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Investigating the Development of Adolescent Leadership Potential: A Longitudinal Case Study

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Contributor Biography

Gregory S. C. Hine is a senior lecturer at the University of Notre Dame Australia in Fremantle. He previously taught in Australia and the United States predominantly in the areas of mathematics and science to middle and secondary school students for 14 years. Greg completed both of his Master of Education degrees at the University of Notre

Dame, South Bend, Indiana. In 2011, he completed his doctoral studies at Notre Dame's Fremantle Campus and was appointed to a full-time academic faculty position in the School of Education. Greg teaches into the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs, and he lectures in secondary mathematics education and educational action research. He has authored and co-authored five mathematics textbooks which are used by secondary students in Western Australia. Greg is the lead author of the text *Teaching Secondary Mathematics*, which is to be published by Cambridge University Press in late 2016. His areas of scholarly interest are student leadership development, the training of pre-service mathematics teachers, the professional development of current secondary mathematics teachers, and educational action research.

Published Articles

Hine, G. S. C. (in press). Student leadership program evaluations: A longitudinal case study. *Leading and Managing*, *22*(1).

Hine, G. S. C. (2014). Student leadership development: A functioning model conceptualized. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, *18*(1), 79-110.

Hine, G. S. C. (2013). Student leadership experiences: A case study. *Leading and Managing*, *19*(1), 32-50.

Hine, G. S. C. (2012). Exploring the need for improvement in a student leadership program. *Journal of Catholic School Studies*, *84*(1), 12-22.

Abstract

My doctoral research project explored the development of adolescent leadership potential within a secondary Catholic school in Perth, Western Australia. Previous research efforts that looked at adolescent leadership did so by examining the perspectives of adults and children using a "snapshot" approach, but the longitudinal design of this project was chosen intentionally to investigate how leadership developed over time. Located within the interpretive paradigm, a 3-year longitudinal case study framed the data collection process. Data were collected from the staff and students most closely involved in a school-based student leadership development program through the exercise of four qualitative research methods. The methods included conducting semi-structured interviews, performing an extensive document search (of published literature and written communication at the school), taking researcher field notes (both in and out of interviews), and regularly maintaining a reflective field journal. These methods helped the researcher inductively conceptualize how one school-based program contributed to the development of adolescent leadership potential of participating students.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case, students should be able to

- Describe some benefits and limitations associated with longitudinal research

- Affirm the importance of using multiple methods of data collection (i.e., triangulation) to enhance a longitudinal project's trustworthiness

- Develop an appreciation for the practicalities of various qualitative research methods within a longitudinal case study

- Appreciate how longitudinal research can heighten ethical issues present in other investigations

Case Study

Purpose of Research

The purpose of my doctoral study was to investigate how one Western Australian Catholic secondary school developed leadership potential in its young adolescents (aged 15-18 years) and to discern what kind of leaders were being produced through its efforts. The five specific research questions that directed and underpinned the focus of the study explored how the key participants of the study—namely, the elected student leaders and key staff—perceived and understood the program of student leadership development currently implemented at the school. These questions were predominantly concerned with the experienced reality of the program as perceived by the participants and were grounded in their subjective understanding of the diverse transactions that constituted the "lived experience" of the program in practice. The chief focus of this study was to obtain explicit, personally expressed accounts from the participants themselves about student leadership and student leadership development. Inquiries were made to illuminate what was expected of student leaders in their elected positions, what these leaders understood about themselves, and the development that had taken place as a result of their involvement in the existing leadership program.

The Overarching Research Questions

There were five overarching research questions which guided the focus of my study. These questions were as follows:

1. What explicit or implicit program of student leadership development is being pursued at the school?

2. What do the key participants understand to be their roles in this program of student leadership and leadership development?

3. What do the student leaders "experience" in terms of leadership opportunities and activities as they participate in the school's program of leadership?

