what these majors think mathematics is can have implications on all of the following questions:

- What are the appropriate collegiate mathematics requirements, if any, for these majors?
- If a requirement were made, what content or processes would this course contain?
- Is it possible to change the definition of mathematics for these majors?

- If it is possible to change the definition of mathematics, is it a desirable goal?

It is beyond the scope of this study to answer these questions, and thus, our list of implications is also our list for further research possibilities. In addition, the researchers do not suggest that research is lacking on these questions (see Hastings, 2006), only that knowing these views of mathematics can have an influence on this research. For example, when faculty at undergraduate institutions are deciding on general education requirements, if they decide to require some sort of mathematics, what do they really mean by mathematics? Knowing that different constituents mean different things and in particular what majors in non-intensive math fields think mathematics is could have influence on what should be required and how it should be packaged. This has direct relevance for those institutions that may be re-vamping their general education requirements.

Further developing our example, some institutions require a course in quantitative reasoning, and often these are offered from the mathematics faculty. However, many mathematicians (see the work of Lynn Arthur Steen) argue that quantitative reasoning courses are not courses in mathematics. This may be fine. But, if these non-intensive math majors take such a course, how would it fit with their definitions of math? A pre- post test study may determine if their definitions change. The researchers contend that their definitions of mathematics may move in the direction of the discipline being an everyday tool.

Although there is not a single “correct” definition of mathematics, and perhaps no dire need to try changing the ways people define it, the researchers contend that it is important and worthwhile to understand just what *is* meant when people say “math.” The researchers find that many people, including those in our study, often define the discipline rather narrowly. General education mathematics courses could serve to broaden students’ views of the subject of mathematics, thereby introducing students to a more multifaceted and fascinating discipline than they had previously imagined. To the extent that educators could accomplish this in our undergraduate general education courses, they would be inviting people into the discipline of mathematics – not necessarily convincing everyone to become math majors, but demonstrating the myriad uses, applications, and features of the field and thereby fostering an enhanced understanding and appreciation of mathematics.

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**Teaching for Understanding the Year Abroad:  
Thoughts on Fostering the Reflective Learner**

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**Abstract**

Using data collected from student surveys, the author has outlined a program of study designed for students on the verge of embarking on study abroad, or year abroad, programs. The goal is to help students become more autonomous, self-reflective learners while abroad to increase the cultural and intercultural benefits of such study. Using the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) framework and the concept of Intercultural Anchored Inquiry are helpful in fostering such learning.

**Keywords:** Year abroad, intercultural learning, reflective learners, foreign languages.



## Part I: Context and Research Findings

Over the last 60 years, scholars in many countries from disparate disciplines in the Arts and Humanities have documented the multiple learning paths a student can take during his or her Year Abroad (YA).<sup>1</sup> Personal learning, culture and intercultural learning, linguistic benefits, and intercultural competence are some of the outcomes identified in academic literature (Selltiz, Hopson, & Cook, 1956; Church, 1982; Freed, 1995; Coleman & Parker, 2001; Coleman, 2005; Ehrenreich, 2008). If the pedagogical idea underlying the year abroad is not realized, a huge loss of learning for the student, both personally and academically, may result. One challenge for the post-secondary teacher is to impart enough knowledge to send students abroad curious and interested in learning about the culture, creating a scaffold for further learning without enforcing any stereotypes that will hinder students going deeper into the culture. The teacher must create a curriculum to help promote self-reflective learners while abroad, while fostering in students the ability to recognize processes working to help or hinder their individual learning outcomes. In this light, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning framework is helpful to examine *what* one is teaching and *how* teaching can be improved with this aim in mind.

My interest in what is being taught and how it can be improved is based on twelve years of post-secondary teaching experience. I have observed that many students do not make the most of the YA learning experience, returning happy but largely unchanged in their knowledge about the culture and deficient in their reflective abilities. This paper examines curriculum designed to prepare students for the YA and explores the associated learning implications. In order to determine what curriculum content is suitable to meet the above aims, information was needed on a number of levels. First, it was important to find out about students' experiences during the YA. For this, I tapped into previously unpublished research I carried out based on the experiences of students while abroad in 2002<sup>2</sup>. Building on this research, I carried out further studies to establish where the obstacles to learning were. Those findings form one of the pillars of the curriculum advanced here.

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<sup>1</sup> The term I use here, the Year Abroad (YA) is also known as Residence Abroad and Study Abroad denoting the same phenomenon: students remain registered in their home countries and return home to finish their degree after one year's sojourn abroad. This can be distinguished from international students who leave their country of origin to study for the entire duration of a program abroad.

<sup>2</sup> The author first began YA studies research in 2002, with a German-Irish Project together with Dr. Gisela Holfter and Prof. Alexander Thomas. The project, funded by the Royal Irish Academy and the

An equally important step in this study was to establish what my courses designed for the YA were achieving or not achieving in terms of teaching and learning goals. To this end, two courses devised to prepare undergraduate students for the YA were analyzed and evaluated, and form another pillar of this paper.<sup>3</sup> Two study cohorts were participants in this evaluation, namely Arts and European Studies students (these will be collectively known as the Arts cohort in this paper), and Business students. Significant differences emerged in terms of the qualitative learning experience between these groups. These differences, important for curricular design considerations, will be discussed later. Overall, the stepping stones to the curriculum suggested in this paper are based on the following pillars:

- Analysis of the current YA curriculum to establish what works and what doesn't
- Ascertaining why students are not maximizing their time during the YA by examining obstacles to the learning experience during the YA
- Drawing on previous Teaching and Learning research utilizing and integrating knowledge on self-regulation and self-ownership, and applying this to the YA

My study showed that YA students need to become more directly involved in their learning while abroad, taking ownership for their individual learning goals. Based on research in teaching and learning, the proposed curriculum focuses on fostering ideas of self-regulation and self-ownership.

### **Implicit and Explicit Ideas behind the Teaching Approach to Intercultural Learning**

#### **Classroom observations.**

Only by deconstructing my ideas of how to bridge the student's world and the potential learning outcomes of the YA, with the help of the SoTL framework, could I learn how to help students fully utilize the YA for their individual learning goals. I began to see more and more (not only seeing but learning from practice, as Schulman (2004) encourages us to do) the case for helping students understand what I wanted them to learn. Students commonly believe they have nothing new to learn

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DAAD, consisted of an analysis of the learning experience both at university and within the socio-cultural environment of Irish students in Germany. Interviews (lasting between 55-90 minutes duration) with 11 Irish students were carried out by the author at the University of Regensburg and University of Nuremberg-Erlangen in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> The analyses took place within a formal course (Diploma in Teaching and Learning at Higher Education) where academic peers provided feedback on teaching practice based on two classes which were filmed for this purpose. Student feedback was also gathered in the form of anonymous questionnaires filled out in class.

about cultural and intercultural learning as they are continually confronted with these issues in the foreign language classroom. This belief often goes hand in hand with the opinion that they will learn and gain an appreciation of the culture just by being physically there, what Wilkinson (1997) terms in her study as the “culture myth.” Sotto’s (2007) realization on the learning process became my conviction:

Learning, real learning, isn’t what happens when we are fed information. Learning is what happens when we realize that we do not know something that we consider worth knowing, form a hunch about it, and test that hunch actively. In doing that, we might also have to seek information, but notice that finding information is only a part of that process. And notice that the process begins when *we realise we don’t know something* [emphasis added]. (p. 56)

After years preparing students for the YA, it became clear that making students aware of where I wanted to take them on this journey was essential. Students need to see that the materials are not just – in colloquial terms – ‘nice to know’ but instead are personally essential to them. In a recent introductory class, I was again surprised that all twenty-five students in the class thought that merely by being in the foreign culture they would return home fluent or near-fluent speakers. This belief is nothing short of a fallacy given the fact that many students continue to socialize with members of their own culture while abroad, as fellow travellers and through social media. This assumption needs to be challenged.

From a SoTL perspective, and from the perspective of an educator, the words of Jerome Bruner (1996) can be applied to the YA context: “A failure to equip minds with the skills for understanding and feeling and acting in the cultural world is not simply scoring a pedagogical zero. It risks creating alienation, defiance, and practical incompetence. ... All of these undermine the viability of a culture” (p. 42-43). Although this is a big ask, and arguably not something the classroom setting can achieve at once, it does point to the need to think carefully about what content will help students appropriately experience the cultural and intercultural world.

These general observations are an important part of why I have chosen certain materials and omitted others. Before the curriculum is proposed, I will first examine two courses I taught for a number of years and which helped me reflect upon the qualitative nature of the course materials I had been employing up to that point.

## **Establishing What Works and What Doesn't: Course Analysis and Student Feedback**

### **Description of Course I.**

Feedback from two recent YA courses informs the first pillar of curriculum revision. The first course, *Intercultural Learning through Literary and Media Texts*, ran in the academic year 2009-2010. It was designed for Arts students in a four-year program and was divided into two parts, each lasting 12 weeks. In Part I, concepts relevant to the YA were covered including:

- Intercultural Competence – contrasting Selected Models
- Intercultural Learning – Concept and Process
- Reactions to Living Abroad and Adjustment Strategies
- Study Abroad Research: Empirical Findings

Classes focused on Intercultural Competence and Learning were taught from the disciplinary perspective of social and cross-cultural psychology, based in particular on the work of German culture psychologist and author Alexander Thomas. Milton Bennett and others' work on Intercultural Learning was also discussed. The class typically began with an introduction into the concept with a visual aid or a handout, followed by a discussion, and questions to be worked out in groups. In Part II, the concepts and theories examined in Part I were applied to literary and media excerpts. Literature excerpts were chosen that shed some light on German-Irish behaviors, each from the other perspective. Novels by Irish-German author Hugo Hamilton including *The Speckled People* (2003), *Die redselige Insel* (2007) and Heinrich Böll's *Das irische Tagebuch* (1957) formed the basis. These texts were read and discussed primarily in German. The literature excerpts (discussed in a circular gathering, with myself acting as a facilitator of the discussion) aimed to foster differentiated thinking about cultural groups and sub-groups in the context of Irish-German relations. The concept of Self and Other – *Selbstbild* and *Fremdbild* – was included to raise students' awareness of how stereotypes can help or hinder their communication when abroad.

