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Intentional Curriculum Development for an Introductory Leadership Course at the University of San Diego

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to better understand the needs of the *Emerging Leaders* courses at the University of San Diego. My overarching research question was: how do I utilize previous instructors, students, and campus partners to implement curriculum changes that will enhance classroom inclusivity and educational impact for this undergraduate leadership course? Using McNiff's cycles of action research as a guiding framework, I explored the intentionality behind developing a curriculum that guides these classes. Reflecting on student feedback, I was able to see an overall satisfaction in the implemented curriculum changes. Ultimately, this work was significant in understanding how course work curriculum can impact a students' desire to engage and learn about leadership.

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Introduction

Traditionally, higher education classrooms are based on a lecture format with students taking notes on information shared. This information generally comes from a curriculum that has been designed by the lecturer and pre-approved to be taught. Students will then regurgitate the information back in the form of a test to determine how well they were able to memorize or apply the material. As a traditional student myself, I have noticed that this leads to a lack of discussion, which leads to a lack of deeper understanding of content.

The University of San Diego (USD), specifically in the School of Leadership and Educational Sciences (SOLES), has some courses that have strayed away from this typical format to become more experiential, leading to more group-based learning. This classroom set up looks different; however, it is still guided by a set of curriculum guidelines to uphold academic integrity. *Emerging Leaders* (EL), the curriculum I work with, is an introductory leadership course, which first and second year USD undergraduate students are able to take as an elective or as an entry point to explore a minor in leadership. In 2007, while looking at leadership development programs for college students, Dugan & Komives stated the following:

> "Leadership development programs should include opportunities for deliberate discussions on a wide range of issues. Students need to learn dialogue skills, listening skills, and need to be able to label personal beliefs and assumptions that guide their actions. Leadership educators should ensure that diversity discussions are included in both formal and informal leadership programs. Furthermore, discussions on socio-cultural issues should be woven throughout an educational experience, not simply as an insular component of an overall curriculum." (p.17)

As leadership research continues to grow, it has become abundantly clear that social awareness, self-awareness and communication skills are key contributors in leadership development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the make-up of this curriculum; textbook selection, classroom activities, graded assignments, group projects, etc. to determine its' impact on the students' learning. Specifically, the existing course curriculum for *Emerging Leaders* (EL) was utilized and altered. New interactive activities and a more diverse reading list were intentionally added to aid students in their own identity and leadership development.

Additionally, I asked how I could best work with instructors, students, and campus partners to ensure that this non-traditional class is upholding its' intentional coursework. A large portion of my efforts have been ensuring that our multiple instructors understand the learning outcomes for the *Emerging Leaders* courses. As Wang in 2015 stated, "Teachers serve as the key agents for performing inclusive educational practices" (p15). With that in mind, it has been a continuous effort between EL instructors, myself, and my supervisor to revisit the course content as needed and put our learning outcomes and common purpose at the forefront of each class session.

Lastly, it was important for me to hear from students; what components of their classroom resonate with them and what areas they feel disconnected to? As I worked through these efforts, it was important for me to acknowledge my privilege within these classes, as a white female authority figure, I entered spaces hoping to receive honest information throughout my research By looking at campus partners, like Rainbow Educators, I began to appreciate their success of facilitation in identity development workshops and sought out best practices on how to apply them to a leadership course. I believe their program challenges the norm for curriculum

development by creating presentations for groups to aid in their understanding and knowledge of

hard-hitting topics such as; power and privilege, LGBTQIA+, and other communities on campus

(Aaron-Albanese, 2013). The Rainbow Educators team highlights community guidelines, which

they have since renamed to be *invitations for bravery*, in order to have these conversations

openly and respectfully. These invitations also serve as a tool for facilitators when working with

individuals who may not have previously been introduced to these topics. Robinson, Cross-

Denny, Lee, Rozas, & Yamada (2015) discuss the success of group facilitation by creating

holding environments that foster inclusivity.