4. What do the elected student leaders perceive to be the benefits or shortcomings of the school's leadership program in practice?

5. What beneficial personal outcomes or leadership growth do the students exhibit as a result of their involvement as elected leaders?

Project Context

The school selected for my study was a Catholic, co-educational, secondary institution in the Perth metropolitan area with an enrollment of approximately 800 students. Demographically speaking, this school is largely populated by Caucasian students who come from a low to middle socio-economic background. Pastorally, the School has employed a Vertical House System for all students since its inception in 1990. The Vertical House System requires all students to report to a Pastoral Care Group for 20 minutes every morning upon arrival to the school, where administrative items (e.g.,

attendance, notices, uniform), religious items (e.g., daily prayer, reflection), and House matters (upcoming events, relationship-building exercises) are managed. Each Pastoral Care Group comprises approximately 20 students from across Years 8-12. There are 6 Pastoral Care Groups within each House, giving a total of 36 Pastoral Care Groups for the school. The student body of the school is distributed across six Pastoral Houses which are named after a patron or patroness (e.g., a key figure in Roman Catholicism). Each House comprises a House Coordinator, six Pastoral Care Group teachers, 10 ancillary staff (teaching and non-teaching), and approximately 120 students.

Student Leadership at the School

Each year, all students in Years 8-11 are encouraged to self-nominate for election by their peers to a leadership position in their Houses. From the nominees, each House elects an Arts Leader, a Sports Leader, and a Ministry Leader for each of the Years from Year 8 to Year 11, generating a total of 12 elected leaders for their House. Across the six Houses, the elections thus produce a total of 72 elected student leaders for Years 8-11. Those who self-nominate for these Year-level positions are required to prepare and deliver a speech in front of their Year-level peers prior to the election date, at which time these peers will then vote for their preferred Arts, Sports, and Ministry candidates. Appointment to the positions is essentially by popular vote among their respective Year peers, although all positions are subject ultimately to approval by the House Coordinator and the House teachers. Tenure in all positions is for the year of election only, but students are free to nominate for leadership again in any subsequent years should they wish. Neither gender

nor prior experience in an elected leadership position has any bearing on a student's eligibility for election to a leadership position in any year.

Year 12 students in each House are invited to self-nominate for House Leader positions in Arts, Sports, and Ministry and overall House Captain, generating a total of 24 leadership positions across the six Houses. Those who choose to self-nominate for a position within their House are required to prepare and deliver a speech in front of their entire House before the annual election date, at which point the students of that House then vote for their House's preferred Arts, Sports, and Ministry leaders and their overall House Captain. After these elections, overall School Captains for Arts, Sports, and Ministry are determined by the six newly elected House Leaders in those respective disciplines. The three elected School Captains for Arts, Sports, and Ministry are expected to exercise dual roles as School Captains and House Leaders for their disciplines. Additionally, among the 24 elected Year 12 leaders, votes are cast by the staff to determine the Head Boy and Head Girl for the year. The Head Boy and Head Girl are thus each expected to represent both their House (in their elected House positions) and the School as a whole.

Research Design

The study relied principally on the recorded exchanges between the participants and me through focus group discussions and individual interviews. Such exchanges were opportunities for the adult and adolescent participants to express their perceptions, opinions, and the "lived experience" of student leadership in their own language. The information I analyzed and interpreted was recorded almost exclusively in this "natural"

language of the participants as they attempted to articulate their understandings and experiences of student leadership. Drawing meaning from this kind of data required methods of qualitative data analysis and the adoption of a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm to inform the methodological conduct of the study. This approach places high importance on interpreting and understanding meaningful social interactions and the empathetic understanding of everyday lived experiences, or *Verstehen*, from the perspective of those who live those experiences (Neuman, 2011; Weber, 1947). Furthermore, and consistent with the theoretical foundations of interpretive social science, symbolic interactionism was chosen as the interpretive "lens" for the study. Central to this perspective is the notion that individuals ascribe meaning to the interactions and phenomena encountered in daily life (Berg, 2007). Then, in turn, I sought to validly interpret and "uncover" the personal meanings conferred upon student leadership experiences by the main participants of the study.

