Using Reflection to Assess Students' Ability to Learn and Develop Leadership Skills

Heather M. Olsen
University of Northern Iowa

Brooke Burk
SUNY Cortland

Abstract

Leadership skill development has been identified as an important element of future leisure service professionals' academic preparation. Thus, the purpose of this paper was to utilize in-depth course reflection and service-learning to assess whether undergraduate students enrolled in a leadership course were meeting the leadership objectives set forth by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT). Results indicated that service learning along with reflection enables students to better connect leadership principles and strategies to professional practice. Additionally, it was determined that structured reflection is thought to provide students with a framework that allows students to more effectively connect course material to their experiences out of the classroom.

Keywords: *service learning; leadership development; self-reflection*

Heather M. Olsen is an associate professor in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services at the University of Northern Iowa. **Brooke Burk** is an assistant professor in the Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Studies Department at SUNY Cortland. Please send correspondence to Heather M. Olsen, School of Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services, Human Performance Center 103 E, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0618, telephone: 319-273-6173, heather.olsen@uni.edu

Introduction

Parks and recreation educators would agree that *leadership* is a critical component of the discipline's curriculum. In fact, the importance of teaching leadership concepts is evident by the accreditation standards established by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT). As such, many programs include a leadership class as part of the core curriculum. The challenge is not teaching the concepts of leadership, as there is a plethora of leadership books available (e.g., Edginton, Hudson, & Scholl, 2005; Jordan, 2007; Lussier & Achua, 2013), but rather developing undergraduate students' leadership skills through instruction and practical application of the theories and strategies promoted throughout these texts. Thus, the obstacle for faculty teaching leadership courses becomes determining the most effective methods of helping undergraduate students develop leadership skills. This development is influenced by the variety of experience levels and motivation, confidence, and attitude factors so developing the leadership skills is not directly teaching the theories but including the practical application. A challenge for faculty is identifying how to adequately assess student learning, growth, and attainment of essential leadership skills.

The purpose of this paper was to utilize the newly established 2013 accreditation standards set forth by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT) to assess undergraduate leadership skill development through reflection in a undergraduate leadership course. In addition, the researchers wanted to determine whether or not students could demonstrate their ability to apply leadership principles, strategies, and techniques to their service learning experience.

Literature Review

Learning through Experience

Developing undergraduate leadership skills takes an amount of effort from students and faculty. For faculty determining learning objectives, selecting appropriate readings, establishing student learning outcomes, and deciding on measurement and assessment tools are complex tasks. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal is to enable students to apply the theory learned in the classroom to various practical experiences. Essentially, the faculty helps students connect theoretical concepts to the work the students will be performing during class projects, internships, and into their professional careers. This type of learning is focused on the student by providing them with experiences to practice leadership skills, techniques, and strategies outside the classroom.

Scholarship on learner-center education is considered a valued practice in higher education as greater focus is placed on fostering student learning (Webber, 2012). More than 60 years ago, John Dewey recognized the importance of giving students multiple opportunities to experience learning. Dewey (1938) indicated "… all genuine education comes about through experience" (p. 25). Cognitive psychologists suggest learning through experience provides opportunities for developing meaningful ways to learn about abstract and challenging concepts (Bruner, 1990).

There are several terms used that describe students' learning through experience such as learning through participation (Chambers & Lavery, 2012), student engagement (Fried, 2012), experiential learning (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010), direct experience (Dewey, 1938),

community engagement (Percy, Zimpher, & Brukardt, 2006), and service-learning (Butin, 2010). Researchers agree students' learning should be meaningful and reflective.

Service learning is a "scholarship of engagement" as it builds a relationship among students, teachers, institutions, and the community (Boyer, 1996). Service learning means learners are engaged in hands-on, meaningful service that addresses real-life needs in the community (Butcher, Howard, McMeniman, & Thom, 2005; Crews, 2005) and use reflection to indicate learning that has occurred during this experience (Watkins & Braun, 2005).

