MENTORING STUDENT LEADERSHIP:
A Comparison of Two High School Programs
and the Development of Student Success

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Abstract

Mentoring student leadership by guiding students in specific attributes elevates student success to a more rigorous and relevant level for learners (Magner, Soulé & Wesolowski, 2011). This exploratory study examined how participation in programs that mentor leadership contributes to academic success as defined within the Common Core State Standards portraits (Wilhoit, 2010). A multiple case study examined two suburban high school programs that mentor leadership. A cross case analysis investigated commonalities and replication logic for the purpose of improving student success. Five common leadership attributes emerged. These prevalent characteristics integrate the features of 21st century skills, identity leadership behaviors, and transformational leadership practices.
Educational leaders shape the framework of student achievement through the establishment of professional development for teachers (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2004). Teachers serving as role models and guides have cultivated student leadership through athletics, service clubs, artistic performance, church education, and classroom academics (Westlake, 2012). School leaders, by guiding teachers to develop leadership in their students, potentially enhance student success as pupils take responsibility for their own achievement, attitudes, and progress (Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, 2000). This study reveals how participation in programs that mentor leadership contributes to student success. Student success was defined by the portraits of student success noted in the Common Core State Standards (Wilhoit, 2010). Furthermore, transformational leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2006), identity leadership theory (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011), and 21st century skills (McGaw, 2009) were used in exploring an interpretative framework for student leadership.

The research focused on interconnections between mentoring and student success, Common Core and student success, and leadership and student success. If the mentoring of student leaders by teachers improves student success through achievement, educational leaders may view professional development on mentoring student leadership as worthwhile.

Common Core State Standards were adopted in 46 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (Schmidt & Burroughs, 2013). Twenty first century skills have been impelled as keys to student success. An educational trend toward combining Common Core State Standards with 21st century skills was designed to improve learning and student achievement (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011). Many of the 21st century skills: innovation, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, initiative, and self-direction (McGaw, 2009), are similar to traits of leadership identified by literature (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Social identity theory, an emerging leadership prototype derived from social psychological research, reconceptualized leadership as a function of group and organizational dynamics (Haslam et al, 2011). By applying this theory to the context of schools and classrooms, the similarities between leadership characteristics embedded in social identity theory and the current Common Core educational policy vision substantially overlap to increase capacity of human resources.
In Figure 1, 21st century skills, introduced to the education community by business leaders (McGaw, 2009), overlap leadership skills embedded in social identity theory. According to an advisory group from 36 business and educational companies that collaborated to develop the Common Core Toolkit (Magner, et al, 2011), educating students goes beyond addressing the learning standards. Leadership, 21st century skills, and portraits of success in Common Core standards were aligned as tools for teaching and learning.

An emerging leadership theory based upon the social identity theory encompasses four foundations, each one with parallels to categories of 21st century skills (Haslam, et al, 2011): representing group interests, promoting group interests, entrepreneurs of group identity, and leaders as embedders of identity. The second framework foundation, promoting group interests, can be aligned with the identified 21st century skills of collaboration and communication. The third foundation, entrepreneurs of identity, can be aligned with creativity, innovation and initiative (Komives, Mainella, Owen, Osteen & Longerbeam, 2005).

Transformational leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2006) encompass five categories: challenge the process, enable others to act, inspire a shared vision, encourage the heart, and model the way for others. Similar to the crossover between social identity leadership and 21st century skills, these transformational leadership practices align with 21st century skills. For example, enabling others to act collimates adaptability, decision making, and problem solving.

Teachers strive to prepare each student through educational standards. Many inadvertently mentor leadership skills to promote students’ future success in the global
community. “The most significant contribution student leaders make is not simply to today’s issues and goals, but rather to the long-term development of people, communities, and institutions so they can adapt, change, prosper, and grow” (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 3).