Research Methods Used

A number of methods for investigating the concept of student leadership development were available to me as the researcher. A qualitative, longitudinal case study was chosen to answer the specific research questions and acted as the orchestrating perspective of the research (Holland, Thomson, & Henderson, 2006; Saldaña, 2003). Longitudinal research is used by researchers to examine features of people or other units over a period of time. It is considered more costly and complex than cross-sectional research, but it "is also more powerful, especially when researchers seek answers to questions about social change" (Neuman, 2011, p. 44). Although there are several longitudinal research models,

the appropriate choice for this research was a longitudinal cohort study (Ryder, 1992). A cohort study examines a well-defined category of people who share a similar life experience in a specified time period, and the focus is placed on the cohort of people, rather than on specific individuals. Cohort analysis is explicitly macroanalytic, and as such, researchers examine the category as a whole for important features (Ryder, 1992). This study explored the development of student leadership potential by tracking one cohort of elected Year 10 leaders over 3 years. At the time of designing the project, I intentionally chose to include Year 10 students as the initial participant cohort and to "follow" the experience and development of these students as they moved through Years 11 and 12. While I could have commenced with a cohort of Year 8 students (and thus made the project a 5-year study), my experience at the School told me that a low proportion of Year 8 and Year 9 elected leaders continued in leadership roles in Years 10, 11, and 12. Moreover, I knew that a higher proportion of Year 10 elected leaders continued in leadership roles in Years 11 and 12—which I felt gave me a better opportunity to discern any meaningful leadership growth within the same individuals. Due to the researcher's intention to investigate development aspects of adolescents (i.e., to what extent the sampled adolescents experienced growth as a result of participating in the School's leadership program), it was appropriate to adopt a longitudinal approach to investigate the phenomenon of student leadership.

Qualitative case studies involve researchers spending considerable amounts of time on site, personally engaging in activities and operations of the case, reflecting, and revising descriptions and meanings of occurrences (Stake, 2007). Payne and Payne (2004, p. 31) described a case study as "a very detailed research inquiry into a single example

(of a social process, organization or collectivity) seen as a social unit in its own right and as a holistic entity." This method of inquiry was chosen for three purposes: to develop fresh insights, establish new theories, or challenge earlier assumptions (Neuman, 2011; Payne & Payne, 2004). Because case studies focus intensively upon one case, the data produced from research are usually more detailed, varied, and extensive (Neuman, 2011). The type of case study employed in this research can be characterized as an observational case study, which Burns (1990) identified as the preferred method of inquiry where the research focuses intensively on a classroom, group, teacher, or pupil. By focusing on one school over a sustained period of 3 years, it was expected that the data collected from key participants would be more varied, contextually rich, and convincing than from what a one-time "snapshot" (Rose, 1991, p. 194) examination would produce. Intrinsic case studies are undertaken when the researcher wishes to understand the uniqueness of a particular case better, rather than generalizing across multiple cases. Robert Stake (2007) argued, however, that study of a case is not undertaken "primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but instead because, in all its particularity *and* ordinariness, this case itself is of interest" (p. 445). Because the purpose of the research was to examine one school's approach toward developing student leadership potential (i.e., the "case"), an intrinsic case study was chosen as the orchestrating perspective of this study.