### **Student feedback: an overview.**

A continuous assessment technique (CAT) was carried out between Part I and Part II in order to evaluate how the students related to and grasped the YA concepts discussed. This assessment

showed that concepts, though at times abstract, were seen as applicable and relevant by Arts respondents with no exceptions.

The following responses illustrate that students showed the ability to keep both an open mind and make links between culture and behavior:

- I think the concepts we studied are helpful for a year abroad. Especially to be tolerant with a new culture and try to find out more *why* people [are] acting like this and not just complain about different behavior (CAT\_B, 2010).
- Now that I have studied these concepts, when I start to feel they apply to me, at least I can be reassured that I know what to expect and feel – to a certain extent. They provide the foundation for further education (CAT\_F, 2010).
- I think I am less apprehensive about the year away because I feel more prepared now to deal with encountering aspects of another culture (CAT\_A, 2010).

Additionally, students reported that studying the concepts in this course changed their *perspective*:

- Perhaps I would seek to be more tactful and culturally aware than I would have been prior to the course (CAT\_K, 2010).

Furthermore, the YA concepts had the desired effect regarding the choice of *peer groups*:

- I definitely feel that I will be more aware of branching out from the Erasmus<sup>4</sup> group. Helpful advice during the course of this class has definitely encouraged this (CAT\_G, 2010).
- I think my interest has grown in the German culture. I am now more determined to make the most of my year (CAT\_I, 2010).
- I now think that I need to be far more aware of customs and integration with other people and with housemates. It has also made my year abroad slightly less daunting in that things have been explained clearer to me. I have also started to view it as quite a serious year in terms of being productive with what little time I have in the country and just to step outside my comfort zone and develop personally (CAT\_J, 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> ERASMUS: European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. ERASMUS is a joint student exchange program between the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) and Turkey.

Also pertaining to the language aspect of the class, students seemed to enjoy the discussions of content through the second language:

- It was interesting and helpful to see how one can express themselves in the language [L2] about the YA (CAT\_A, 2010).
- I found the discussion of the concepts in German as beneficial as one would never be able to gain a grasp of much of the vocabulary that is new relating to these concepts if one only studies through the medium of English (CAT\_K, 2010).

Thus, many of the key aspects held central to the YA, i.e. choice of language and peer groups when abroad were grasped and internalized.

### **Description of Course II.**

The second course (run a year later in 2010-2011) was entitled *Intercultural Learning for the Year Abroad: Theory and Practice*, and was designed for Business students, but included a handful of Arts students. It was conceptually similar in the first semester as *Intercultural Learning through Literary and Media texts* with content focusing in the first 12 weeks on intercultural learning and living abroad. In the second semester, to reflect the fact that this was a different cohort, 12 weeks were spent concentrating on language for YA purposes – on ‘Institutional’ German and ‘German for University’ (in addition to German language discussion class).<sup>5</sup> Previous student experiences were included: two post-YA students were invited to discuss their experiences with the outgoing students, and findings on YA studies were presented. The objective was for students to learn from, and be challenged and motivated by, other students. To this end, students were asked to articulate their own YA goals (which we called YAGs) in an online learning forum (‘Blackboard’, open to members of the class) which was only visible to me. In a second Blackboard entry, students were asked to identify what action points they needed to adopt in order to realize their goals over the year.

### **Student feedback: an overview.**

An assessment of the course was carried out between the first and second semester. Business students had the following comments about the first semester (Intercultural Concepts):

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<sup>5</sup> All materials concentrated around teaching students how to react to YA situations in the target language. Some authentic documents were used (registering with the local authorities, filling out forms at a bank), supplemented by the book “*Alltag in Deutschland*” (2005, Klett Verlag) which focuses on daily situations in Germany with language exercises.

- Concentrate less on the theories; they really don't seem all that practical. Half of the experience next year will be learning these things for ourselves (03\_BComm International, 2011).
- I would rather more concentration on situations, on year abroad experiences, i.e. key information we need to know about living in Germany rather than cultural ideologies (05\_BComm International, 2011).
- I was very disappointed with the first term after having expected so much more. I found learning about the theories and such to be a waste of time, where we could have been learning more practical and useful things. I look forward to this term though with the promise it'll be more central to the year abroad (06\_BComm International, 2011).

Conversely, the Arts students in the same class unanimously found course concepts very beneficial as the sample quote relates:

- I think the theory behind preconceptions and culture standards is extremely beneficial and the course structure / layout is good, i.e. theories, then practice (11\_Arts / LCS, 2011).

Both sets of students enjoyed learning from older students' YA experiences:

- Getting previous students in to speak is a brilliant idea (10\_Arts / LCS, 2011).
- Final year student (was) the best way – first-hand information (06\_BComm International, 2011).

In contrast to the first semester, the second semester, which concentrated on academic language and practicing authentic YA situations, received more favorable feedback from Business students:

- I feel I got great benefit from this semester because it was incredibly practical and I really felt I got a great understanding of the various systems. Also I felt that I would be able to put the vocabulary to great use. I would have liked if more time could be spent on this area just because I feel that everyone would be able to benefit more from this both on a long-term and short-term basis (15\_BComm International, 2011).
- Extremely helpful classes, they helped prepare us for practical situations we will have to experience next year. Very helpful in preparing us for what to expect, what sort of paperwork we will have to fill out and especially the small but nonetheless extremely important things

such as applying for a TV license. Role-plays used were also very helpful as they helped prepare us for conversations we will be faced with in Germany. Perhaps doing more role-plays would be beneficial as I personally feel they are the best form of preparation and also force us to practice our spoken German (12\_BComm International, 2011).

- I found the work we did on the banks, looking into work contracts, and the working in groups to practice using these phrases and how to open a bank account, very beneficial as it is something that we are guaranteed to need when we go to Germany (13\_BComm International, 2011).
- The material in Semester II should be taught throughout the term as some material I found from Term I did not help (09\_BComm International, 2011).

Despite developing an online social platform (in the form of a blog, a wiki, and a learning entry between the student and myself as lecturer), there was little interest among the Business students.

The feedback forms offer some insights as to why this was the case:

- I really didn't give it much thought. It didn't seem that urgent. I don't see a practical value to be honest (03\_BComm International, 2011).
- [I] keep forgetting about it – lack of time to sit down and do it (08\_BComm International, 2011).

Against this, Arts students all participated in the online learning opportunity, grasping much more the reason for this learning forum:

- Yes, I participated in Blackboard. I think I'm much more aware of the cultural opportunities and hurdles that will be present. The focus for me has changed from "get better at German" to "integrate into their world" and in doing this become more fluent (11\_Arts / LCS, 2010-2011).

### **Curricular implications of course analysis for teaching and learning.**

An analysis of courses shows that the content was most effective when students understood the relevance to their own YA and could see how knowledge could be applied outside of the classroom. Arts students in particular grasped the reflective capacity of the intercultural concepts and seemed to be more determined to take their learning seriously during the YA as a result. However, the study of different academic programs has shown again that an effective program with one group



will not necessarily be successful with another: Business students need to see more explicit connections to everyday life or they tend to lose interest early in the term. Creating more relevance is important for motivating these students.

Because the current generation of students is so adept in social electronic practices, I expected that writing or reflecting on their YA Goals online would be an incentive to learning for both Arts and Business students. As seen above, this did not prove to be the case. The non-participation by Business students in the voluntary online learning tasks shows that many students choose to overlook components that are not assessed or do not affect their overall grades. The initial idea, i.e. that there would be learning across disciplines and across student cohorts, with some sort of learning synergy *between* groups, did not come to fruition; students tended to stay in their own groups with a tangible unspoken barrier between them.<sup>6</sup> Students themselves remarked on this fact:

- Perhaps for next year Commerce and Arts students should be in separate classes. It is quite clear that there is a big gap between the two groups (10\_Arts /LCS, 2010-2011).
- Perhaps a separate commerce class would benefit LCS /Arts as they seem to want different content (11\_Arts / LCS, 2011).

### **Why Students are not Maximizing their Time during the YA: Obstacles to the Learning**

#### **Experience**

Inquiry into students' qualitative research experience while abroad began in 2002 and continued periodically until 2011. Face-to-face interviews were held with students during their YA (2002)<sup>7</sup> and with returned YA students (2009-2010).<sup>8</sup> The 2002 interviews were the basis for questionnaires later developed and completed by 42 students on returning from the YA (2006-2011).

In this sample of students, academic adjustment challenges were notable, and began outside of the classroom before the commencement of the semester with issues such as registration for courses, which was not as centrally organized abroad as at home. A running thread throughout the

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<sup>6</sup> One case study by Sherry Linkon (2000) on "Students' Perspectives on Interdisciplinary Learning" explores the right conditions for interdisciplinary knowledge: The author argues that the educator needs to ask questions at various levels and in various contexts (p. 69), and do this for a number of courses over a period of time to see the students' point of view. One deduction is that teaching interdisciplinary knowledge is more difficult and complex than one might first assume!

<sup>7</sup>See note 2 for details.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with five returned YA students were held during 2009-2010. All students questioned in this survey are Irish nationals.

interview scripts was the language challenge students faced at university. Comments revolved around understanding content through the foreign language (L2) and adapting to a different academic system. The in-class experience required adjusting to the higher levels of class participation by German students. However, there was evidence of positive academic and intellectual exchange, with students commenting on different teaching methods and styles. Overall, the academic side of their YA presented more challenges for the average 20 year-old Irish student than experiences in the wider socio-cultural environment.

Analyzing all questionnaires and the interview data collectively from 2002-2011, three factors were identified that prevented students fully immersing themselves in the L2 apart from the university setting:

#### **Peer groups and choice of language.**

As already identified in sojourner and YA literature, staying in groups with co-nationals is considered undesirable as it creates a barrier to understanding host nationals. Irish students who remained in English-speaking circles did not break away from familiar interaction patterns or engage to any great extent with the host culture on a deeper level. Findings show that speaking the L2 was a repeated challenge for Irish students particularly in the early months abroad. This may be one reason why students found that German students chose to speak English with them despite their attempts to keep conversations in the L2.