It is with this knowledge that I wanted to collaboratively work with EL instructors,

campus partners, and my supervisor in order to alter the current standing curriculum and promote

inclusivity for all student voices in the classroom. Ultimately, the overarching research question

guiding my study was, how do I utilize previous instructors, students, and campus partners to

implement curriculum changes that will enhance classroom inclusivity and educational impact

for this undergraduate leadership course?

Literature Review

Historically, a classroom setting holds authority, power, and typically involves

instruction by an educator as well as students with an intent to learn. By nature of this design, the

instructor's voice is heard most while students only participate in discussions when they are

asked to do so. Although the opportunity is presented to engage as a group, some student voices

are heard more than others, leaving a number of voices unintentionally removed from

conversations and learning.

Chen (2005) took a look at the student experience and uncovered what he calls the

"hidden curriculum" (p.15); an underlying education that favors privileged identities in the

classroom. Chen (2005) found a connection between the identities of students and their level of involvement in class and stated that more privileged identities were more likely to engage within the classroom. With this knowledge, it is important to be cognizant of power and privilege in the classroom in order to actively encourage all voices to participate.

In a continued effort to understand student engagement, Ingram (2015) discusses microaggressions and their capability to create anxiety, mistrust, or other feelings of unease for students in a classroom. Whether these microaggressions are intentional or unintentional, it is imperative for educators to be aware of their impact on a classroom. For example, Ochoa & Pineda (2008) asked their students, who were primarily Latinx, to freely write about previous classroom experiences to better understand classroom engagement. Responses revealed a trending need to be *the perfect student*; described as not speaking out of turn and remaining quiet, while also being diligent with course work. Whether it is a cultural expectation or a shared feeling among many students in today's world, student expectations have been developed throughout an educational lifetime.

Going deeper than surface-level course content,Matyo-Cepero, Varvisotis and Lilienthal (2018) decided to look back at previous efforts and explore how to better "humanize the educative process" (International Alliance for Invitation Education, para. 2). Although these tactics for Invitational Education Theory were typically seen only in K-12 classrooms, the college classroom can also operate with some of these ideals. When students of all represented identities feel heard, valued, and responsible for their learning, it enhances their educational experience. For example, Maxwell & Gurin (2017) explore the impact of dialogue within educational settings and note the importance of active listening, utilizing personal and analytical components to course work, re-direction of off-topic conversations or using them as a learning

opportunity. Discussion-based learning can provide new elements to a lesson such as; personal experiences, anecdotes, opinions, and disagreements. Knowing this, I believe it is imperative to foster a sense of belonging within the group and a mutual understanding of respect for the space to allow for these types of discussions.

In sum, this research reveals that classroom settings can exclude a number of student voices and provide a limited range of learning for students, specifically students who hold less privilege and students who have only ever known a traditional classroom setting. Thus, more research is needed in areas such as curriculum development in order to rethink the educational setting within a classroom. The textbooks in which we provide our students with, the discussions that we allow or don't allow, the activities and learning opportunities we provide and the ways in which we as authority figures engage with them should be greater looked at in order to no longer perpetuate some of these limitations in our education system.

Context

The University of San Diego

The University of San Diego (USD) is a private liberal arts institution located in southern California. With just under 6,000 enrolled undergraduates, USD holds a small student population. It is also important to note that, based on data collected in Fall of 2019, 50% of the undergraduate population identified as White, making USD a prominently White institution. Following the highest demographic population, 21% of student identify as Hispanic or Latino, 7% identify as Asian and only 3% of the population identify as Black of African American. These numbers are reflected in many of the on-campus classrooms, creating a general lack of diversity in many cases. While USD is working to acknowledge these numbers and create

change, it is still early in their plans. Thus, my research took place with the presence and impact

of this lack of diversity.