The nature of this study focused exclusively on the opinions, descriptions, and perspectives of individuals regarding student leadership and student leadership development. To address the developmental aspect of these questions required me to use a method that could record and interpret information about a selected cohort of elected

Year 10 student leaders (aged 15 years) as they moved through their final 3 years of secondary school. The intention was for this recorded information to be compared on a yearly basis to determine the extent, if any, of leadership development and personal change within the study's student participants. The flexible nature of this study accounted for new students to become involved, or present students to cease their involvement, in the leadership program. A longitudinal study was the most appropriate selection, as it maximized the opportunity for me to track, report, and compare findings over the 3-year period and to gain insight into any developmental changes within the student leaders with regard to their leadership capacity. It was expected that the data gathered in this way would be more convincing than that which might emerge from a single, snapshot examination or a cross-sectional analysis. Focusing on a single case in this way allowed me to investigate the central issue of student leadership at considerable depth and to gather data that would help ultimately produce what various giants of qualitative research (e.g., Guba, 1981; Stringer, 2008) describe as a thickly descriptive account of the issues of concern.

Most of the data for this study were collected through *qualitative interviews*. I made a deliberate effort to maintain self-discipline in the way the research was conducted, and the methods of field notes and reflective journaling were chosen to assist me in this regard. Said another way, I took field notes during every interview and I made a journal entry after every interview had taken place, thereby enhancing the confirmability of the study. Collecting data using these two methods also helped me to triangulate data at single and across multiple points during the project. *Researcher-generated field notes* were chosen to supplement the typed transcriptions of the

interviews and recorded my personal observations not captured within the transcriptions themselves. This method helped me to corroborate the findings of the interviews and was exercised during the analytic process to assist in the detection of patterns and regularities within the gathered data. I employed *reflective journaling* as an ongoing method of compiling the study's data and procedures, thereby enhancing the project's confirmability. This method provided me with the opportunity to reflect on salient ideas from interviews, to informally assess the efficacy of interview techniques used, and to reflect on any qualitative changes which may have occurred vis-a-vis student leadership from year to year. Journaling was also used to further develop and interpret emerging understandings of the study's focus and to form provisional hypotheses about the specific research questions. I also conducted a *document search* of available school records to generate insight and background information regarding the school's student leadership program and its current philosophical underpinnings. Documents included memoranda and correspondence between staff concerning student leadership; official publications such as the School Prospectus, Handbook, Yearbook, along with periodicals to the school community; and student leadership program outlines. Available documents of this kind helped me to discern the existing program of student leadership at the School and, thus, guide the preparation of questions for the intended interviews.

Sample

To address the purpose of this study and maintain the longitudinal character of the research, I interviewed the entire cohort of elected student leaders each year (from 2007 to 2009) with the exception of certain students. Given that I was a House Coordinator

within the School, the student leaders from the House I coordinated were not interviewed for the study's data collection because of a perceived power differential between researcher and participant. While the study closely monitored the leadership growth and development of the student cohorts over the time they held elected positions of leadership at the School, the same extent of coverage was not practicable for every one of the staff who might be considered to have a direct involvement or legitimate interest in the form and outcomes of the student leadership program. Due to my intentional preference for in-depth interviewing rather than broad-sample data collection, and the naturally limited scope and time available to me, it was necessary to concentrate on a sample of key informant staff who, by virtue of their particular positions and responsibilities in the School, had a significant and ongoing involvement with the School's student leaders. While almost any staff member could legitimately provide insight into the existing leadership program and its participants, I focused upon those individuals who had a direct and tangible relationship with the cohort of student leaders and who had a formal responsibility for mentoring them during the course of their development. The key staff members, therefore, were purposively selected from their respective populations, and the staff sample comprised the School Principal, the Deputy Principal for Pastoral Care, and the five House Coordinators.

Practical Lessons Learned

To say I had learned considerable amount about conducting longitudinal research over the course of my doctoral study (which took me 7 years, to the day!) would be a tremendous understatement. Some of the palpable lessons I learnt are illustrated below,

which include developing and maintaining high-quality relationships, designing a project that flexibly responds to change, deciding carefully when to collect data, considering ethical practices, and using a reflective journal to capture salient and ongoing thoughts.