#### **Speaking English with (home and) host students.**

In the first months, Irish students appeared to lack confidence in their German, unwilling to switch to German when German students began speaking English with them. Others found that this fact encouraged them to spend more time in ERASMUS circles.

#### **Multimedia usage and breaks in stay.**

Although multimedia usage positively influenced L2 gains for some (*"I read a lot of German books, newspapers and watched German TV, this helped my adapting to living in Germany"*), for many, multimedia proved to be a significant obstacle to learning (students mentioned *Facebook*, and being on *Skype* every night to family members). This observation is echoed by Ehrenreich who finds that "media opportunities are increasingly changing the quality of the YA experience itself, as it was never so easy to be connected to home even in the most remote corner of the world" (Ehrenreich, 2008: 30, translated by the author). This was compounded by frequent visits home to family and

friends – a vast majority of students made trips home at Christmas, over the semester break, at Easter and even for family occasions – and meant that students who were speaking German were speaking it for less time than intended by the sending institution.<sup>9</sup>

In summary, many students expressed regret at not fully utilizing the learning potential during the YA. These sentiments were voiced more often by Business students than by Arts and Humanities students. Business students as a cohort seemed to grasp less clearly the explicit reasons for going abroad – to be immersed in the culture, to develop more native sounding language structures and differentiated thinking, and to learn about their own cultural conditioning from a new perspective.

### **Part II: Proposed Academic Curriculum**

In Part II a curriculum is advanced to prepare students for the YA, based on the above analysis of courses and student feedback. The revised curriculum seeks to address two key findings of this study. First, Business students did not see the relevance to intercultural concepts studied in preparation for the YA. This needs to be addressed and improved. The curriculum will connect course content and application during the YA to create learning motivation which, in turn, should mean changed behaviors once abroad. Second, all students need more help in becoming reflective learners in order to meet their YA goals during their YA. Unfamiliarity with the academic culture of their YA, choosing to socialize with peers from their home university, using social media through the medium of English, and traveling home during holidays all prevented students from meeting their YA goals. Work on self-regulation and other concepts from Teaching and Learning discourse will be discussed to foster students' engagement with their learning processes.

#### **Creating Learning Motivation and a Scaffold for Using Knowledge outside the Classroom**

To address the first problem of students failing to see the relevance of their studies in intercultural concepts prior to the YA, the concept of the Intercultural Anchored Inquiry (IAI) is adopted. This tool, first proposed in an intercultural learning environment by Stefan Kammhuber (2000) in Germany, uses critical incidents (CIs) to stimulate reflective learning and is an adaption of Kolb's research in 1984. The IAI resonates with Bruner's idea of helping students be active learners in the classroom (see

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<sup>9</sup> The majority of students travelled home 3-4 times during the year. In the sample 2006-2007, only one student travelled home once during the year (1:20), in the 2010-2011 sample only one student travelled home once (1:13).

Schulman, 2004: 513), and also satisfies much of what Arndt Witte (2011) identifies as necessary preconditions in the teaching and learning of Intercultural Competence. He argues that Intercultural Competence

must be *actively acquired by the learner*, i.e. s/he must be inherently prepared to invest time and effort into the holistic process of learning, due to experiences of personal deficits in this regard. This investment-potential can only be realized by rich *experiential learning* which includes affective and psychological components of personal identity-construction and their cognitive, affective and behavioral expression. The process of learning and acquiring intercultural competence must combine elements of intercultural experience and an acute awareness of the *differences and similarities of the cultural constructs, norms, categories and beliefs* [emphasis added] involved (p. 102).

The IAI offers an apt integration of many of Witte's points: using critical incidents, it is based upon experience in cultural settings (fulfilling the requirement for experiential learning); it demands of the learner a response (active learning) and it focuses on behaviors and how these are to be understood from a different cultural mind set (bringing in a discussion of difference and similarities of cultural constructs, norms and beliefs).

The IAI is particularly relevant in light of the feedback by Business students who largely failed to see any relevance of studying YA concepts and failed to connect with approaches designed to stimulate reflection in intercultural learning. To use the critical incident method of teaching and learning in preparing students for their YA, critical incidents are extrapolated from the interview data with Irish students during their YA in Germany. These critical incidents are presented to students preparing for their YA and used to facilitate "intrinsic motivation and critical reflection" (Torosyan, 2007: 14). First, individual responses to the CIs will be collected in order to ascertain students' emotional, rational and cognitive interpretations of behavior. Then, critically reflecting on premises for attributions will generate multiple perspectives. Understanding multiple perspectives will allow students to reflect alternative behavior consequences. Finally, this knowledge can be meta-contextualized in different intercultural settings. After following these steps, students will understand that their cultural knowledge may be too limited to understand the behavior in question, at which point the introduction of the intercultural learning concepts becomes timely and relevant. Apart from the textual analysis of critical incidents, other learning inroads can be used: testimonials from students

themselves where students learn from returned YA students also foster intrinsic motivation. Short film excerpts could also serve as anchors to show learning relevance (such as *Cold Water*, 1987 Intercultural Press). The IAI offers a helpful, non-prescriptive tool to build a necessary bridge between theory and practice showing students the relevance of intercultural concepts and how they will be beneficial to the students during their YA. Integrating this method into the new curriculum will create learning motivation and build a scaffold for students to use this knowledge during their YA.

### **Reflecting on Curriculum: Proposed Changes**

The second problem revealed by this study is that students are not meeting their YA goals in regards to language acquisition and cultural understanding. The obstacles which prevent students from achieving their YA goals will require adjustments to the curriculum both in order to raise students' awareness of these issues and provide them with tools to overcome them. Knowledge from teaching and learning is helpful here to address this, and is discussed with some solutions below. To address the problems exacerbated by language patterns and choice of peer groups, students will be encouraged to break away from English speaking circles. In particular, students will be made aware of the dangers of staying in English-speaking circles (the so-called ERASMUS trap). Presenting students with the testimony of peers who did not meet their language and cultural acquisition goals during their YA because they did not step outside English-speaking circles will be used here. Furthermore, students will be prepared to speak German by incorporating language role-plays into the classroom. These activities will increase students' confidence in speaking German and provide them with ideas about how to overcome obstacles concerning their language progression. From the findings in both cohorts, more focus on academic language and academic structures in German-speaking countries need to play a role, and more experiential exercises here can facilitate this as they involve students both emotionally and intellectually. An example here would be role-plays in the L2 simulating student experiences during the YA "Sprechstunde mit dem Professor" (Office hours with the Prof.). Here more collaboration between Language Courses and the YA preparation module are needed.

To help students make the academic adjustment to the new learning environment and differences in course and university structures, information presented in their course prior to the YA needs to address these aspects. This will ensure that students feel prepared for the differences in the German university and educational system. This information can be easily integrated into culture and language courses in Year II of the degree.

Finally, students' multimedia practices and frequent trips home created a barrier to fully experiencing their YA. In order to raise students' awareness of this problem, they will be challenged to think about the use of their time after their university day and encouraged to reflect about their online language practices. Students will be encouraged to switch the language of their multimedia practices to German and to write a diary or log in German. Furthermore, specific information on jobs and placements with agencies in Germany and Austria will be provided to motivate students to spend their holiday seasons in their host country.

The findings in this study indicate that certain aspects of the curriculum were beneficial enough to merit expanding their use in preparing students for their YA. In particular, students noted the benefits of adopting social psychology and cross-cultural psychology pedagogical techniques to deepen their understanding of German culture prior to their YA. The Arts students particularly noted the value in using of culture-specific novels and short stories to analyze behaviors and narratives from a German cultural perspective. Analyzing the role of culture on behavior gave students an opportunity to reflect about the idea of behavior modification when abroad, and the analysis of particular situations provided an opportunity to understand that there are many ways of constructing meaning. There was some resonance with Strümper-Krobb who argues that such texts give the student the opportunity "to question their own view(s) of the foreign text and culture" (Strümper-Krobb, 2000, p. 214) and also help them realize that there are different ways in which the foreign culture can be understood (see Strümper-Krobb, 2000, p. 215). Therefore in the wider context of using literary texts as a pedagogical tool for promoting cultural and intercultural learning, this approach achieves its learning outcomes and can be continued for Arts students' preparation for the YA.

While much of the existing YA curriculum for YA preparation was endorsed by Arts students, overall feedback shows that students need to be divided into separate classes in preparation for the YA with different focal areas and conceptual emphasis. This will allow for tailored approaches to

teaching intercultural learning and make it easier to implement curricular changes such as grading online participation, as Business students failed to take it seriously without formal assessment metrics.

### **Other Curricular Changes to be Made During the YA: Drawing on Teaching and Learning Knowledge**

Whatever YA goals students set for themselves (which can vary depending on what the student feels he or she is capable of), a main objective of this curriculum revision is to help instill in students a sense of individual ownership<sup>10</sup> of their learning experience during the YA. Hopefully this process will help students go on to be reflective learners and self-authors of their individual learning paths. Helping students realize that certain behaviors will need to be fostered once abroad to gain in language fluency and cultural knowledge is important. The “Zone of Proximal Development” (Vygotsky, 1978) will facilitate this on a conceptual level, aiding students towards self-authoring their YA goals. Known widely in SoTL circles, this defines the gap between individuals’ unaided achievement and their *potential* achievement with the help of a skilled partner (discussed below). On a practical level, the steps to effective YA goal implementation will be aided by such a partner. These steps were suggested by Myron H. Dembo and Helena Praks Seli in 2004, and I adapt them here to the YA context to help students move towards self-regulation.