Leadership Qualities in Recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has established accreditation standards for undergraduate education programs in the field of parks and recreation (NRPA, 2013). These standards establish learning objectives guidelines for various courses taught in an accredited curriculum for this field of study. The goal of these standards is to prepare undergraduate students for a professional career in parks and recreation and related fields. While the standards established by the accrediting body within NRPA are comprehensive covering areas of development in programming, administration, risk management, and human resources, the standards related to leadership are of utmost important in this paper.

According to COAPRT, accredited programs must include undergraduate instruction related to research and practical experiences in the following areas:

> Students graduating from the program shall demonstrate the following entry-level knowledge: a) the nature and scope of the relevant park, recreation, tourism or related professions and their associated industries; b) techniques and processes used by professionals and workers in these industries; and c) the foundation of the profession in history, science and philosophy (NRPA, p. 13, 2013).

We utilized the COAPRT learning outcome that focused specifically on student assessment which states, "The program shall demonstrate that quality assessment measures were used to assess learning outcomes associated with this standard" (p. 13). For a more detailed list of the leadership-specific course objectives that were used by the courses and informed the development of the assessment tool, please see Table 1.

Table 1

Leadership-Specific Course Objectives

The importance of ethics in leadership.
Understand the principles and procedures of supervisory leadership, including interpersonal communication, motivation, supervisory leadership, discipline and separation, and ethics and standards of conduct.
Ability to design experiences reflecting application of knowledge from relevant facets of contemporary professional practice.
Ability to facilitate recreation for diverse clientele settings, cultures, and contexts.
Group behavior, dynamics, and group leader activities and functions.

A review of frequently used textbooks in this field indicated that the following curriculum areas are important for the preparation of future leisure service professionals: leadership styles, communication, group dynamics, understanding the importance of followership, embracing diversity, and making ethical decisions (Edgington et al., 2005). In addition to instructing students on key concepts related to leadership, it is important for students to have the opportunity to develop and practice these leadership skills (Wurr & Hamilton, 2012). The practical experience can take on a variety of forms from working with groups in the local community, to leading activity among their peers in the classroom (Byrd, 2009; Hurd & Garrahy, 2009; Klimoski & Amos, 2012). Thus, linking the formal instruction of leadership principles, strategies and techniques to the practical application of these elements is thought to best enable students to become leaders in the field of parks and recreation.

Reflective Learning

Educators in a variety of disciplines including social work, education, nursing, sciences, and engineering have noted the importance of reflection in the learning process (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Dunlap, Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Iwaoka & Crosetti, 2008). However, this process has yet to be adequately explored in the field of parks and recreation and specifically as it relates to obtaining various leadership skills essential to this field. Previous research has noted the impact that reflective learning can have on students' acquisition of complex course concepts and their self-efficacy to utilize the skills taught in class (Dunlap, 2006; Dempsey, Halton, & Murphy, 2001, Strait & Lima, 2009). This research indicates that students are better able to make informed choices about their behaviors as professionals when given opportunities to reflect on material discussed in the classroom. Many students also feel as though they leave college with a greater skill-set which gives them the confidence to adapt these skills to real-life situations (Dempsey et al.).

"Students who learn the most in service-learning are those who do a lot of reflection" (Gent, 2009, p. 149). Reflective learning provides students with opportunities to explain their thinking and problem-solving strategies; it encourages students to become more self-aware and supports their ability to connect theoretical concepts to practical experiences (Dunlap, 2006; Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004). Additionally, the reflective process allows students to compare their past experiences with concepts they learned during a course. By providing students with the opportunity to share previous experiences, they are able to monitor their own growth with a subject area. Reflection also enables instructors to be more aware of student's current skills and the acquisition of new ones (Dempsey et al., 2001; Dunlap, 2006).

Reflective learning is an essential component of the service learning process. The continued development of current skills through reflection, in addition to enabling students to be aware of new skills they acquire, enables them to become more aware of the their strengths and encourages them to explore ways in which to improve skillsets they feel are deficient. Essentially, it enables them to set personal goals and becomes more attentive to their achievements (Dempsey et al., 2001). Additionally, reflection requires students to look inward at their learning process and see how a course and the experiences embedded in that course impact their learning about a particular topic and how this may impact them in the future (Dempsey et al.).