Developing and Maintaining Quality Relationships

Working at a school, one learns immediately how precious the time of others is. Collecting data from the same people across 3 years makes one realize that there is a pressing need for ongoing commitment of time and contact for the participants and researcher alike—in other words, both groups know they are "in it for the long haul" (see Holland et al., 2006). Given that my approved research proposal had stipulated that participants were not to be rewarded or incentivized for their involvement in the study, I had to find a way to keep 36 adolescents and 5 adults happy—and to keep them wanting to be interviewed for 3 years! Additionally, the challenge was magnified due to my interviews taking place during lunchtimes (for the student leaders) and during teaching-free periods (for the staff).

Aside from the usual courtesies of clear communication about when and where the interviews would take place, canceling and rescheduling as few interviews as possible, showing up early to greet all participants at the door (i.e., being there first!), and afterward thanking them profusely for giving up their time, I discovered that keeping participants contented across a protracted period of time hinged upon finding ways to make them feel that their involvement was valued. For instance, on a number of occasions, I used the phrases "You've made me think about student leadership in a different way," "That's something I never would have thought about," and "What you

just said was really insightful" a number of times. Each time I recall the participants showing a degree of pleasant surprise—invariably in a proud and satisfied manner—they would respond by saying "You're welcome" or "Glad I could help you." Drawing directly from my reflective journal, I found one instance where I had learned an important skill as an interviewer regarding quality data and quality relationships. The excerpt is from 2009, immediately after I had interviewed a focus group of Year 10 student leaders (15-16 years old):

> I did find that there was one instance where I had to play the role of a "conversational traffic cop"—letting J and G wait their turn whilst D spoke. Another instance was where I could sense that the conversation was about to become misdirected and the focus ultimately digress—I actually let the digression take effect for a brief instant before quickly guiding the speaker back to the original topic. After all, these scheduled interviews take place during all participants' lunchtimes, and we have to maximize every opportunity for fruitful conversation to emanate.

Had I cut the digression short too soon—which was a lighthearted moment between all of us—the interview would have taken a turn for the worse. Across the 3 years of data collection, I never sensed from my participants that participation in the interviews was an onerous task—most likely because they felt that their time and input were valued.

Design the Project to be Flexible

Participant attrition is considered one of the greatest challenges to conducting longitudinal research (Saldaña, 2003). Knowing this challenge (or perceived weakness) well ahead of the data collection, I was able to convert it to a strength by designing the project to be openly flexible to change. Holland et al. (2006) argued that flexibility is of considerable value to longitudinal research and that projects should allow "the potential for development and innovation to take place throughout the entire research process" (p. 33). In the first year, I collected data from 7 adults and 15 Year 10 school leaders. With some new school leaders being elected in the study cohort's second year (as the group progressed to Year 11) and with the inclusion of an additional leader (the overall House Captain) in Year 12, there had thus been an opportunity to consider the impact of the program on (a) any of the original cohort who have left the program after 1 or 2 years and (b) any new student leaders who have been elected to the cohort in Year 11 or 12. As such, the research design had to remain flexibly open to accommodate these anticipated changes in participants. After the first year of data collection, there was also one staffing change with a new Deputy Principal appointed. When reporting the research findings, I had to ensure that the readers could identify which cohort student leaders belonged to and which Deputy Principal had offered which testimony. While making the distinction between Deputy Principals was comparatively easy, Table 1 shows how I was able to help readers distinguish which cohort any particular student belonged to.

Table 1.

Caption: Cohorts of elected leaders 2007-2009.