The first step in the process is goal setting and strategic planning. Students ask, “What are my YA goals?” Following a discussion of YA literature findings and CIs, students identify both online and in discussion with their lecturer what individual goals they wish to pursue. In a follow up online entry, students reflect on what strategies they can implement to address issues that will distract them from their goals. Therefore, they think about and write about their goals in Academic, Cultural, Linguistic,

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<sup>10</sup> This idea of self-ownership is conceptually similar to the notion of self-directed learning already used in connection with the YA. At the 2010 conference on YA Assessment at the University of Bath, Coleman discussed how self-directed learning can support the YA experience and how technology can facilitate and enhance self-directed learning. In a similar vein, *The Common Framework of Reference for Languages* emphasizes developing learner autonomy reflection and pluri-culturalism in foreign language teaching. It proposes a comprehensive action-oriented notion of communication based on the language user’s underlying existential competence, whereby the learner is seen as an autonomous person and a social actor who forms personal relationships in social groups (see Intercultural Competence through Experiential Learning: The Common Framework of Reference, CEFR, 2011).

and Professional terms (Opper, Teichler & Carlson, 1990, p. 38), and about the Intercultural and Personal benefits (Coleman and Parker, 2001) associated with the YA.

As mentioned, an overall aim of this curriculum is to create a sense of self-ownership of the YA and self-authorship of specific YA goals. This requires purposeful or intentional learning. Self-ownership is aided in the choice of curricular choices; self-authorship is managed with a skilled partner to help students reach their potential. This idea has been translated as a 'cultural mentor' elsewhere (Berg, 2009), namely a person who will accompany students on their YA path and help them design their own learning. In light of this, providing a cultural mentor from the home university is recommended to help students follow through on their pre-identified YAGs and to make adjustments in their behaviors where necessary. For example, students might be challenged to set aside social patterns of meeting with home nationals, and to seek out contact with host country nationals.

To achieve the steps to self-regulation and to help students change behaviors, two further steps are adapted from Dembo and Praks Seli (2004). These steps are Strategic Outcome Monitoring and Overall Assessment.

Strategic Outcome Monitoring asks students to reflect on how well they are meeting the YA goals they set for themselves. Online journal entries and the act of writing will prompt students to reflect on their time abroad and help them check for the presence or absence of certain factors. These factors include time spent with host country nationals, average time a day spent listening, speaking, reading and writing German, cultural reflection, and more. Students are encouraged to question if any changes need to be made while they are abroad. The cultural mentor suggested above will help students monitor their progress.

Overall Assessment asks students to reflect more generally on their YA. While abroad, students consider if changes made have improved the qualitative experience of their YA. Questions here include thinking about what strategies were the most and least effective. What changes are still needed for the remainder of the YA?

On returning home, students fill out post-YA language self-assessment form. In addition, the EU LOLIPOP-ELP will be given to students to measure intercultural competence (available online at <http://lolipop-portfolio.eu>).<sup>11</sup> Students submit their credit points and write a YA reflection on what they

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<sup>11</sup> This scale ranges from A1 to C2 where C2 means "I can interpret and evaluate people's behavior based on many different cultural theories I have encountered and experiences I have gained and can



learned both from within the university setting and outside the university, integrating their linguistic development.

These reflections put the tools into students' hands to help them realize their pre-identified goals while abroad. The proposed curriculum has of yet only been tested in part, with aspects integrated into the YA preparatory course for the outgoing YA class, 2013-2014.<sup>12</sup>

### **Review and Conclusion**

This study proposes an academic curriculum specifically to prepare Irish students to go on ERASMUS to Germany, but the ideas of fostering a reflective learner, and identifying and authoring individual goals during the YA resonate with other mobile groups. The findings of this study, various snapshots over a nine-year period of Irish students in Germany, and the barriers identified to learning, are not unique to this group of students, but have been found in other empirical studies analyzing the YA experience – particularly concerning the social and language patterns of students when abroad. A longitudinal research design would best suit this type of study in that this would facilitate the evaluation of students' learning outcomes following the proposed curriculum. This is something I hope to do in the future. For now this research design has taught me what works well for what academic cohort, and with the help of SoTL, it has given me a new perspective on how important it is to make learning tangible and real to students to counteract a possible lack of motivation towards culture and intercultural learning. I assumed for a long time that students should know what and how to learn when abroad, and that they should automatically perceive the learning relevance of course materials, but this journey has thought me this is not necessarily the case. This revelation bears some resemblance to Schulman's argument that "the nature of our work habits and conditions is so unreflective that we even forget some of the understandings that we have achieved in the course of our practice" (Schulman, 2004, p. 505). By engaging in empirical research of what students were actually doing and thinking about their YA, and how they were interacting with course materials, I was challenged to examine the relationship between teaching relevance and learning motivation. The Intercultural Anchored Inquiry (Kamhuber, 2000) was suggested as conceptual tool in the

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reconcile sometimes conflicting world views. I often seek out the role of an impartial intercultural mediator".

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the division of Business students and Arts students into separate classes has not yet been possible due to staffing considerations.

establishment of a new curriculum for the preparation of YA students as it integrates both cognitive and experiential aspects of learning in an intercultural context.

There are a number of caveats in the curriculum approach suggested. In the classroom one must bear in mind that “teaching and acquiring intercultural competence cannot be product-orientated, as there exists no definable end-product” (Witte, 2011, p. 103) and

The teaching and learning process has to be carefully planned, not only for each single class, but also for the overall learning sequences. The learning must be provided with a rich experiential and constructionist learning environment, *tailored to his/her particular interests and needs*, in order to lay a foundation to develop her increasingly complex and dynamic third places, in spite of the reductive drawbacks of the artificial classroom situation. In this context it is obvious that the *teacher does not assume responsibility for the learning process alone* [emphasis added]...[and] the ultimate responsibility for the learning...lies with the individual learner (Witte, 2011, p. 103).

That the teacher does not assume responsibly for the learning process alone is an important point: Coleman (2010) reminds us that the outcomes of the YA depend on many factors, only some of which can be influenced by institutions and program coordinators. Individual motivations, attitudes, preparation, curriculum, integration, support, tasks while abroad, debriefing on return, assessment and L2 maintenance are all influencing factors (Coleman, 2010).

As OECD figures show that student mobility is on the increase, issues of teaching and learning and academic curricula will become more topical as time goes on.<sup>13</sup> Bracht et al. (2006) provide a differentiated view on what ERASMUS – the program sponsoring all the students in this study – in particular will need: more intensive preparation, more academic, administrative and financial support for the students while abroad, closer links between higher education and the employment system, and stronger efforts to make the benefits visible. The authors conclude that “the ERASMUS programme will have better chances in the future if it becomes again more ambitious as far as the *quality of the experience abroad* [emphasis added] is concerned” (Bracht et al., 2006, p. xxiv). Apart from the insights above gained by using SoTL, this lens applied to existing preparatory courses and teaching pedagogy has shown a number of needs which have to be addressed. Tailoring

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<sup>13</sup> Over the past three decades, the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 4.1 million in 2010, a more than five-fold increase. (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/oecd-eag-2012-en.pdf>, accessed, 12 October, 2013).

content to specific cohorts, grading previously voluntary online exercises, and encouraging students to reflect on their learning progression in relation to their own specific YA Goals while abroad with the tools suggested (including cultural mentor and self-regulation questions from previous T&L studies) means that they will have an opportunity to be challenged and to modify any behaviors to maximize learning potential before they return home. This in turn should influence the quality of the experience abroad and lead to greater learning outcomes.

Based on an analysis of what obstacles actually prevent optimal learning goals during the YA, I hope that the phased and interdisciplinary approach to curriculum suggested here will spark the development of more reflective students. The Teaching and Learning approach suggested here will have achieved much if students themselves reach the conclusion that Goethe once did (after spending three months in Italy in 1786), “Nothing above all, is comparable to the new life that a reflective person experiences when he observes a new country. Though I am still always myself, I believe I have been changed to the very marrow of my bones” (Goethe, 1816-17/1970, p. 147).

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**Using Dialogue Journals in Mentoring Relationships: Teacher Candidates' and Mentors'  
Experiences**

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**Abstract**

Existing literature on the use of dialogue journals in teacher education highlights its relevance in facilitating teacher candidates' reflective thinking. There is little, if any, focus on the use of dialogue journals within the mentoring relationship, between teacher candidates and cooperating teachers, during field experience. Utilizing a phenomenological inquiry, the researcher sought to gain insight into teacher candidates' and mentors' experiences using dialogue journals during an early childhood practicum. Results reveal that teacher candidates' and mentors' experience using dialogue journals varied. While some participants reported that the dialogue journals were beneficial to their relationship, others did not see the same value.

**Keywords:** mentoring; dialogue journals; field experience; teacher candidates; cooperating teachers; early childhood

### **Introduction**

Within the context of this paper, a dialogue journal can be defined as the written exchange between two people in a professional setting, with one of the persons being viewed as the expert, or more experienced of the two. This exchange is usually initiated by the less experienced, or novice person, although that may not always be the case. The topics of the written exchange should emerge organically, as opposed to being predetermined. For example, if a novice teacher has questions or comments after observing a lesson activity or is simply seeking advice on specific classroom management strategies, he or she would initiate the written exchange to reflect those inquiries. Finally, the exchange can extend anywhere from a few weeks to as long as a year. The foundation of the dialogue journal, obviously, should be the exchange; therefore, the more experienced teacher has the power to transform the dialogue journal into a valuable teaching tool in preservice teacher education.

The present study, a phenomenological inquiry, investigated teacher candidates' and cooperating teachers' (mentors) experiences using dialogue journals during an early childhood practicum, or field experience. The researcher sought to gain insight into the mentoring relationships and, particularly, into teacher candidates' and mentors' ideas about the value of the dialogue journals in relation to enhancing communication during the practicum.

### **Literature Review**

A search for relevant literature on dialogue journals (specifically in teacher education) revealed a lack of current empirical work. The few studies available usually focused on the exchange between teacher candidates and either their course instructors or their university supervisors. Additionally, the discourse on the use of dialogue journals essentially comprised of the use of dialogue journals as a reflective tool (Barkhuizen, 1995; Bayat, 2010; Holten & Brinton, 1995; Lee, 2007; Recchia & Shin, 2010) and the benefits of utilizing dialogue journals (Garmon, 2001; Lee, 2004). Little, if any, of the research specifically examined the dialogue journal within the context of a mentoring relationship—the relationship between teacher candidates and their mentor teachers (i.e., cooperating teachers who volunteer to participate in field experience).