Skills are learned and mentored. Such skills are necessary to assume leadership positions, both titled and assumed (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2004). In addition, specific skills have been tied to the Common Core State Standards (Magner, et al, 2011). As such, there seems to be a commonality across leadership theory, leadership practices, 21st century skills and portraits of the Common Core State Standards, making such skills critical for students to learn, whether the goal is leadership or academic success. It is said that leaders are high achievers, and high achievers are leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

An Intersection of Leadership and 21st Century Skills

While there are plenty of studies on both student leadership and mentoring, there is a paucity of research connecting student leadership mentoring with improved student achievement, college and career readiness, and, ultimately, portraits of student success. Intertwining features of identity leadership theory, transformational leadership practices, and 21st century skills allow us to rethink possibilities of educating students through the process of mentoring leadership.

Developing leadership in all students through the mentoring of 21st century skills may be a direct and purposeful avenue to school, career and community preparedness (Haslam, et al, 2011). Leadership skills embedded in social identity theory and 21st century skills emphasized by the portraits of the Common Core Standards have comparable headings. Alignment between these skill sets suggests teaching leadership skills as defined by social identity theory may help students acquire 21st century skills suggested as necessary for college and career readiness. Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Manilla, and Osteen (2005) recommend adult influences such as those provided by mentors are critical to development of leadership skills. However, few studies investigate the relationship between influence of adult mentors and student acquisition of 21st century leadership skills.

Teachers spend educational preparation and professional development time learning to teach conceptual elements in order for students to meet educational standards. This particular study, however, was designed to fulfill a need to develop mentoring skills in teachers to guide their students as independent thinkers and
community members. In considering others as an individual decision is made, the group becomes more energized and cohesive (Glasser, 2007). If, as identity leadership suggests, students learn to identify themselves as a group whose goals are aligned (Haslam, et al, 2011), Common Core portraits and 21st century leadership skills can align to sequentially develop college, career and community ready citizens. Studying mentoring of student leadership skills, particularly those skills earmarked in the 21st century skills list, offered the potential to give educational leadership a snapshot into the power of combining leadership skills with the Common Core portraits. Figure 2 shows similarities among identity leadership theory’s framework foundations, Kouzes & Posner’s transformational practices of leadership, 21st century skills and portraits of the Common Core State Standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTITY LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>PRACTICES OF LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>21ST CENTURY SKILLS</th>
<th>PORTRAITS of the COMMON CORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STANDING FOR THE GROUP In-Group Prototypes</td>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>Critical Thinking Initiative and Self-Direction Research and Inquiry</td>
<td>Demonstrate Independence Build Strong Content Knowledge Value Evidence Attend to Precision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAIRNESS In-Group Champions</td>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>Problem Solving Flexibility and Adaptability Responsibility Decision Making</td>
<td>Comprehend as well as Critique Reason Abstractly and Quantitatively Look for and Express Regularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN REALITY, REPRESENTATIVENESS &amp; LEADERSHIP Entrepreneurs of Identity</td>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>Communication Collaboration Productivity Creativity and Innovation</td>
<td>Respond to Varying Demands of Audience, Task, Purpose and Discipline Strive to Understand Other Perspectives and Cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTHORITY AND POWER Embedders of Identity</td>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>Information Literacy Media Literacy Digital Citizenship ICT Operations/Concepts</td>
<td>Use Technology and Digital Media Use Appropriate Tools Make Use of Structure</td>
</tr>
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Figure 2, Behavior, Skill, Practice and Portrait Cross-Section

This project sought to determine if there is an association between mentoring leadership and student success in academics, job performance, and societal contributions. The study investigated the potential of transformational leadership
practices, 21st century skills, and social identity theory’s foundational framework in raising student achievement and preparing students for career, college and citizenship in our global society. A framework used in this investigation was the cross-sectional elements as listed in Figure 2 above.