Leadership cohort	Sub-cohort	Number of participants
Cohort A, 2007	A: Elected Year 10 Leaders assuming formal leadership responsibilities	15
Cohort B, 2008	B1: Elected Year 11 Leaders assuming formal leadership responsibilities	10
	B2: Elected Year 11 Leaders re-elected after previous experience as Year 10 Leaders	5
Cohort C, 2009	C1: Elected Year 12 Leaders assuming formal leadership responsibilities	6
	C2: Elected Year 12 Leaders re-elected after leadership experience as Year 10 Leaders only	5
	C3: Elected Year 12 Leaders re-elected after previous experience as Leaders in Year 11 only	6
	C4: Elected Year 12 Leaders re-elected after previous experience as Leaders in Year 10 and Year 11	3

Description: A table showing three Cohorts of student participants in the first column:

Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C. In the second column, each of these cohorts

comprises sub-categories which indicate how long students have held an elected position

of leadership at the school. The third column represents how many students belong to each sub-category.

Consistent with the longitudinal nature of the research, the various data-gathering instruments were used flexibly and at repeated intervals over the 3 years of the study. These instruments remained open to appropriate modification from time to time in order to accommodate potentially changing circumstances. Specifically, the interview schedules for each cohort of student leaders had to be adjusted according to which sub-category they belonged. For instance, Cohort C4 comprised three young men whom I had interviewed on four occasions (with research questions [RQs] 1, 2, 3, 4) each year from 2007 to 2009. By the time the second year of data collection commenced, I realized that asking the same questions would produce few, if any, useful or new data, and such an approach might condition the participants to certain questions. As such, a revised interview schedule typically commenced with a gentle recapitulation of the key points from the previous year's interview (e.g., "Last year you made some really good points about . . . Some of your comments included . . .") before asking some extension and reflection questions (e.g., "Now that you have been a student leader for over a year, how do you see . . .?"). By interviewing student leaders according to their respective cohorts, I found that I could enhance the longitudinal character of the research—which was to report on the extent to which students (and key staff) felt they experienced leadership growth. Conducting interviews in this manner also provided a nice platform to write the *Findings* and *Discussion* chapters in my thesis, where each research question was addressed separately and in combination for each year of data collection. At the same

time, both a cross-sectional (within year) and longitudinal (over 3 years) analyses of data were presented.

Decide Carefully When Data Should be Collected

Careful thought needs to be given to when data are collected in any research project. The literature base for longitudinal studies suggests that while there is little guidance on precisely how long the time intervals between data collection points should be, these points should be repeated at approximately fixed time intervals (Holland et al., 2006). Across all 3 years of my own project, I decided to wait until Term 3 (mid-July to September) until interviewing any participants. There were three reasons to justify this choice. First, the participants had experienced their respective roles over a period of 9 months, and interviewing them about their leadership growth at this time was more likely to elicit more fruitful data than at mid-year or earlier. Second, I could strengthen the trustworthiness of my research by field testing the interview schedules with real people before gathering data. Within the literature, various authors outline that competent qualitative research attempts to build trustworthiness in order to make a reasonable claim on methodological soundness (see Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). To begin with, and due to a perceived power differential between my elected Year 10 student leaders and me (as their House Coordinator), I selected these students to field test my student interview schedules. Other field-tested participants included the current Head Boy and Head Girl (who were the most senior elected student leaders in the school), a retired secondary school principal, and several teachers who were not in the participant sample. Some field notes I took during an interview proved to be instrumental throughout

the entire study—when asked about the roles and responsibilities, the Head Girl listed an impressive account of the activities she undertook, before stating how much she enjoyed it, and in summary "That's why I became a leader." This statement (which I scribbled on the interview schedule) became a question I asked every student who became part of the study. The third reason was for me to have sufficient time to complete all of the interview transcriptions, have these transcriptions member-checked by participants, analyze collected data from four sources, write and disseminate an executive summary for each research question to each participant, and commence planning for the next year of data collection.