In Barkhuizen's (1995) work with graduate students, one of his aims of dialogue journal writing was to "give students the opportunity to reflect critically upon their experiences of the course-work, readings and assignments" (p. 24). Further, in Lee's (2007) research, teacher candidates were instructed to use dialogue journals to reflect on issues raised throughout course sessions. Holten and Brinton (1995) discussed the use of dialogue journals between practicum students and their practicum supervisors and revealed that the idea of the journals was adopted "as an integral component of the practicum to foster self-reflection" (p. 23).

In one study (Herndon & Fauske, 1996) that did include cooperating (mentor) teachers, the dialogue journaling took place between the cooperating teacher and university supervisors, not teacher candidates. And again, the focus was on journaling for reflective purposes. In Garmon's (2001) study, teacher candidates were asked to provide feedback on the dialogue journals they used in exchange with their course instructor. Teacher candidates reported, among other things, that the journals contributed to their understanding of course material and promoted greater self-reflection.

Although dialogue journals could easily be incorporated into course work as a means to facilitate reflection on some level, they may hold greater potential when used during field experiences. Previous research has revealed that communication is a key ingredient for a successful mentoring relationship (Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, & Ballou, 2002; Clifford, 1999). However, problems in communication during field experience are all too common as there has been a tradition of silence within these experiences (Albers & Goodman, 1999).

Dialogue journals can—to some degree—curtail some of the common challenges in communication between teacher candidates and their mentors. However, the benefits of using dialogue journals in field experience may not be realized when clear expectations of the process are not made explicit. As stated previously, the foundation of the journal rests in the actual dialogue; therefore, it cannot and should not be one-sided.

## **Method**

### **Setting**

The present study, which received approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), was conducted in the College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction at a large northeastern university. An early field experience, or practicum, was required of all teacher candidates majoring in early childhood education. The eight-week practicum usually took place during the beginning of teacher candidates' junior year and they were placed in a variety of child development centers on or near campus. Before the practicum began, teacher candidates were paired with cooperating teachers (mentors) as a means to facilitate mentoring relationships.

### **Participants**

Four teacher candidate-mentor teacher dyads participated in the study. All participants gave written informed consent prior to inclusion in this study. The teacher candidates consisted of two females and two males. The mentor teachers were all females. While the participants did not represent a range of racial or ethnic groups, they did vary in gender, age, and years of teaching experience (See Table 1). There were no set criteria for pairing the dyads; they were randomly assigned. The dyads met twice a week for two to four hours throughout the duration of the eight-week practicum. Often times, teacher candidates did not have the opportunity to speak one-on-one with their mentors during their visits. Dialogue journals were incorporated as a means to facilitate additional communication, given the time constraints during visits.

**Table 1**  
*Demographics of Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching Experience	Highest Level of Education	Race/Ethnicity
Peter (TC)	18-25	Male	1-5	High School	White
Tiffany (MT)	26-40	Female	6-10	Bachelor's	White
Ashley (TC)	18-25	Female	0	High School	White
Kasey (MT)	40-65	Female	21+	Bachelor's	White
Derek (TC)	18-25	Male	0	High School	White
Jana (MT)	26-40	Female	1-5	Bachelor's	White
Natasha (TC)	18-25	Female	1-5	High School	White
Mary (MT)	40-65	Female	16-20	Master's	White

*Notes.* Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the participants. TC= Teacher Candidate; MT=Mentor Teacher

### Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher's interest in gaining insight into the mentoring relationship between teacher candidates and their mentors, and the communication that does or does not exist during the relationship, prompted a phenomenological inquiry. From a phenomenological perspective, the research seeks the experiential world of participants, which can only be accessed through some form of expression (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, the experiential world, or phenomena, included the mentoring relationship and the experience of using a dialogue journal during the relationship. The teacher candidates' and mentors' experiences were accessed mainly through their language—verbal and written.

Data consisted of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with teacher candidates and mentor teachers, field observations and dialogue journals. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions related to the mentoring relationship and the usefulness of the dialogue journal throughout the practicum experience. Informal observations took place during each of the teacher candidates' visits to their mentor's classroom. Field notes were taken during these observations. Prior to the teacher candidates' first visit to their mentors' classrooms, they were provided with a notebook to utilize as their dialogue journals. There were no scripts or writing prompts for the dialogue journals; the only instructions that were

given included a requirement to begin a new journal entry during each visit and to leave the journals with the mentor teachers so they could respond before the next scheduled visit. The teacher candidates had complete freedom in what they asked or comments they wished to make. Although the dialogue journals were not collected until the end of the practicum, the researcher usually perused the journals during field observations, simply to confirm participation on the part of both the teacher candidate and the mentor teacher.

At the end of the practicum, the dialogue journals were collected, interviews were conducted, and handwritten field notes were gathered and organized. Interviews were transcribed immediately and handwritten field notes were subsequently typed. In order to get a global sense of the data, the researcher first read through all of the data before beginning any formal analysis (Giorgi, 1997). Afterwards, the researcher began the process of hermeneutically interpreting the text (van Manen, 1990). Participants' dialogue journals and transcribed interviews were read and re-read multiple times. Key statements or phrases that were considered essential to understanding participants' experiences within the mentoring relationship and with their use of the dialogue journal were identified and highlighted. Text that did not seem to be relevant to participants' true experiences was extracted. Next, using the key statements and phrases, the researcher crafted a description of each participant's experience. The written descriptions were then read several times in order to find meaning in the text. Finally, interpretations of the text were made and read over one final time to complete the analysis process.

### **Results**

The intent of this phenomenological inquiry was to gain insight into teacher candidates' and mentors' experiences within the mentoring relationship and with their use of dialogue journals during an early childhood practicum. Analysis of the interviews and dialogue journals revealed that participants' experiences varied. Some teacher candidates and mentors found value in using the dialogue journals. In at least one dyad, the mentoring relationship did benefit from the written dialogue that took place throughout the practicum. In other dyads, the dialogue journals did not seem to matter in terms of enhancing the mentoring relationship. During site visits, the researcher noted few verbal interactions between most of the teacher candidates and their mentors; only one dyad communicated regularly during visits, in addition to the dialogue journals.

**Mary and Natasha**

Mary and Natasha appeared to have the most successful, positive mentoring relationship. The dialogue journal was only a supplement to their ongoing verbal communication. Even though they conversed on a regular basis, Mary always responded to Natasha's questions in a timely manner. Additionally, Mary provided positive feedback in relation to Natasha's questions in the journal. For example, Mary's praises included, "*Wow, such great questions!*" and "*This is a great question!*"

Natasha stated that Mary seemed very open to discuss any topic with her. Moreover, Mary's responses were always in great detail, usually two to three pages in length. In the example below, Natasha asks for feedback after teaching a small group activity.

*Natasha: What do you consider to be my personal weakness(es)? How can I improve?*

*Mary: As a mentor teacher, I would also like to mention your strengths. You are very knowledgeable about child development, interact very well, reliable, and seem to be very interested in learning more! (Such as the insightful questions you are asking in this journal). With regards to things to work on: Some suggestions were made on your lesson plan activity; Try to be more patient with the children especially when they seem upset or angry; Don't be too hard on yourself as this is a learning experience and don't strive for perfection: As no one is!; Remember to have fun! If you're not enjoying what you do, the children quickly learn this; Also, always keep in mind that these children are only 3, 4, and 5 years [old]. Sometimes we have high expectations and lose sight of who we are working with!*

**Tiffany and Peter**

While Peter expressed happiness with his overall experience during the practicum and with his mentor teacher, he mentioned their lack of verbal communication as a drawback. In his interview Peter stated:

*Tiffany was really great; I had a lot of respect for her. I just wish I could have talked to her more because I didn't really do that too much...there were a lot of days where literally the only thing we said to each other*

*was, 'Good Morning' and then, 'See Ya Later.' I mean, I wanted to be communicating more, but I guess it was all circumstantial...Fortunately, the dialogue journal provided me some supplementary advice from Tiffany.*

Tiffany, similar to Mary, always responded to Peter's questions in great detail and often made comments such as, "Good Question!" or "Great questions so far, I can tell you really think about your work." During Tiffany's interview, she stated that the dialogue journal was helpful and that Peter was very observant and posed good, thought-provoking questions in his journal.

### **Jana and Derek**

During Jana's interview, she discussed Derek's discomfort in speaking with her. According to Jana, whenever she tried to speak to Derek, he seemed uncomfortable and would never make eye contact. When the researcher spoke with Derek, he admitted that he felt most comfortable using the dialogue journal. He stated,

*If anything, I found the notebook conversations to be invaluable over the course of the practicum. Through it, I was far more comfortable asking questions about the program and requesting suggestions on personal approaches in early childhood.*

While Jana expressed an appreciation of the dialogue journal, she felt that many of Derek's entries contained trivial questions that could have been discussed in person. On more than one occasion, Jana attempted to initiate verbal communication. For example, when Derek asked Jana about particular strategies or activities to keep her classroom under control, she responded, "I would like to talk personally about this. I think that is going to be much better!"

### **Kasey and Ashley**

During observation visits, the researcher noticed virtually no verbal communication between Ashley and her mentor, Kasey. According to Ashley, from the first day of the practicum she felt confused about her role because Kasey had not communicated any expectations to her. Initially, Ashley felt that the dialogue journal would be a good way for her and her mentor to communicate, given her mentor's busy schedule. Much to Ashley's dismay, Kasey did not treat the dialogue journal as a priority as she often

forgot about it and on several occasions needed to be reminded to respond to Ashley's questions in the journal.