Emerging Leaders

Emerging Leaders is a 3-unit undergraduate course that is designed about first- and

second-year college students attending the University of San Diego. The course is offered under

the leadership minor, which is within the School or Educational Leadership Sciences (SOLES)

and is a co-instruction model; meaning it is taught by a PhD student as well as an undergraduate

or graduate student. It is intended to expose undergraduate students to new ways of thinking

about leadership and utilizes models like the social change model (Komives & Wagner, 2017) to

explore micro and macro-level effects pertaining to leadership. Below are the listed learning

outcomes, created in Fall 2019:

1. Learn about leadership concepts and theories and be able to apply these concepts and theories to their lives.
2. Explore what it means to create a diverse and inclusive community.
3. Engage in critical thinking about leadership through assignments, activities, and discussions.
4. Learn how to be an effective member of a group by engaging in small-group learning communities.
5. Learn about involvement opportunities and resources at USD.
6. Develop significant relationships with peers and instructors.

During Spring of 2019, I had the opportunity to be a co-instructor in one of the sections.

This experience was truly the driving force for this research. It allowed me to see that the course

curriculum had areas of growth. Listening to where students are at developmentally when it

comes to their own identity encouraged me to re-evaluate their comprehension of this curriculum

and explore alternatives to how they best learn. An extremely positive outcome of this

opportunity was that I was able to better grasp the concept of the learning outcomes and the

importance of community building in this course.

Positionality as a Graduate Assistant

As the graduate assistant for Community and Leadership Development, I am uniquely placed to work with both SOLES and the student affairs department. My supervisor and I work closely with the leadership minor team to build and execute the multiple sections of Emerging Leaders (LEAD 150). Course enrollment varies each semester, so there can be anywhere between 1 and 8 total sections of the same course. Our administration team is made up of myself, my supervisor, the graduate assistant in SOLES and the director for the leadership minor. Together we are in charge of instructor selection, instructor training, curriculum development, syllabus creation, textbook selection, etc. Beyond that, we host weekly meetings with the instructors throughout the semesters in order to make sure the course is going smoothly.

Methodology

Overview

The method in which I conducted this study was action research, which is a useful tool when looking at qualitative data. This form of research allowed me to include my own personal reflections and positionality throughout the entire process. I utilized McNiff's (2016) cycles of action research (see Figure 1) to structure my efforts. This model allows for a continuous thought process for research.
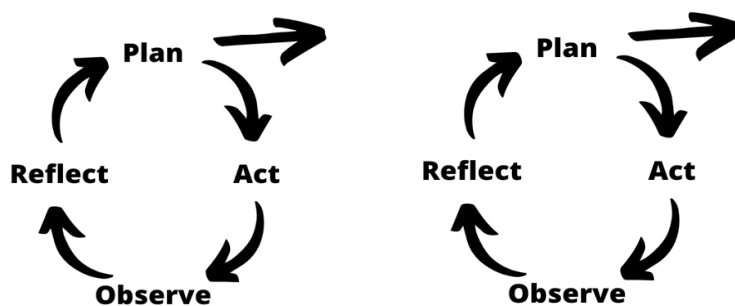

Figure 1. Cycles of Action Research. Adapted from "*You and your action research project* (4th ed.)" by J. McNiff, 2016,. New York, NY: Routledge.

As I anticipated my research being cyclical and changing, I felt that utilizing this method of research would allow the planning process that took place, as well as the reflection needed for re-evaluating. The largest informative planning component took place during my pre-cycle data collection. This was a time for me to actively engage in discussions around what curriculum components had previously done well in the EL classes, and what areas could be examined for change. Following my pre-cycle, the semester began and I was able to conduct my two consecutive cycles (see Table 1 for an overview). The reflective process for both of these cycles allowed me to better understand the positionality of how these students might learn best. It also allowed me to look inward about my own beliefs around higher education and the typical classroom experience.

Data Collection

Throughout my research process, I found it easiest to collect data by using questionnaires, observations and surveys. I felt that hearing about the students experience in the classroom would be best expressed in their own words. I utilized open-ended questions, as well as multiple-choice, in order to allow for a variety of answers. My pre-cycle allowed me to reflect on the conversations I had, the way in which I interpreted those conversations, and the action steps that were taken from there to move forward. In Cycle 1, I had the opportunity to observe classroom interactions while students (participants) presented their leadership articles and discussed their decisions. I was able to actively listen and note my own observations during this time to later reflect upon. I was a guest in their learning environment; therefore, the follow up questionnaire was a way for students to anonymously express their thoughts and whether or not it was helpful to their learning. The post-survey in Cycle 2 actively sought to hear from these

participants and their experience with the provided curriculum and experiential learning

components.