A Word About Ethics

Qualitative, longitudinal research is often accompanied by special ethical dilemmas and confidentiality considerations from prolonged engagement with participants (Holland et al., 2006; Thomson & Holland, 2003). Stephen Farrall (1996) argued that the ethical issues raised in longitudinal research are not unlike those found in quantitative or qualitative research, but rather these issues are heightened. Principally, because the prolonged engagement of the researcher with participants is greater, so too is the risk of disclosing matters of a distinctly personal nature. For the most part, my research was considered "low risk," in that it did not seek to gather data of a highly or mildly sensitive nature. Nevertheless, ethical safeguards must be put in place for all research projects, and mine was no different in this regard. At the end of each calendar year—and as promised at the commencement of the project—I provided a provisional analysis of each research question to all participants as these analyses became available. However, one of the RQs

(i.e., RQ4) posed a potential ethical dilemma for all involved. This question sought to determine whether any improvements could be made to the existing leadership program, and the possibility of an individual criticizing the program or another individual was clearly present. Before engaging the focus group interviews with that question, I outlined specifically to participants that because this question had the most potential for eliciting insights to improve what was already in place, an additional summary of findings (improvements) would be presented at a staff meeting at the end of the year. As with all of the interviews, participants were guaranteed complete anonymity and that all data would be de-identified prior to dissemination.

To illustrate, most of the elected leaders and key staff members largely had positive things to say about the leadership program. Nevertheless, during the study, a few students proffered statements regarding negative leadership experiences. In 2007, three students (Cohort A) voiced concerns with regard to assuming leadership positions. One student recalled experiencing difficulty in balancing leadership responsibilities with schoolwork; another peer reported frustration at attending frequent leadership meetings. A third student leader expressed annoyance at some of his elected peers stating,

> Some people just slide through without doing much at all, or without leaving such an impression that they could. Maybe it's because they're too shy, or lazy, or not committed enough.

This student commented further on the matter and noted that while those few, uncommitted leaders were capable of undertaking leadership responsibilities, their

approach was counter-productive to the collective, positive efforts of fellow students leaders.

In 2007 and 2008, many students highlighted a shortcoming of the leadership program involved the election process at the School. Students in Year 10 and Year 11 (Cohorts A and B) described the current process as being influenced by a perceived "popularity contest"—that is, the claim that some leaders become elected more readily because of their popularity among peers than their capacity to lead. One student offered insight into the prevalence of this phenomenon, stating it

> Happens more in Year 8 and 9, but when you're older if you don't want to go for it you just don't [nominate yourself]. It happens in Year 8 especially, because the only people who get chosen are those who got voted for in primary school or who are popular.

All students in Cohorts A and B who raised concern over the voting process agreed that the "popularity contest" tended to occur within Lower School and that the outcome of such elections was counter-productive toward the School's efforts in leadership development.

In 2009, two students volunteered negative experiences associated with leadership. One student (Cohort C4) described how committing to leadership responsibilities had adversely impacted schoolwork and reflected, "If I knew how much being a Year 12 leader involved, I wouldn't have gone for [the position]." Another student (Cohort C4) expressed how she felt leaders did not always receive an appropriate amount of acknowledgment for their efforts.

Use a Reflective Journal

Earlier this year, I attended a research proposal presentation, where a doctoral candidate was carefully outlining the qualitative methods she wished to use for her data collection phase. Of the outlined methods was reflective journaling, and one of the critical readers offered the candidate some sound advice. The advice was "Unless you are absolutely convinced that this method will be useful for you, and more importantly, that you will regularly commit to maintaining a journal—then don't use it as a data collection method." My instant reaction was that these words were rather sharp, but after subsequent reflection I must admit this advice was indeed apposite. Casting my thoughts back to my own data collection, I recalled how I had managed for 3 years to keep a regimented schedule of interviewing, typing interview transcriptions (usually within 24 hours), member-checking those transcriptions, managing the field notes taken within the interview, and sitting down at least once a week to make an entry in my reflective journal. As I looked back at what I did, my immediate thought was of gratitude for deciding the plan of action early on in the project and sticking with it. Doing so helped me to enhance the trustworthiness and veracity of the longitudinally collected data and to record any salient or latent ideas about student leadership. If I had not faithfully and repeatedly engaged in any of these processes—and I certainly valued the method of reflective journaling!—the longitudinal dimension offered in every chapter from my Methodology onward (*Findings*, *Discussion*, *Conclusion*) would have suffered.