**MODEL FOR MENTORING**

There are benefits to mentoring leadership skills in students at all levels of education (McGaw, 2009). Development of leadership skills can be expanded through mentoring programs, formalizing the mentoring process through sequential strategies (Wheeler, Keller & DuBois, 2010). Mentoring can have beneficial effects on students’ social and academic progress (Dondero, 1997). For example, Rhodes, Grossman and Resch, (2000) found that students who were mentored earned higher grades, had fewer school absences, valued school more, and had more positive perceptions of their self-worth and better parent relationships than students who were not mentored. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) go beyond the psychology of leadership being generally concerned with individual attributes, and bring to light “motivation of those who follow” (Chapter 1, paragraph 7). Mentors are the guides of those who follow. There is an assertion that mentors may also be the inspiration of those who lead (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Following a thorough study observing the effects of positive mentoring on students, Dr. Jean Rhodes developed a model of youth mentoring:

![Model of Youth Mentoring](Figure 3, Model of Youth Mentoring (2002))
Examination of two high school programs investigated the mentoring of leadership in students. A purposeful sampling of high school programs that mentor students was developed to target the mentoring of leadership. The individual aggregation of interviews, observations and documents cascaded the adult mentor, student mentor, student leader and emerging leader attributes. Embedding three assessments on skills, practices and behaviors with the six student leaders of the two groups helped the researcher to dig deeper, thickening the description of the leadership mentoring programs. A cross case analysis investigated commonalities and replication logic in utilizing this information for the purpose of improving student success in high schools (Yin, 2014).

Two previous pilot studies targeted mentors/teachers and university students. It was valuable to look at programs that mentor high school students, and the merits of recognizing leadership potential in students younger than college age. A comparison of high school age mentoring programs and college experiences benefits future development of leadership programs. It will additionally be beneficial to look for a sampling in future studies that offers variance in town and school, comparing interviews with students at different institutions, perhaps different areas of the country and a contrasting leadership program with alternate syllabus or documents.

Mentoring of leadership in students may be a powerful tool, reaching out to find potential in unlikely students who don’t possess typical leadership attributes (Cain, 2013). College students previously interviewed in an aforementioned pilot project considered themselves introverted, shy, awkward, lacking in organization, or were uncomfortable managing situations. They felt strongly that their mentors are the reason they found strengths within themselves they didn’t know existed. Further study with younger students may be able to point to mentoring leadership as an instrument to student success. At-risk students may benefit greatly from leadership mentoring as a way to bring positive attributes to the surface of their troublesome circumstances.

Triangulation of document analysis, interview of students, and observation of student leaders increased information on possible association between emerging leaders as high school or college students and the mentoring of the leadership skills embedded in the 21st century skills and the published portraits of the Common Core State Standards. Three leadership assessments, embedded as artifacts of the study, served to stratify and deepen the study. Mentoring programs, while primarily used to improve deficient circumstances in social, technical and academic arenas, can move beyond the damage model through “vigilant attendance to the undergirding
philosophies and assumptions of both programs and mentors involved as well as the material and social resources available to them” (Nguyen, 2005, p. 4). Mentoring has potential to be proactive by increasing student success.

The emerging leadership theory based upon social identity provided a basis for the combining of Kouzes’ and Posner’s (2008) leadership practices with 21st century skills and portraits of the Common Core Standards (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2004). The necessity to demonstrate the benefits of mentoring leadership has been sparked through previous studies. Accordingly, leadership and achievement are increasingly becoming a matched pair (Griffin, 2010).

THE STUDY

The population for the study was a suburban high school district in the northwest, drawing from curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs that have a structured method of mentoring students. The sample was made up of students and teachers/mentors from two mentoring programs discovered in a pilot study: a music program and an after school service club. The primary logic for selecting the specific high school was based upon accessibility and specific mentoring programs in the region, in a rural state that has few schools of sufficient size for robust programs to flourish.

The music program was a high school band program. The mentoring of leadership stemmed from the marching band unit developed in the fall of the year, but the process began during the spring of the previous school year. The director developed a syllabus for the leadership-mentoring program. The students were encouraged to find their own inner leadership skills and behaviors. Through the development of both a forum and a community service project, the students applied for leadership positions in the spring of the year, interviewing with a panel of community music leaders, such as local artists, public figures, symphony director, college music professors, and noteworthy composers. Those chosen were evaluated throughout the school year, with periodic meetings between mentor/teacher and student leaders for the purpose of review of each leader in the program.