Table 1

Overview of Research Progression

Cycle	Method	Participants	Purpose
Pre-Cycle	Review curriculum recommendations and pre-existing data		Look at intended learning outcomes, collect previous data and collaboratively make changes to the curriculum
Cycle 1	Participants present a leadership article or their choosing and completed a questionnaire to reflect	28 Emerging Leaders students across 4 different sections	In order to gain a better understanding of what areas of leadership stand out to participants and to hear about why this information is personally relevant to their learning
Cycle 2	Post-survey that follows the end of the semester	28 Emerging Leaders students across 4 different sections	To know what the classroom experience was like for these participants and to hear about how they felt within the group dynamics

Limitations

Qualitative data can be considered subjective. In order to combat this, I utilized multiple-

choice options and thematic analysis when reviewing responses and interactions. A second

limitation was that the participants were already enrolled students within the Emerging Leaders

sections, suggesting that their desire to obtain the information can solicit a positive response

from them. To address this issue, when asking questions surrounding classroom experiences, I

asked for specific examples that stood out as notable. Finally, this research was conducted at a

predominantly white institution thus the demographic was pre-determined upon enrollment. The

students enrolled were the participant pool. Nevertheless, it is important to note that cultural,

racial, and life experiences differed amongst the group.

Pre-Cycle: Review of Pre-Existing Data

Plan

Having been in my Graduate Assistantship for one year prior, I noticed some trending

themes among course evaluations and feedback from previous instructors. Previous LEAD 150

students and instructors shared similar thoughts on the original required textbook; *Leadership for

a Better World: Understanding the Social Change Model of Leadership Development* by Susan

R. Komives and Wendy Wagner. The shared opinion was that the models and ideals provided

were a highly westernized way of interpreting leadership. This led to discussions around how to

best introduce these ideals, while also encouraging other ways of thinking about leadership.

Act

In hopes of exposing students to alternative ways of thinking about leadership, the

decision to change the required textbook and add in supplemental readings was finalized. The

new required reading would now be; *The Power of Latino Leadership: Culture, inclusion and

contribution* by Juana Bordas. Bordas (2013) discusses powerful connections between Latino

culture and community-based leadership. Furthermore, the cultural context of a LatinX author

provides the opportunity to discuss how leadership might look different amongst differing

cultural backgrounds. The supplemental readings were added in order to highlight and

complement the chapters within the required text and highlight other leadership ideals. There

were articles added surrounding vulnerability in leadership. Specifically, there were two chapters

discussing the *social change model* (Komives & Wagner, 2017) and there was a reading

discussing servant leadership. These texts were meant to provide a wide range of different ways

of thinking, different authors and hopefully display that leadership does not look one certain

way.

Observe

The changes made to the curriculum were met with a lot of positivity. However, I noted

that some administrative colleagues were hesitant that having a required text written by a LatinX

author would cause students to gravitate away from the course. Their concern was that the

textbook having "*Latino*" in the title could cause non-Latino students to feel a lack of connection

to the material. In response, a member of the administrative team stated that if this were the case,

many non-white students would struggle with their education material, as much of the required

texts today are written by white authors. This point served as a catalyst to move forward with the

change. It was expressive of the many ways in which education and curriculum building could be

re-examined to do better by their students.

Reflect

The process of selecting readings for the classroom was extremely valuable to this

research. It allowed me to think and reflect on what areas of leadership might be important to

introduce. The original text was something I, as a white female, could connect with while trying

to advance my leadership, but the same may not have been true for enrolled students trying to

expand their personal leadership while holding other identities.