I would like to distinguish the purposes of field notes and journaling, as these methods can appear ostensibly blurry for a research candidate. It might be worth noting

that while field notes are used to provide a descriptive and contextual record of an interview, journaling provides an ongoing compilation of the researcher's reflections, interpretations, questions, and provisional hypotheses throughout the course of the investigation. I used journaling extensively during the data collection and data analysis process, and as my study progressed, I realized how valuable this data collection method was for longitudinal research. As soon as was practicable after each interview, I completed a journal entry (a) to maintain an ongoing record of my practices, (b) to reflect upon and interpret the interview experience, and (c) to look at the new data with a diachronic (explorations over time) and a synchronic (cross-sectional analyses at a fixed point in time) view (Saldaña, 2003; Thomson & Holland, 2003). Continued reflection and interpretation assisted with the clarification of emerging topics and themes concerning the operation of student leadership at the School and assisted in the development of questions to be asked in future interviews. Most importantly, keeping a reflective journal over a protracted period allowed my emerging interpretations of adolescent leadership development to be captured faithfully and repeatedly without relying heavily on the human memory.

One entry selected from my reflective journal addresses those criteria listed above. The entry was written shortly after interviewing a female House Coordinator in 2009, after interviewing this person eight times beforehand across 3 years. Herein,

What jumped out of the interviews today was her admission that the leadership program did help with student leadership development. Today's comments were a complete contradiction to what she had stated a year ago, in that the feeling was student involvement in the program had no

effect on leadership development. Her contention last year was that some people either were "natural leaders" (or "had it") or they weren't. I do concede that my interviewing technique has sharpened over time, and today's interview was one-on-one. It certainly does appear that something should account for this "reversal" in thinking—it will be interesting if the other participants will agree that the efforts of those working most closely with the elected student leaders do have a demonstrable, tangible effect on their leadership development.

There were statements from students and staff alike reflecting similar mindshifts vis-a-vis leadership development, and the reflective journal not only helped to tentatively document these "on-the-run" diachronic and synchronic analyses but also to look at my own practice as an interviewer. Maintaining the journal also meant that these valuable, salient thoughts could act as prompts or guides in subsequent interviews. Specifically, I used the findings from this interview (and the journal entry) to edit the interview schedules for the remaining staff and students.

Conclusion

My doctoral study set out to explore how one secondary Catholic school developed leadership potential within its elected student leaders. Because the study was planned to investigate at depth how such potential developed over time, I chose a longitudinal case study to frame the focus of the inquiry. Collecting data for 3 years, I found that I could validly make a number of claims about how the elected students grew as leaders—and more so than if I had selected a snapshot approach using the same research methods. At

the time I started my PhD (mid-2005), the methodology I designed to investigate adolescent leadership development had never been used, and most research into this issue had largely come from an adult, "snapshot" perspective. Employing the aforementioned methodology with a prominent student voice enabled me to produce some interesting findings which I hope other researchers will use to continue to build on the body of leadership-based literature.

Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. Early in the case, I made several claims to justify the use of a longitudinal case study for my research project. In light of these claims, how do you justify that longitudinal research is the best choice from all available orchestrating perspectives?

2. In the "Practical Lessons Learned" section, I discuss some strengths and weaknesses associated with longitudinal research. In light of your own research design, to what extent do these characteristics inform what you plan to do?

3. What other method(s) of data collection could you suggest that I have used to investigate the topic of adolescent leadership development? Justify each choice with sound methodological reasoning.

4. The literature suggests for various reasons that ethical issues present in all research projects are heightened in longitudinal investigations. What are some of these reasons? To what extent are these (or others) applicable to the research you intend to conduct?

Further Reading

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