During the interview with Ashley, she expressed disappointment in the lack of communication between her and Kasey. She stated, *Certain times [Kasey] was really busy and I did not want to bother her, so I would write in the dialogue journal. The only thing is, she really didn't respond...I would kind of say, 'Oh I wrote some questions in the dialogue journal' and she would be like, 'Oh yeah, well I didn't get to it, I've been really busy.' But then the more I thought about it, I was like, 'Well there's nap time in the afternoon.'*

### Discussion

Teacher candidates' and mentors' experiences using dialogue journals varied. While some participants reported that the dialogue journals were beneficial to their relationship, others did not see the same value. Two teacher candidate-mentor dyads expressed an appreciation of the dialogue journals and cited its practicality, especially when there was insufficient, or nonexistent, verbal communication. All of the teacher candidates could see the possibilities in using a dialogue journal during field experience, even if it did not seem to benefit their current mentoring relationship. However, one mentor teacher reported that she actually preferred traditional verbal communication over the dialogue journal. In the case of Jana and Derek, for example, Jana wished to communicate more verbally even though Derek seemed more comfortable with written forms of communication. Although Jana made many attempts to converse face-to-face, Derek had never reached a level of comfort that would facilitate full engagement with his mentor. Jana and Derek's mentoring relationship could have simply been a result of pairing two very different people. Given the fact that there was no formal process in place for partnering the teacher candidates and mentors, one should expect the possibility of mismatches in personalities.

While neither Mary nor Natasha expressed a preference for one form of communication over another, their strong relationship demonstrated that the written communication in dialogue journals could be equally as effective as verbal communication. In the case of Tiffany and Peter, both saw the value in using dialogue journals. However, Peter expressed some disappointment that their verbal dialogue did not really extend beyond the mere, "Good Morning" or "See Ya Later." But as Peter stated in his interview, he accepted that it was all circumstantial. In other words, he did not take it personal as he was

aware that logistically, verbal, or face-to-face communication would be a challenge. Peter reported that he was well aware of the time constraints that acted as a hindrance during field experience.

Finally, Ashley believed the dialogue journal seemed like a good idea in theory. However, in her particular situation, even the dialogue journal could not remedy the communication challenges Ashley faced with her mentor, Kasey. In speaking with Kasey, it was apparent that she was well aware of the communication problems between herself and Ashley and she was not hesitant in taking blame. Kasey said she knew it was important to communicate but time constraints certainly made the task of mentoring a challenge.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have implications for teacher education in all contexts—nationally and internationally. In teacher education, there is always the search for new ways to help teacher candidates and novice teachers make practical sense of teaching and all that it entails—the highs and the lows. Dialogue journals could become an invaluable teaching tool and resource in all types of teacher preparation programs worldwide and, thus, should be considered for more widespread use during field experience. The value in gaining insight from experienced teachers—the gatekeepers of the profession—should not be understated. In analyzing the dialogue journals, the researcher discovered that teacher candidates also have a number of concerns related to teaching. The most common themes to emerge from the journals included questions about classroom management, curriculum, and specific teaching strategies. This may, in some way, explain why teacher candidates see value in using dialogue journals, especially when verbal communication is limited. Dialogue journals are beneficial not only because they ensure that some form of communication is taking place (in most cases), but perhaps more importantly, because they serve as an additional resource for teacher candidates as they prepare for a career in teaching. Through dialogue journals, mentor teachers are given a sometimes rare opportunity to explicitly share specific teaching strategies and this alone can be invaluable to novice teachers. Even more, dialogue journals can be used as a reference guide, long after field experiences and college courses are completed.

While the use of dialogue journals during field experience may hold potential, it is clear that more research must be done in this area. The small sample size (N=8) limits the researcher's ability to



generalize any of the findings. The participants' experiences were varied and one must also take into consideration the multiple layers of a mentoring relationship. Time is a critical factor in the development of any meaningful relationship; therefore, the short duration of the practicum (eight weeks) should also be considered a limitation of this study. This study could be replicated in any teacher education program, both nationally and internationally. Suggestions for future research include a larger study that extends over a greater period of time. A greater sample of teacher candidates and mentors during an extended field experience (i.e., student teaching/internship) would certainly offer deeper insight into the true value of incorporating dialogue journals and its influence on the mentoring relationship.

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**Faculty Learning Community (FLC) on Student Leadership:**

**Applying Student Voices to Leadership Development**

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**Abstract**

While college student leadership is well studied, the faculty's role in developing student leaders is an area that is underexplored. Twenty students joined eleven members of a faculty learning community (FLC) in a mid-sized college to discuss their perspectives on student leadership. The FLC members/researchers used semi-structured focus group interviews and a phenomenological approach to identify traits of student leaders and to explore opportunities colleges can offer to promote students' growth as leaders. Using thematic analysis, this study discusses the ways colleges can use FLCs as a platform to facilitate student leadership effectively.

**Key words:** Faculty learning community, college student, perspectives, leadership

## Introduction

College student leadership education is traditionally an initiative championed by student affairs professionals in higher education, who facilitate workshops, train resident assistants and student employees, host community service experiences, teach leadership studies courses and provide internship opportunities. The role of a faculty learning community in developing student leaders is an underexplored area. This study, conducted by the Student Leadership Faculty Learning Community (FLC) in a mid-sized state university, was designed to identify qualities of student leaders using an FLC paradigm to explore opportunities colleges can offer to promote student growth as leaders. The researchers, also members of this Student Leadership FLC, describe the process and outcomes of using an FLC as a platform to provide faculty and students across disciplines opportunities to engage in dialogue on student leadership on campus. Drawing on intersections within FLC and student leadership theory (Desrochers, 2010; Beach & Cook, 2009), the researchers asked: In what ways can the use of the FLC model impact faculty participants' perspectives, attitudes, and actions regarding their roles in cultivating college student leadership development? This research question serves as a framework for the study where the authors tease out ways an FLC captured important leadership characteristics in developing student leaders. This article concludes with best practices recommendations, illustrating strategies colleges can deploy in using an FLC model to facilitate student leadership growth.

### Faculty Learning Community (FLC)

In a faculty learning community (FLC), six to fifteen faculty and professional staff across different disciplines build a genuine community, make a year-long commitment, and engage in active and collaborative professional development conceived as learning (Cox, 2004; Shulman, 1993; Ortquist-Ahrens & Torosyan, 2009). Cox (2001) identifies ten qualities as essential to the success of FLCs: "safety and trust, openness, respect, responsiveness, collaboration, relevance, challenge, enjoyment, esprit de corps, and empowerment" (p. 18-19). Through frequent activities and careful reflections, an FLC provides safety and support for its members to investigate, attempt, assess, and adopt new (to them) methods (Cox, 2004); promotes "collegial, interpersonal, and collaborative relationships" (Ortquist-Ahrens & Torosyan, 2009, p. 3); and supports teaching and learning (Cox, 2004). Importantly, an FLC

creates the deep learning opportunities for its members, which often results in student learning and feedback (Cox, 2004).

Current but limited research into the effects of FLCs on student leadership suggests that the use of small group learning environments has a positive impact on learning (Desrochers, 2010). The benefits compared with other forms of faculty development include a more focused, intensive, and structured effort with the topic, attention paid to building community while working on a shared project or topic, and a positive impact on improved implementation of pedagogical techniques and assessment of student learning in classes that are taught by those involved in the FLC (Desrochers, 2010; Beach & Cook, 2009). FLC research also suggests that a key benefit of an FLC is that its members come from diverse backgrounds with a variety of experience (Gebelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

### **College Student Leadership Development**

College student leadership is demonstrated by making positive impacts at any level of an organization by applying sound ethical principles, ensuring that all voices are heard in decisions, and encouraging others to act (Komives, et al., 2011; HERI, 1996). The FLC utilized this student leadership thinking as a foundation to inform its study where it conceptualized leadership in a broad context, theorizing it as fluid and evolving. By design, FLC members employed this open and variable lens in the FLC study so readers have the opportunity to understand leadership in multiple ways and with flexibility.

College student leadership development programs are informed by work of scholars and practitioners who recognize that all students have the capacity to demonstrate leadership and that these skills will help students make the world a better place. Common guiding principles of these programs are: all students have the capacity to demonstrate leadership (Komives, et al., 2011), leadership development is a process that leads to positive social change (HERI, 1996), and a combination of intentional faculty/staff interventions provides the appropriate levels of challenge and support to create the development of college students (Moore & Upcraft, 1990). For purposes of this discussion, and as an intersection to our FLC student leadership work, we examine three leadership principles: student engagement, mentor relationships, and internships/field experiences.

Student leadership development theory has received increased attention in recent years as colleges and universities recognize the importance of ensuring that their graduates apply ethical

standards within their chosen profession, make a positive impact as engaged community citizens, and stay connected to the institution after graduation (Astin, 1993; Komives, et al., 2011; Kuh, et al., 2010). Research has focused on college student engagement in relation to educational outcomes and student leadership development (Kuh, et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Mentoring is one of the activities higher education institutions provide that has significant impact on the development of student leadership skills (Dugan, et al., 2011). Roberts (2000) points out that college and university faculty, staff, senior/graduate students, peers, friends, religious leaders, and/or family can all serve as mentors. This FLC study adopted the broader concept of mentorship, including student-faculty and student-student. The skills and knowledge that students gain from mentoring include public speaking, building confidence, working effectively on teams and in groups, serving the community, becoming civically engaged, and influencing positive change (Dugan, et al., 2011; Komives, et al., 2011; Kuh, et al., 2010).

Student internships are another experience that may promote college student leadership development. Working in the field, taking action in the community, and learning from more experienced mentors allow students to discover what they do/do not know and what does/does not work, which, in turn, better trains them for more complicated roles, including leadership (Williams, Matthews, & Baugh, 2004). Internships also are a means for students to explore different career fields and enact a chosen academic major. The internship experience is impactful and shown to build leadership capacity among college students through the exploration and submersion in an experience that is very different than what students experience in the classroom (Dugan, et al., 2011).

Individual faculty and staff play a critical role in encouraging students to become engaged in the campus community and to provide leadership opportunities that will help students grow. Placing the FLC into a research context, this study provides an inside look at college students' perspectives on leadership, and in turn, provides faculty/staff insight into FLC development opportunities which encourage student success.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to describe and reflect college students' perspectives and expectations on leadership engagement (van Manen, 1997; Moustakas,

1994). The phenomenological approach created a comparative lens that allowed the researchers to analyze students' lived experiences before and during college and compare commonalities among the participants. This research method facilitated the listening, seeing, and responses between participants necessary to understand the realities of college students and leadership.