Mr. Bergen is a 20-year veteran high school band director, having taught inner-city school band for his first eight years in a largely populated city in a western state, complete with metal detectors and police in the hallways and parking lots. He is an imposing presence, appearing more like a linebacker on a football team than a band director. Mr. Bergen has a booming voice and an entertaining sense of humor. He has
received numerous teaching awards during the past two decades for inspiration, organization, and innovation in the classroom. The high school band director at Mountain High School for the past 13 years, Mr. Bergen has guided a successful high school band program with a creative approach to musicianship and leadership. He believes in a strong sense of collaboration, signified by his involving the local community in the training and study of student leadership.

One of my favorite parts of the application for leadership is that they have to interview a leader in the community. It could be the CEO of a company. It could be the (university) president. It could be the principal. Somebody that’s not been warned much in advance, it’s kind of a cold call, they have to get in touch with folks that way, set up an interview schedule, have questions ready, ask the questions, you know, they have to attend the interview, and then they have to summarize that after it’s all done. And then apply it to their own perspective of being a leader.

The student mentor and leaders interviewed were all inadvertently seniors. They were proud to be a part of the band leadership program, citing self-confidence and increased excellence as benefits of participating in the formal leadership mentoring program. Student mentor Vickie captured this best by saying:

Being in this program, as well as participating in all-state music, ultimately playing with more advanced musicians has made me a better leader as well. I’m able to have a different perspective from being around other peers who are driven and more advanced in their playing. I’m pretty quiet, but I was able to guide others because of these experiences.

An off-shoot of the community Lions Club, the Leo Club provides student leadership positions through a structured pattern of service. Leadership sessions were developed and practiced, and even though there was no selection process, all students in the club are continuously working toward leadership opportunities.

The mission and vision of the Lions Club sets up the mentoring of leadership in community service for the Leo Club. Leading philanthropic service in the community in order to foster nonviolence and advance global understanding is the core of community service organizations (Luce, 2009).

Lions Club Vision: “TO BE the global leader in community and humanitarian service.

Lions Club Mission: TO EMPOWER volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace and promote international understanding through Lions clubs” (International Association of Lions Clubs, 2013, p. 2).

Mr. Vanowen is one of two adult mentors of the Leo Club. He meets with his student leaders and emerging leaders often, usually at lunch time, giving up his own
duty-free lunch to mentor these developing leaders. He is a rising star at Mountain High School, young, innovative and captivating, according to students. He teaches English to students in the alternative high school program as well as the main stream high school. Lynn, one of the emerging student leader members of the Leo Club, stated, “He is a good role model for us. He doesn’t try to be our friend, but he just makes everything more exciting. We actually want to work for him and with him”. He believes in the goodness and success of every student, according to two student leaders, and enjoys mentoring and advising the Leo Club with another English teacher. Mentoring leadership is important to Mr. Vanowen. He facilitates student leaders as they brainstorm with each other about how to be an effective leader, and inserts questions in order to keep the leaders on track. These lunch meetings are for the purposes of strategizing. According to Mr. Vanowen:

*What we’re striving to do is show the student leaders various strategies for developing buy-in from the rest of the club members, their peers, which is always challenging in any group. Getting that buy-in and getting that acceptance from those who are your peers, especially bringing them from a point where they see you as a titled leader, so to speak, to someone who is a valued leader. Usually we want to model that with them by setting aside that extra time just for student leaders within the club, and trying to work on strategies, and brainstorm more strategies, and then set up an action plan – for them to carry it out with the rest of the club, delivering or demonstrating their leadership to the group.*

Like the band program, the leadership interviewed were seniors. This particular group has built the Leo Club to the largest membership in many years. They spend a great deal of time together outside of school, and regularly meet with Mr. Vanowen and the other club advisor for brainstorming sessions.

