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LDRS 2014: Fall 2019

## **Final Reflection Paper**

### **Five Exemplary Practices of Leadership:**

Although I employed all of the five exemplary leadership practices throughout the semester, I relied mainly on two practices: enabling others to act and encouraging the heart (2018:14). The independent research process can be daunting for someone to undertake for the first time. Every few weeks, I would dedicate a team meeting to teaching skills needed for research. With the help of our graduate students, the group was able to learn the basics of SPSS data analysis which we use in our lab, how to formulate and fully explore a research question, and how to write literature reviews and synthesize information. This kind of lab meeting created collaborative opportunities and allowed us to gain skills, strengthen friendships, and trust each other which are some of the main aspects of enabling others to act (2018:177). Our lab generally hosts one information meeting for undergraduate research assistants (URAs) at the beginning of the semester, however, by having multiple meetings to focus on skills, the undergraduate students were better prepared for independent research. Strengthening others is a way to maximize leadership benefits because it enables others to carry similar skills on to other organizations and individuals (2018:200). In addition, I offered to review writings and findings with group members before sending their work to be edited by lab professors. I also asked volunteers to lead our bi-weekly article meetings and discuss findings which gave the URAs a chance to be their own leaders.

As for encouraging the heart, the morale in a research setting can be lower than in other organizations because the work is tedious and tiring. Based on input from my group, we

instituted a nice breakfast food schedule for our bi-weekly meetings. Sharing a meal together and talking about the foods and preparations created a stronger bond of friendship that extends beyond just the lab setting (2018:253). In addition, I made sure to thank everyone for their hard work in any of the emails that I sent and would often bring in surprise candy for the URAs, personally involving myself in their struggles and successes (2018:201). Likewise, I used tips from Covey's understanding of empathic listening and became sensitive to my group's needs and understanding if they needed to take a few days off (1990). Although this was in the "encourage the heart" section, showing concern for others is a key tenant of enabling others to act as well (2018:181). This policy of openness allowed them to keep their motivation high even when school became overwhelming.

I believe that I developed the most in the "model the way" leadership practice. I personally align myself and my actions with wanting quality research to be completed and wanting to give other students opportunities to engage. I clarified the values of our research lab to ensure we all understood the goals we wanted to achieve (2018:28). However, I sometimes struggle with emulating that because I am a very competitive person. Throughout this semester, I learned how to be collaborative with others and to be vulnerable to people about how hard research can be. One concrete example is that I was having a tough day and did not feel like leading a group discussion on the article for that week's meeting. I decided to start the meeting with everyone sharing the highest and lowest points of the week before getting into the article discussion. I set the example by modeling the values that research results are important and that we are striving for success but that the process is overwhelming and we need to rely on each

other for support (2018:53) This aligned me with my value of collaboration and openness and even led to one of our best discussions of the semester.

### **Connection to Peer Leader Experience:**

My research lab has connections for personal growth embedded within it. For example, I have three graduate students who I can go to if I'm struggling with a question or need guidance. Above them, we all have two lead professors who have immense knowledge in our subject area that we can consult. However, I saw a lack of cohesion and motivation among the URAs. Therefore, I set out to create an environment of collaboration and healthy competition to increase our independent research skills and gain practical work skills within this field. This was a challenge to the normal research process because most labs operate on a competitive basis. Not many undergraduates have the opportunity to conduct purely independent research or present these findings, however, I decided to make this a more successful venture for students. I was able to break down this process into smaller steps, having URAs master different steps including understanding psychological writing, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions throughout these meetings (2018:154). In addition, I provided the lab a comprehensive list of annual psychology conferences that undergraduate students can apply to present at with their own work. I searched for opportunities, which allows for URAs to investigate their interests further without my involvement (2018:121). Lastly, I was able to encourage some students to actually begin their own independent research even though they had less research experience than many people in their grade. Allowing individuals to have these opportunities and to be nested in a collaborative and friendly environment created a lab space that I was happy with and that I believe was successful for everyone involved.

**Critical Reflection:**

Overall, I think I was successful in my peer leadership experience. I am proud of the comprehensive list that I created that allows students easier avenues to find research opportunities and conference presentation possibilities. Although this may not seem like a large task, I worked hard to cross-reference these opportunities and conferences to ensure that they would be worthwhile for anyone who utilized the list for opportunities. I utilized Newton and Ender's tips about how to find other campus and community resources for undergraduates in my lab and was able to locate fifteen more research and conference opportunities than I had when I believed my list was finalized (2010:248). In addition to the creation of the resources list, I was successful in creating a journal club, however, we do meet bi-weekly instead of weekly as I had originally proposed. Retrospectively, meeting every week is not a reality with over six undergraduates with varying availability and other commitments within the lab. Lastly, I was successful in encouraging students to engage in independent research and I am currently working with other undergraduates on research projects. I had originally hoped to have two presentations completed, however, the semester was off to a busier start than expected in the lab which delayed independent research projects. I think that all of my goals were S.M.A.R.T. because they were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

In the future, I would like to lead these kinds of lab activities with another peer leader. At times, I became overwhelmed by all of my commitments on top of editing other URAs' reviews and two people could be more thorough in the evaluation of URAs' work overall. In addition, I would like to have several individuals create a comprehensive list of opportunities since some of us come from different fields and may have exposure to research opportunities with overlapping

interests to our lab. Overall, I think I was successful but would like to spread the work among multiple peer leaders in the future.

**Personal Application:**

Serving as a peer leader in this capacity allowed me to re-evaluate my idea of how research is completed in the field and allowed me to practice new leadership skills in a small setting. The clinical psychology research field is highly competitive at the doctoral level. This competition seeps down to undergraduates from our professors and our graduate students which makes undergraduate research seem competitive as well. Although all levels of research are competitive, I realized that there are plenty of ways for individual researchers to collaborate. In addition, I realized the value of diverse outlooks and understandings on research and how independent framing of research questions can create unique findings. I learned that I do not have to be the expert at this stage and learned when to refer URAs to graduate students or professors (2010:250). This recognition allowed for more positive working relationships and an openness about knowledge of the field. Overall, leading a group of motivated researchers motivated me to continue to work hard and set a positive example for us in the lab.

My beliefs surrounding leadership changed during this process and allowed me to be more open and vulnerable about my struggles while helping others gain new skills. Before this experience, I believed that leaders needed to be stoic and needed to be able to handle all issues on their own. However, this leadership experience showed me that effective leadership is often done with other individuals and with the collaboration of the group one is leading. My attitudes also changed from one of seeing leaders as “above” others to seeing the leader as a servant or resource for people that he or she is leading. One of the recitation activities that changed my

viewpoint was the marshmallow and spaghetti stick activity. I am usually very knowledgeable as a leader in my positions and I had no knowledge of this activity and was unsure how to lead. Instead of taking charge, I decided to step back and provide input or ideas based on others ideas. This example showed me that not every leader has to be in charge or have all of the answers all the time. Overall, I believe this semester's research experience forced me to re-evaluate and modify my leadership style to create a more positive and motivating environment for all individuals involved, myself included.

## References

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