### **Participants**

This Student Leadership FLC was composed of eleven college professors, representing departments across campus which included Business Administration and Economics, Education and Human Development, Women and Gender Studies, Theater, Mathematics, Recreation and Leisure Studies, Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education, and staff in Military Science and Student Affairs.

The researchers used an opportunistic sampling strategy, drawing student participants from a pool recommended by professors who served in the Student Leadership FLC (Creswell, 2006). After the college Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the research study, the researchers emailed a letter of invitation to each selected student. Students confirmed their interest in participating in the research by completing signed consent forms that the researchers provided. The researchers invited 24 students to share their stories related to student leadership. Twenty of the 24 students (83%) participated in a student focus group. These participants consisted of six males (30%) and 14 females (70%); comprised of 19 white (95%) and one Hispanic (5%) student. The college's student demographic includes: males (42.3%), females (57.7%); white (78.5%), Hispanic (3.9%), black or African American (6.9%), Asian, native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (1.8%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.6%), and unidentified race/ ethnicity (8.3%). Table 1 details demographics of each student, including an overview of identity variables related to students' leadership experiences.

### **Data Collection**

The semi-structured focus group interviews with the FLC members and their recommended student participants served as primary data of the study. The FLC researchers used open-ended questions to increase the breadth of responses (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The researchers audio-taped the interviews with students and transcribed these audiotapes verbatim. Interview questions included:

- a) When was the first time you recognized that you were a leader?

- b) What opportunity did you find here in college that allowed you to be a better leader?
- c) What are the traits of good leadership that you suggest professors should look for in future leaders?
- d) Is there any advice you'd like to give to professors and the college to facilitate your growth as a leader?

**TABLE 1**  
*Demographic Information of Participants*

Student	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Major(s)/ Minor	Undergraduate/ Graduate	Year(s) in school
Debera	F	Caucasian	27	Undeclared	G	
Robert	M	Caucasian	21	Psychology/Sociology	U (Senior)	3.5
Ed	M	Caucasian	26	Mathematic/Childhood inclusive education	U (Senior)	2.5
Dan	M	Caucasian	27	Finance	U (Senior)	1
Carole	F	Caucasian	21	1. Political Science/ Philosophy & Women and Gender Studies 2. International Studies (Delta College)	U (Senior)	3.5
Danielle	F	Caucasian	23	Women and Gender Studies	U (Senior)	.5
Brittany	F	Caucasian	21	History and Women and Gender Studies	U (Senior)	3.75
Tom	M	Caucasian	21	Mathematics/Adolescence inclusive education	U (Senior)	3.5
Alice	F	Caucasian	19	Spanish/Military science	U (Junior)	1.5
Chloe	F	Caucasian	23	Nursing	U (Senior)	2.5
Jay	M	Caucasian	22	Physical Education (with adapted PE concentration)	G	1.5
Tiffany	F	Caucasian	22	Physical Education (with adapted PE concentration)/Physical education certification	U (Senior)	4.5
Sarah	F	Caucasian	21	Physical Education /Physical education certification	U (Senior)	3.5
Jessica	F	Caucasian	21	Mathematics/Adolescence inclusive education	U (Senior)	3.5
Emily	F	Caucasian	23	Women and Gender Studies/Art & English	U (Senior)	1.5
Jim	M	Hispanic	23	Sociology/Women and Gender Studies	U (Junior)	0.5
Sandra	F	Caucasian	20	Psychology	U (Junior)	2.5
Samantha	F	Caucasian	21	Theatre	U (Senior)	3.5
Kelly	F	Caucasian	21	1. Theatre 2. English (with English Literature concentration)	U (Senior)	3.5
Heather	F	Caucasian	26	Environmental Science	G	1.5

### Data Analysis

The FLC researchers completed an inductive thematic analysis using constant comparative method (Glaser, et. al., 1967) to identify common threads that ran across the data. The researchers read the transcripts and notes numerous times. Each researcher highlighted particularly revealing phrases, then coded and assigned meaningful labels to the data. The researchers then discussed the interpretative codes and reviewed variances in the labels until they reached an agreed understanding of



the relational knowing of the data. The researchers continued data analysis by comparing labels and phrases to determine whether to classify data segments separately or within an existing code (Wolcott, 2001). Using pattern regularities, the researchers determined the essential or invariant themes, those that gave fundamental meaning to the students' lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). The authenticity of the findings was further supported as data saturation was reached, whereby repetition of the information and confirmation of previously collected data across participants occurred (Meadows & Morse, 2001). The words of the students supported these themes.

Investigator triangulation enhanced the plausibility of the findings (Creswell, 2006). The researchers possess backgrounds in qualitative inquiry, interview techniques, and knowledge of student leadership. In addition, the researchers used member checks to confirm data and interpretive accuracy. The focus group moderator sent the student participants a description of the transcripts and asked each student to indicate if she/he was correctly represented in the descriptions. Six of the 20 student participants confirmed data accuracy via email back to the researchers and four more validated data accuracy in verbal communication with the researchers. Finally, all researchers participated in data analysis. The co-investigators acknowledged predilections and checked these results by debriefing one another across the data and throughout the research process.

## **Findings**

### **Procedure of Using an FLC as a Platform to Promote Dialogue on Student Leadership**

This Student Leadership FLC provided a platform for faculty and students across disciplines to engage in dialogue on student leadership on campus. The variety of participants' background made this study more accurately reflect the voices of students and faculty members, which increased the quality of the research and its findings. Additionally, this multidisciplinary approach can be replicated by others, serving as a model to further the application of FLCs in multiple campus settings. FLC literature supports this cross pollination as a means to access and develop student leaders (Gebelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

The FLC included eleven college professors representing nine departments from five schools across campus. The FLC members shared a passion for developing student leaders and each used techniques in their work that experts identify as variables that promote leadership development, including

but not limited to, experiential learning as team leaders, camp coordinators and project managers; undergraduate research such as writing and presenting; and skill based development in programs like Reserve Officer Training (ROTC) and Theater.

The FLC met bi-weekly throughout the school year. In addition to these regular meetings, the FLC held two focus groups where FLC members discussed traits they believe characterize a good leader in a college setting. The researchers of this study led the FLC member focus groups, sent focus group results to each FLC member for additional comments and ideas, and used this feedback to determine the final traits documented for the purpose of this study. FLC members also met with 20 recruited students from 20 majors/programs as part of one three-hour focus group aimed at understanding students' perspective on leadership. Prior to this meeting, one of the researchers sent an e-mail to student participants describing the research setting and focus group questions. Student focus group participants individually answered four initial interview questions as part of the entire group then broke into small groups to continue collective discussion. As follow-up to this research, in April 2013 an FLC student/faculty panel presented at the college's annual Scholars Day as means to advance the FLC Student Leadership dialogue campus-wide.

This FLC's year-long journey engaged "a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done" (McGill & Beaty, 2001, p. 11). It produced a cross-fertile FLC that modeled ways to foster opportunity for faculty and students across disciplines to engage in dialogue on student leadership on campus. Importantly, it advanced student and faculty understanding of leadership as experienced from diverse spaces of knowledge and identities.

### **Outcomes of Using an FLC as a Platform to Promote Dialogue on Student Leadership**

The FLC configuration in the context of this study exposed ways in which different disciplines engage students in leadership. The Student Leadership FLC offered the platform whereby this study could be conducted in-depth and across campus. Associated with the FLC work and prior to meeting with the student focus group, FLC members identified five important leadership characteristics as significant in developing student leaders: "engagement," "initiative," "ethical behavior," "critical-thinking," and "lived experiences." In thematic analysis of the student focus group, the FLC researchers discovered five dominant themes that overlaid these leadership characteristics: "student engagement," "mentoring,"

“internships and field experiences,” “taking initiative,” and “ethics and goal setting.” A discussion of these five themes follows.

### ***Student Engagement***

The theme of student engagement, organic to the FLC focus and a cornerstone of college student leadership development (HERI, 1996; Dugan, et al., 2011; Komives, et al., 2011; Kuh, et al., 2010), intersected all four interview questions presented to students. Students reported that their first leadership experience started before college, most likely in high school, growing out of participation in student organizations, music and arts, sports, or volunteer work. Opportunities to help others, a hallmark to student leadership development literature (HERI, 1996; Komives, et al., 2011), also emerged as a key aspect which students linked with their campus engagement, such as tutoring, volunteering, team sports, campus organizations, and subsequent leadership outcomes. Tiffany, a senior in Physical Education, discovered her leadership growth through volunteer work:

Coming into college I can't really say that I was a leader. I didn't do really well at all. ... Dr. Smith's class helped a lot because there are a lot of volunteer opportunities to work with kids. And I like to think that I went above and beyond to the point that me and J actually started our own program, so probably it wasn't until I found what I liked and what I want to do I decided to step up and change what I was doing.

Faculty and staff members from nine departments joined this FLC, and students from 20 majors/programs participated in this study. This data complements the relationship of student engagement to student success and persistence where students' lived experiences link to leadership outcomes (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This co-curricular-to-leadership bridge, as narrated by students, offers insight into ways students perceive and attribute their own leadership potential. It also highlights means for a multidisciplinary FLC to facilitate student leadership prospects.

### ***Mentoring***

Not surprisingly, mentoring as an element connected to leadership resonated with FLC members and the students in this research. Focus group data confirms that students bring to college rich experiences serving as athletes, participants in school and community clubs, and helpers to others at home or in organizational settings. Mentoring in a college setting can further these already existing skills and interests, and it can better deliberate students' growth and development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This FLC discovered mentoring frequently happened on a one-on-one, individualized

basis. Student participants discussed ways unexpected external triggers awakened their leadership ability. In addition to being guided by faculty and staff, students also discussed ways they mentor each other. This peer-to-peer interaction corresponds with the perspective that all students have capacity to demonstrate leadership (HERI, 1996; Komives, et al., 2011). Chloe, a senior Nursing major, shared her experience as a peer mentor:

I would say that my first leadership experience in college was an orientation student advisor for the incoming freshmen classes. ... When I was a freshman I went through a lot of trials and tribulations that I wished I had somebody there to help me with and I wanted to be that person for the new freshman ... I really felt like I was making difference. Especially I was only a sophomore, so I felt like the freshman could relate to me easier than maybe a professor ... That was one of my most memorable experiences.