Cycle 1: Leadership Article Presentation and Reflection

Plan

Following the initial curriculum changes, it became apparent that our administrative team had tried to expand learning by adding what we felt was necessary to discuss leadership. This was necessary at the time, and yet, I began to wonder if what we had placed in front of them was relevant to their leadership process. Do they resonate with the leadership ideals presented? Do they see themselves and others in the models? This prompted the idea of providing the opportunity for students to self-select an article discussing leadership and present it to the class. The motivation for this was to see what students are drawn to and for what reasons.

Act

Students were given five minutes to explain and discuss their selected article. This would be an opportunity for them to discuss the reason they chose the article, what about it stood out, their connection to the style of leadership discussed and any other notable pieces. Their classmates were able to join in on the discussion piece and were encouraged to ask questions.

Observe

Classroom observation. This component of this cycle provided me an opportunity to visibly see the students interacting with the material. I was introduced as a guest and observed as discussions unfolded around leadership styles, famous leaders, poor leaders, etc. The presentations were informal which allowed for open dialogue. I found it most interesting that students all came with something different and unique to them. See Table 2 for demographics of students who participated in the classroom observation. There were no repeating articles or thoughts, and each discussion was formed from personal experience. The discussions were rich and included; leaders who are making college campuses more accessible for the differently-abled, impactful women of color in dance, the daughter of Walt Disney sharing who wealth with the less fortunate and Greta Thunberg inspiring young leaders that no dream is too large.

Table 2

Student Participant Demographics

White Women	Women of Color	White Men	Men of Color	Total
12	9	4	3	28

Follow up questionnaire. Knowing that I was a guest in the physical space and understanding that this may have impacted the discussions or answers, I created the follow-up questionnaire in order to provide anonymous feedback on their experience with this presentation. I received 20 follow up responses (see Table 3), allowing for a good representation of all present students. Below are the questions that students were asked to reflect upon, and trending themes that emerged:

1. Please state the author name and title of the article you chose.
2. How did it feel searching for an article that resonated with you?
3. On a scale of 1-5 how difficult was it to find an article?
4. What were you searching for in the authors you were looking at?
5. Please note any take-aways you have after presenting to your classmates on your chosen article.

Table 3

Summary of Responses

Theme	Number of students who reference this theme
Inspired by the presentations and a personal connection to situations	6 of 20
A passionate drive for inclusive leadership and the recognition of power and privilege	10 of 20
Relational leadership and the importance of community building	16 of 20
Article selection came with ease	18 of 20

Reflect

Following the classroom observations, I felt whole-heartedly connected to this cycle and its intended purpose. There was a lot of dialogue and it was coming from primarily students, without much guidance from the instructors. This was an indicator that the students felt connected to the presentations, not only their own, but hearing from their peers about their leadership articles. Leadership looks and feels different to each individual and this cycle allowed for the representation of a variety of styles, faces, voices and beliefs within leadership. Reading the responses found in the follow-up questionnaire, I was reminded that students enjoy feeling empowered to enhance their learning. Although it may have felt like an assignment, their learning was in their capable hands and that was powerful. It will be difficult to know if the positive responses were unembellished, but the group discussions spoke volumes about the students' values and what they viewed as imperative for leadership. My final reflection on this cycle was that these students were informed, well-spoken are future leaders.

Cycle 2: Post-Semester Reflective Survey

Plan

In order to receive feedback on the overall course experience, I felt it was necessary to ask questions and receive anonymous answers. Students were given the survey during their last week of class and were asked to answer honestly. I hoped that these questions would uncover whether these students felt a deeper connection within their classroom and why. I worked with my supervisor and talked with my fellow graduate students to better understand how to receive that feedback. Ultimately, I planned an anonymous survey with an opportunity for students to answer questions that would not typically appear on a course evaluation; diving more into the intentional behavior that drives the course.

Act

Providing participants with open-ended questions was a way for me to ensure that there was

a thoughtfulness behind their responses. Whereas, the true/false questions were a way for me to

interpret whether certain learning components had taken place over the course of the semester.