*Brynn and I will have lunch with (Ms. Wolcott and Mr. Vanowen), usually one day before Leo Club and they will kind of say what we did well last week, and what we need to work on. At the beginning, we were both kind of shy, especially me. And our advisors will be like, “you guys need to get excited about it” and we will say, “yeah, let’s get excited about it now”. We get excited about our community service projects, because when we are so-so about it, nobody can get excited about it. So they really encourage us to be excited about the club and really get into it. It works! (Michelle)*

Student leaders in the two programs were administered the Leadership Profile Index (student leadership), developed by Kouzes and Posner (2008). In addition, the sample students took the 21st century skills assessment (Griffin, 2010) and the identity leadership inventory assessment (Steffan, 2013). This pilot exercise was implemented to give trustworthiness to the study and to search for common ground within and
between student leadership, 21st century skills, identity leadership and portraits of the Common Core.

To assure manageability of collected data, the sampling was limited to the aforementioned programs, specific programs that, in some way, formally mentor leadership in high school students. Because of the unique sample available for the investigation, results were likely not comprehensive of a general high school population in the United States or even in the sample state. In addition, the study was limited by the specific categories in which leadership was investigated.

Topical boundaries used for this multiple case study are outlined in the diagram below. Boundedness and behavior patterns are critical to understanding the case (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Predicting and managing these boundaries was not an easy task due to the fact that case study research vacillates between the general and the specific (p. 165). The investigation of the music program and service club targeted mentoring of leadership skills, practices and behaviors. The nature of mentoring leadership is different from other factors of student success, such as home environment, community influences outside of leadership mentors, intelligence, and wealth. While these elements exist, they occur outside of the boundaries of this study.

![Diagram of Topical Boundaries](image-url)

Figure 4, Topical Boundaries of this Study

The focus of this study was the intersection of 21st century skills, leadership practices, and social identity behaviors as they were mentored, and the influence that the leadership program had on the success of the students through their leadership
experiences. Student success was measured through the portraits of the Common Core standards. Observation of leadership mentoring programs and the students who participate in these programs were combined with student and mentor interviews, and finally, the study of the program syllabi.

Figure 5, Investigative Boundaries and Priorities

**Assessments ARTIFACTS**
- 21st Century Skills Assessment
- Leadership Profile Index
- Identity Leadership Inventory

**Interviews**
- Adult Mentor Interview
- Leadership Student Mentor
- Student Leader
- Section/Committee

**Document Coding**
- Band Leadership Mentoring Document
- Lions Club Charter Document

**Observation**
- Student Mentor
- Student Leader
- Section/Committee

**STUDENT SUCCESS**

A primary research question was, “How is leadership ability influenced by receiving formal mentoring in leadership?” The use of a multiple case study offered a look at two programs that mentor leadership at this particular high school. Aggregating the two leadership mentoring programs offered an in-depth look at each program. A view across the two programs revealed similarities and differences, targeting patterns in specific skills, practices, and behaviors. Utilizing the cross-section of the conceptualization of the current research topic, Figure 6 was designed as a preliminary model on the mentoring of student leadership and is still being developed:
Educational leaders continuously balance methods, initiatives, best practices and philosophies of educating students. Training teachers to be mentors of student leadership is only good educational leadership practice if there is some quality evidence that student leadership influences student success. This study has the possibility of communicating valuable evidence that student success and achievement are strongly linked to the development of student leadership. As the scope of education transforms with the times, the mentoring of leadership may be a key to success in education and student preparedness for the future. Utilizing leadership and teamwork to move toward the goal of excellence, the marching leadership program is convergent. Modeling the way for others, standing representative of the group, collaboration and citizenship were significant leadership attributes that this particular group of student leaders value. On the other hand, the Leo Club program is divergent, employing leadership and teamwork to inspire innovative options and possibilities for the purpose of serving others. Inspiring a shared vision, standing representative of the group, collaboration and citizenship were the leadership principles held in esteem by these student leaders.