Using the FLC as a foundation structure establishes opportunities for faculty and staff to act as mentors where they can invite in and further cultivate students' leadership potential. While not a requirement to this FLC membership, 100 percent of FLC members serve as mentors to their students, and in FLC meetings, FLC members frequently exchanged ideas on how mentoring can better facilitate student growth.

College campuses committed to student success must provide opportunities that encourage faculty/student mentoring. Akin to Gebelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith's (1990) thinking on member diversity, interdisciplinary FLCs are fertile venues that enable opportunities for faculty to develop student leaders. Taking students to conferences, presenting at campus research symposiums, and recommending students for positions are examples of how faculty/student mentor relationships develop. Student voices here confirm this potentiality, but they also evidence the "by chance" or fluid nature under which mentoring evolves. This FLC study underscores this finding, and importantly, captures ways to transition faculty/student mentoring from an arbitrary circumstance to a more static variable common to college attendance.

### ***Internships and Field Experiences***

Opportunities to participate in campus activities are essential for students to develop leadership skills (Komives, et al., 2011; Dugan, et al., 2011). Our FLC research discovered that every student participant in this study had applied for or sought out an out-of-classroom position on campus, such as positions with student clubs, honors' societies, university police, residential life, leadership programs, freshmen orientation, field experiences, and internships. The required field experience itself can often

network students to additional learning and leading opportunities. The same students agreed that these opportunities helped them develop leadership qualities. Jessica, a Mathematics Education major, talked about how her field experience helped her become a leader:

There are many different roles that you have to take in the classroom. You have to be a leader with the students. ... My first placement led me to volunteer for that (Americore). I tutored and mentored students last semester ... It helped me become a role model, and help students is what I really want to do. It has helped me develop professionally and become a leader.

This finding matches student engagement literature, which underscores the importance of campuses committed to promoting student success to make options like internships and field experiences visible and accessible to students (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010). Evident through this study, internship and field work not only provide students opportunities to gain experience in an area they are interested, but also allow students to engage in leadership roles where they develop new skills and gain confidence. Focus group data deepens this finding, helping us see the important nuances to ways students utilize and authenticate experiential learning. Inspired by the research results of this FLC, the college established an Internship FLC that focuses on students' engagement and leadership in internship and field experiences.

### ***Taking Initiative***

One of the most important traits student leaders shared with the researchers was the need to take initiative, which experts link with student engagement and is a quality our FLC highlighted as fundamental to student success. Taking initiative in class can be a prominent student learning outcome where student participation frequently links to course success. Group programs can be especially fertile in spurring students to take initiative, particularly when program leaders gather team members together to work collaboratively. Related to taking initiative, focus group data also revealed that student leaders are skilled at handling the unexpected. More than a roll with the punches tendency, this reflective response to situational factors employs an active approach to problem solving that correlates with student engagement and academic persistence (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010). As a counter to passivity, we see how taking initiative can prompt positive change:

I notice that we don't know each other really. So, I got some people together ... found some chunks of time there weren't any of those classes and we organized a study group ... It doesn't need to be a big thing either. ... It's silly little thing like that that we can all just take care of instead of waiting for someone else to do.

This FLC study underscores the importance of constructing learning environments that encourage student initiative rather than ones that hand students answers. This fosters self-responsibility and accountability among students and demands constructive input from faculty and staff. Data here, particularly students' self-discovery of ways to initiate and engender behavior, highlights best practices that emphasize active dimensions essential to good teaching and learning. In correlation with student leadership, our FLC research affirms this key teaching/learning dynamic.

### ***Ethics and Goal-Setting***

Ethics and goal-setting are two other essential traits connected to student leadership that came out of our discussion with students and were identified by the Student Leadership FLC members. Literature on student engagement theory confirms the significance of moral reasoning as it relates to students' self-actualization of learning and leadership potential (Smith, 1978). Ethical judgment and goal setting go hand in hand as students examined and evaluated their college leading and learning options. Alice, a Spanish and Military Science major, remarked:

I have always been raised with really good ethics and taught to hone on individual goals instead of going on what your friends are doing or what's popular. I have always gone with my own interests and pursued my goals and that has led me to some experiences that I have. Some of those included being in the front and being a leader. Some of those required me taking a step back and learn from others and I think that getting different points of views in different leadership positions definitely helped me to be where I am today.

Students in this study emphasized the importance of assuming leadership roles and taking initiatives in learning environments. Similarly, student leaders talked about the importance of personal accountability and willingness to admit or accept mistakes as well as being passionate, persistent, and honest; all traits the FLC members linked to leadership.

In addition to leading, students discussed the importance of being active followers. Student respondents linked ethical leadership behavior such as thinking on their feet, caring and respecting differences, and seeing and recognizing the bigger picture as important to good decision-making. Student insight into behaviors that overlay leadership development help reveal ways students themselves negotiate college living and learning opportunities. These student insights move the theoretical understanding of leadership development into a praxis arena where FLCs can play an integral role.

**Members' Development Through Using an FLC as a Platform to Facilitate Student Leadership**

Using an FLC as a space for inquiry and learning, the FLC members in this study developed new perspectives and attitudes about faculty roles in cultivating student leadership. For example, research findings earmark a need for faculty and staff to increase orientation programming focused on leadership opportunities for all incoming students, including freshmen and transfer students. At the research site, the college requires all freshmen to enroll in a one-credit Academic Planning Seminar (APS) and offers this orientation seminar as an option for transfer students. Despite this curricula staple, now a common feature on many campuses, participants suggested that new students might pursue further leadership prospects if introduced to these possibilities at the start of college, and that such experiences would enhance the likelihood that more students would have opportunities to examine their leadership potential.

This FLC research discovered that taking initiative is a fundamental attribute to realizing leadership potential. But getting students to volunteer on top of full-time course schedules, work and family demands is a familiar problem to many campuses. Through this study, FLC members learned different ways to promote student leadership and foster leadership potential in the classroom, such as offering course incentives for volunteering, assigning group projects where students must work collaboratively to complete an assignment, and creating a welcoming and inspiring classroom environment. Student activity outside the classroom also warrants recognition, thereby helping students build solid portfolios. Personal thank you notes, letters of commendation or certificates, or a college authorized co-curricular transcript are examples of ways to recognize and document student extracurricular effort. Using incentive strategies to spur leadership potential underscores the important integration of academic and civic-minded learning activities, a key variable that Kuh (2010) correlates with student success.

This FLC research also recommends strategic ways to connect leadership opportunities with diverse student populations, commuter students in particular, to help bridge the ever-fracturing commuter/student activity gap. For largely residential campuses, as is the case for the research site, meeting the needs of commuter students in areas of leadership development can be a challenge because commuters are often less connected to the institution when compared to their residential counterparts (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 2010). Some commuter-linked leadership strategies that this study identified

include a ride-share board, peer mentor programs, using technology to connect students with leadership opportunities, and most importantly, joining together with students “where they are.”

Impressively, this Student Leadership FLC research accrued several enduring outcomes. The FLC advocated for and successfully established a college-level mentor leadership award that annually recognizes extraordinary faculty who research/publish and/or travel to conferences/present with students. A second legacy to this FLC work, in celebration of student leaders, the FLC initiated a new Scholars Day online journal, *The Spectrum*, which began in 2012 and is now issued annually to showcase student scholarship. This FLC work confirms that colleges must establish an overarching vision that recognizes student leaders, leadership development programs, and mentors who promote student leadership. Official recognition of mentoring and leadership conveys institutional value and priority for such work and raises the bar for what is expected from college citizens. If mentoring and leadership aspects become fixtures in ways colleges assess and reward excellence, faculty, staff, and students are likely to engage. Ramani, Gruppen, and Kachur (2006) affirm that in order to better serve mentees, mentors also need “mentoring, recognition, [to] be awarded, and support” (p. 406).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to the FLC study. Eleven faculty and staff members across nine departments/disciplines on campus comprised the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) that conducted this research, and these FLC members constituted the student focus group comprised of 20 students from 20 majors/programs. While broad in scope, participation from additional majors/disciplines outside FLC membership, and those from a more diverse demographic would permit the results of this study to be generalized to other populations. Also, the study was executed over one academic year within the confines of a one-year FLC commitment, which limits follow-up opportunities among the FLC members and the students who informed the focus group. Extending an FLC beyond one academic year offers broader ground for additional study and may yield further discoveries. Researchers who are interested in carrying out similar studies using an FLC model should consider these noted limitations.

### **Conclusion**

Unlike the traditional view of the leadership development facilitation as a student affairs responsibility, this FLC study promotes multidisciplinary faculty-staff/student interaction. The FLC on



Student Leadership served as a prompt for engaging student leaders and as a working platform to better see and understand how student leadership opportunities originate and grow on college campuses.

Through student voices realized within the structure and support of a formal learning community, this study revealed the significant role colleges and their faculty and staff play in fostering student leadership and those circumstances and behaviors student leaders exhibit in actualizing leadership potential.

Student development literature (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) documents the positive correlation between leadership activities and student success. This research reifies this important intersection as discovered and grounded in the FLC experience. While strategically transitory in membership and topical focus, FLC legacies can live well beyond the FLC configuration. This is true for the Student Leadership FLC where *The Spectrum*, a scholarly student journal, and a faculty mentor and leadership award, are now fixtures to the college community. These mainstays shine back on the merit of FLCs as cross-fertile spaces where campuses can cultivate new thinking and learning. This resonates with the FLC on student leadership, which grew into a rich site for collaborative research, forging a new path for student leadership innovation.

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