Specifically, here are the questions asked with a few themes:

1. Describe how you felt entering into this class at the beginning of the semester?
2. Now, at the end of the semester, how do you feel leaving the course?
3. On a scale of 1-5 how comfortable did you feel about engaging in class discussions?
4. Please share any relevant feelings you have about your answer to the previous question.
5. T/F; The course readings and videos helped in my understanding of class discussions
6. T/F; Did the classroom feel equitable in terms of giving you and your peers space
7. Overall, were the in-class activities impactful? Why or why not?

Observe

I observed 28 presentations that were given by the participants, across 4 different sections

of LEAD 150. I took notes in a personal journal that allowed me to reflect on the experience of

hearing from these students. I then received responses to the follow up questionnaire (see

Appendix B), which I analyzed for common themes. I also documented the number of times a

commonly utilized word appeared in a response question (see Table 4).

Table 4

Theme Counts

Themes from Q1	Themes from Q2	Themes from Q3	Themes from Q4	Themes from Q5	Themes from Q6	Themes from Q7
Uncertainty (16)	Confident/inspired (11)	5 (20)	Safe (8)	True (27)	True (28)	Self-discovery (8)
Enthusiasm (10)	Self-aware (9)	4 (6)	Inclusive (6)	False (1)	False (0)	Physical movement (5)
Uninterested (2)	A sense of community (8)	<4 (2)				Participation needed (4)

Themes from Q1

For question 1, students were asked how they felt entering into the course at the beginning of the semester. Overall, students were divided into three groups: uncertainty, enthusiastic and uninterested. Regarding uncertainty, students mentioned that because this was advertised as a non-traditional class, that they were unsure of what to expect. For example, one student shared the following, "I didn't know what to expect because it seemed interesting to be a part of such an unstructured class that was discussion based unlike many other classes that are all lectures." Students also expressed that they were eager and ready to start looking for leadership opportunities, stating that they were "excited to learn about leadership" and "ready to start their leadership at USD." Finally, a few noted that they thought it might be "a waste of time because it was not covering a core requirement" or that they were worried it would be "repetitive" because they had taken a leadership class prior.

Themes from Q2

In the second question students were asked to reflect on how they felt now that their semester was over. These were some of the most inspiring responses I collected, with students sharing that they felt "more confident," "self-aware," and that they had developed a "sense of community" in their classrooms. One student stated, "I think this course was a good introduction to my time at USD and I feel more prepared to be a leader." Another student reflected that they felt "accomplished and grateful for having had the opportunity to be a part of it." When they discussed their self-awareness, they spoke about feeling "enlightened" and that they "learned a lot about social justice." One student stated, "It expanded my views." These areas of personal development are valuable areas of growth. Lastly, the classroom experience for many was described as "very comfortable." One student noted, "I feel like I have a little community here at

USD that has offered me a place to be myself. I have a little family here." The number of students who mentioned "forming relationships" and "loving the discussions" was also positive feedback that these efforts did not go unnoticed.

Themes from Q3

Question 3 was a scaled question asking students to gauge their comfortability when it came to class discussions. This scale was ranged 1 to 5, (5) being they were completely comfortable, (1) suggesting that they did not feel comfortable at all. 20 of 28 students responded with (5), 6 of 28 student responded with a (4) and 2 students reported lower than a (4). This aligns with the belief that every student is unique and will experience the classroom in their own way.

Themes from Q4 (Optional question)

This was an optional question for students to add notes about their response to Q3. The intention behind this was that if student had either a very poor experience, or a very positive experience, they would be able to expand on that thought. From the responses that were received, safety and inclusivity were two of the themes that arose. Students reflected that "the class community was very friendly and welcoming", that they "liked the small class dynamic" and that it made it "more comfortable for sharing." One student shared, "class discussions included everyone and were very open." Another added, "The environment felt very safe and open for me to speak up in and it felt as though everyone wanted to hear what others had to say." Although these are wonderful responses, I would have liked to hear from the students who didn't have the same experience so as to better include their voice in the future of the course.

Themes from Q5

The intention behind asking whether or not the course readings were helpful was to gain a better understanding of whether or not the textbook and readings were truly beneficial in the students' eyes. Ultimately, 27 of 28 students selected "True" that the readings were helpful in their understanding of classroom discussions and one student reported that they were not helpful. Again I believe that readings and these areas within a curriculum can be fluid and change as time passes to keep up with relevancy of course work.