Marching band student leader and mentor Casey articulated what student leaders from both groups tried to express about a sense of fairness and justice that arises from good work ethic and collegiality as a group.

*I have talked about what’s fair and not fair since I was little, but through marching band I now truly understand that fairness. We’re all generally understanding of each other’s strengths and
what we all have to offer. In order to have a good system, we have to be able to communicate respectfully. That respectful communication is where fairness begins.

In conclusion, both groups had five leadership attributes in common that consistently held value to the student leaders and adult mentors of the marching band and Leo club. These prevalent characteristics integrate the features of 21st century skills, identity leadership behaviors, and transformational leadership practices. As the five attributes surfaced in the interviews, observations, document coding and leadership tests, valuable insight was provided into the importance of mentoring emerging leaders in specific areas.

Student success, as identified in the seven portraits of the Common Core Standards, is the intended outcome of mentoring leadership in the leadership mentoring model being developed. The portraits, therefore, are the results when leadership is mentored:

1. Demonstrate independence
2. Build strong content knowledge
3. Respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline
4. Comprehend as well as critique
5. Value evidence
6. Use technology and digital media strategically and capably
7. Strive to understand other perspectives and cultures
This investigation broadly illustrated how mentoring leadership in high school students affects student influence and productivity in a school setting.

“Studies have found shared characteristics among effective leaders across sectors and situations. No characteristic is universally associated with good leadership in these studies, but vision and focus show up most often. Effective leaders help articulate a vision, set standards for performance, and create focus and direction” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 347).

In the two cases studied, three 21st century skills were of utmost importance to the adult mentors and student leaders. Clear communication, collaborative activities, and developing a sense of community and citizenship were a critical part of creating focus and direction for their group. One transformational leadership practice surfaced in this study, that of modeling the way for others. An identity leadership behavior, that of representing the group, was of critical importance to the mentors and leaders examined in this study.

Numerous similarities surfaced during the study that have practical implications for practice. First of all, an organized and sequential program of mentoring reaches students who demonstrate varying qualities and characteristics of leadership aptitude. This ordered approach to recognizing and encouraging leadership in high school students goes beyond developing leadership that happens organically in the classroom, on athletic teams and or in activities for adolescents. Categorizing leadership into achievement, work ethic, citizenship, service, structure and problem solving helps adult mentors and teachers find aptitude in students who are not outgoing or who may struggle in certain areas.

Secondly, developing leadership in students has the potential to give these young people purpose, definition to their goals, and encouragement to be risk-takers. The participants in this research study had strong perceptions about improving personal success through mentoring leadership in many students. Third, designing a course or activity that incorporates leadership into the framework by way of 21st century skills, identity leadership behaviors, and transformational leadership practices is a thoughtful avenue, according to the research subjects, to both assess and develop a solid leadership program.

Finally, utilizing the portraits of the Common Core State Standards proved to be an assessment of student success that evaluated the effectiveness of the mentored skills, practices and behaviors. While the attributes mentored come from the syllabus of the marching band program and the Lions Club constitution and by-laws, Common Core portraits effectively tested the mentored leadership characteristics. Furthermore, the three leadership tests given gave strength to the benefits of employing the seven
Common Core portraits as a measure of success and achievement. Cross-referencing of 21st century skills, identity leadership behaviors and transformational leadership practices with portraits of the Common Core State Standards in the various research techniques gave clarity to both commonalities and differences of leadership philosophies.

As a result of this research, practitioners can gain valuable insight into the development of leadership programs within a sequential course or student consortium. The value to participating students and the adults who mentor leadership gives student organizations a jumping off point for increasing effectiveness through developing student leadership. Academic classes and extra curricular activities have the possibility of increasing benefits to students through leadership opportunities and development of new skill sets in student work. The study of training teachers to mentor student leadership in classes and student organizations imparts an abundant opportunity to understand mentoring in terms of student success.
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18


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