Themes from Q6

Question 6 was another True of False question regarding whether or not the classroom felt equitable among their peers. This question was important to learn about whose voices were being heard, specifically in the context of a non-traditional classroom based around discussion. All 28 students marked "true" suggesting that the classroom gave students a space to learn and discuss leadership topics.

Themes from Q7

The final question was designed for students to reflect on their classroom activities and whether or not they made a lasting impact. These responses were some of the most valuable responses in my research, as they referenced the intention behind non-traditional learning. Students reflected on self-discovery stating, "they made me think and expand my knowledge of myself and others" and "we were given so much freedom as to what topics to engage in and most importantly we were given a voice and a platform through which we could apply everything learned in the classroom." One student mentioned, "they tested different types of leadership by putting us in various situations when we had to work together to figure something out." This feedback suggested students gained insights from working in teams. There was also positive feedback regarding the activities that involved physical movement. One student shared that it

"made the class more engaging and fun while also being purposeful." Another student stated, "It brought us closer and taught me how to interact with a group" and that "they got us on our feet and thinking and it helped inspire new thinking." This engaging way of interacting with the material seemed to be enjoyable for the majority of students. Furthermore, one student noted the distinction that they "did not enjoy the actual activities" as much as they "enjoyed the discussions after the activities", which again, suggested that each student will have preferred forms of learning in a classroom, and that should be welcomed and noted. Along these lines, students noted that facilitation and "participation from everyone" was needed in order to make the learning as beneficial and engaging as possible.

Reflect

This cycle proved to be extremely helpful in providing a big-picture view of how the students felt within their LEAD 150 class. Although there were different classes, different instructors, and different students participating in this curriculum, there seemed to be a strong sense of positivity surrounding this course. To create an overarching vision for different classrooms is a difficult task, and yet, it seems that the mutual feeling of respect and community is present for the overwhelming majority of participants. To see trends emerge like; self-awareness, confidence, and community gave me a sense of gratitude and fulfillment.

<p align="center">**Recommendations**</p>

In creating a curriculum, for one class, or multiple it is difficult to imagine exactly how learning will take place and it is next to impossible to predict how the classroom dynamic will develop. For these reasons, the recommendations I have developed are less about content, and driven more towards creating experiences that can guide content. My recommendations are as follows:

1. If a textbook is a required component, be sure to understand the value in the provided text.

    a. Look for unique ways of utilizing your reading; different applications, compare and contrast styles of readings, add relevant and easy-to-read articles to provide information for class discussions, etc.

    b. Consider having students bring in articles they find relevant to the course work being discussed in the classroom.

2. Be willing to empower students to enhance their own learning.

    a. Allowing places in your curriculum for your students to openly and powerfully discuss their thoughts, opinions and interests can be uplifting for their development.

    b. The ability to lead the classroom for a period of time can also lead to new, explorative and collaborative conversations.

3. Explore adding areas of non-traditional classroom components.

    a. Get creative with group activities; add movement where you can and keep energy around the learning process heightened.

    b. Keep debrief conversations open-ended and conversational; debriefing in a circle, facing one-another can create a sense of openness and willingness to share.

These recommendations are based on the areas of the curriculum that I focused most heavily on; readings, activities and classroom dynamic. Course content is also a crucial component to any higher education class and it should be noted that the this research does not explore the impact of a writing class vs. a math class,. However, there is something to be said around the classroom

dynamic component; as this can serve as a reminder that students may be more inclined to actively participate in their learning if they are engaged in various ways.

Final Reflections

On the last day of the Spring 2019 semester, my co-instructor and I, allowed space for our students to acknowledge any particular classmates who made a lasting impact on them during their LEAD 150 experience. The next hour was filled with heart-felt displays of gratitude and some tears. They expressed how grateful they were that this class allowed them something that their other classes could not; space to express and learn about themselves. Traditional college students begin their journey around the age of 17-19, thus it is no surprise that they enter into most classes or university life with uncertainty and hesitation. The need to explore their own identity, hopes, dreams and voice are crucial. I believe that recognizing these developmental components as they occur in higher education could allow students to experience more growth in areas like personal leadership; taking it upon themselves to act a leader in everyday situations.

Reviewing the post-semester survey was especially rewarding. I enjoyed hearing that a similar sense of community, self-awareness and leadership development was felt amongst the classes I studied. Admittedly, Emerging Leaders is not set up to be a typical lecture format, so some of these areas will be difficult to add to existing curricula. However, I encourage educators to think outside of what they were given in their classrooms and look to how college students today are learning. All answers and information are at the tips of their fingers and they are less inclined to be physically writing notes if they can simply look them up before the exam. Engage them in other ways, ask about their experience on campus, get them to build something in small groups to get their creative mind flowing, and try new things. As a student myself performing this research, I began to reflect on which areas of my college course work stood out to me; the

majority of them were tasks that were abnormal to the expected lecture format. These

unexpected ways of learning were more likely to stick with me throughout my education and,

thereby, left a lasting impact on my ability to apply those learned lessons.

Looking to the future of education there are a few things that may impact the ability to

have these more in-person connections. While analyzing my data for this research, the COVID-

19 pandemic presented the world, and our campus community, numerous obstacles to overcome.

All classes were moved to an online format, all faculty and staff were asked to work remotely,

and students were required to leave campus housing. This unforeseen event has the ability to

change higher education entirely and will likely allow for little transition time. It is important for

my research to note this, as my efforts highlight the importance of interconnects in a classroom

and experiential learning. If changes to learning are mandated, it may require; new educational

platform development, more creativity from educators and unique ways of engaging with

students to still promote learning.

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Appendix A

Student Selected Leadership Article: Follow-up Questionnaire

Email sent to Participants:

Dear LEAD 150 students,
Thank you bringing your article selections into the classroom, your participation has allowed us to see unique perspectives and learn about the new ways of leading. As many of you know, I am researching the curriculum development for the LEAD 150 classes and would like to hear your process and thoughts behind your article selection. I ask that you take a moment to fill out this questionnaire so that I glimpse into your experience.

All responses will be anonymous when collected and I greatly appreciate your participation!

With gratitude,
Kayla

Questionnaire:

Instructions:

This reflection is to greater understand the process of selecting the article you chose to share with the class. All submissions will be anonymous when collected.

Questions:

1. Please state the author name and the title of the article you chose
2. How did it feel searching for an article that you resonated with?
3. On a scale of 1-5 how difficult was it to find an article?
4. What were you searching for in the authors you were looking at?
5. Please note any take-aways you have after presenting to your classmates on your chosen article

Appendix B

Post-Semester Survey

<u>Email to participants:</u>

Dear LEAD 150 Students,
I want to thank you for your participation throughout this course and I truly hope it has been a positive experience for you all. As many of you know I am current graduate student here at USD and am conducting research to better understand what classrooms today could benefit from to be inclusive for all students.

I am asking that you take a moment to respond this the survey below (which will remain anonymous) so that you may reflect on your experience throughout the class.

Feel free to ask me any questions you may have, or respond with other thoughts you may not be able to express in the provided questions.

Again, thank you for all of your efforts this semester and I wish you all the best!
With gratitude,
Kayla snow

<u>Survey:</u>

Instructions:

As the semester comes to an end, I am asking that you reflect on your classroom experience in LEAD 150. Please note that all responses will remain anonymous. Data collected from this survey will allow me to reflect upon the changes made to the LEAD curriculum and continue to enhance.

Questions:

1. Describe how you felt entering into this class at the beginning of the semester?
2. Now, at the end of the semester, how do you feel leaving the course?
3. On a scale of 1-5 how comfortable did you feel about engaging in class discussions?
4. Please share any relevant feelings you have about your answer to the previous question.
5. T/F; The course readings and videos helped in my understanding of class discussions
6. T/F; Did the classroom feel equitable in terms of giving you and your peers space
7. Overall, were the in-class activities impactful? Why or why not?