Research indicates that reflective learning must include important elements to provide students with questions that allow students to compare their practical experiences from the course to theoretical concepts discussed (Dunlap, 2006). Further, Dunlap suggests questions should encourage students to elaborate on their ability to learn and understand course materials, making the reflection a formal part of course requirements, and provide students with an opportunity to look back upon their learning and experiences throughout the course and beyond.

Self-Reflection

Learner-centered education fosters personal development, confidence of conceptual knowledge, and authentic and purposeful reflection (Sambell, McDowell, & Montgomery, 2013). A conceptual framework of structuring the reflection of undergraduate service learning is needed illustrating whether student leadership development is occurring during service learning experiences. Such knowledge can be collected in many ways. There are numerous assessment tools intended to gather evidence to support the use of learning through experience in various higher education courses including standardized scales, interviews, focus groups, journaling, questionnaires, surveys, self-reflection, and observations (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Given the broad definition of learning through experience, it is not surprising that assessment takes many forms (Strait & Lima, 2009). Reflecting in higher education is frequently becoming used because it allows students to self-reflect and examine their own experiences, beliefs, and assumptions based on their learning (Minott, 2008).

According to the literature, service learning is not complete until reflection has occurred (Dempsey et al., 2001; Dunlap, 2006; Gent, 2009). Structured reflection is thought to provide students with a framework that allows students to more effectively connect course material to their experiences out of the classroom. Gent (2009) highlights structured reflection in the sense that teachers provide questions that make the connection between the course content and the service-learning actions so students develop a "deeper understanding of the material" (p. 149). Further, she clarities structured reflection is not to determine what they know, but structuring questions so students are applying theory to practice while guiding deep thinking skills.

Self-reflection invites students to express their learning and it makes sense for assessing undergraduate students' personal growth. Based on the work of service-learning reflection and assessment scholars, Gent (2009) describes service-learning should conform to the 6 C's: continuous, connected, challenging, contextualized, coaching, and communication. To encourage quality reflection, she indicates self-reflection assessment must encourage students to evaluate their own experiences. Table 2 illustrates a description of each of the key terms.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to utilize the newly established 2013 accreditation standards set forth by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COAPRT) to assess undergraduate leadership skill development through reflection in a undergraduate leadership course. In addition, the researchers wanted to determine whether or not students could demonstrate their ability to apply leadership principles, strategies, and techniques to their service learning experience.

Undergraduate parks and recreation students enrolled in leadership courses from two accredited parks and recreation programs were engaged in service-learning projects in order to develop their leadership skills. The investigators then utilized students' self-

Table 2

Gent's 6 Cs of Reflection

Key Term	Explanation
Continuous	Reflection should be ongoing.
Connected	Reflection should directly relate to the course learning goals and students' experience.
Challenging	Reflection should guide students to higher order thinking.
Coaching	Teachers should act as a role of supporting, encouraging, and giving suggestions to strengthen reflection.
Communication	Reflection should allow for open and honest communication where students can share ideas and experiences.

reflection papers to assess leadership skill development that occurred during service learning experiences.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduate students enrolled in leadership courses in two parks, recreation, and leisure studies departments in the United States. The courses were chosen specifically based on similarity in course objectives, assignments, and content taught to the students. One course was taught at a university in the Midwest and another course was taught at a college in the northeast. The University of Northern Iowa offered two sections of *Leadership in Leisure, Youth, and Human Services.* The course met twice a week for 75 minutes each class period for a total of 16 weeks. There were 32 students enrolled in the first section with 4 freshman, 11 sophomores, 11 juniors, 4 seniors, and 2 post-baccalaureates (with one student visiting through the university's international program). There were 30 students enrolled in the second section with 6 freshman, 8 sophomores, 9 juniors, and 7 seniors.

The *Leadership in Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Studies* course taught at a college in the northeast, SUNY Cortland, met three times each week for 50 minutes per meeting for 15 weeks. The students also met for an additional 75 minutes twice a week for lab time in order to prepare for and implement their service learning project. There were a total of 23 students enrolled in the course which consisted of one freshman, five sophomores, 16 juniors, and one senior. Table 3 describes course enrollment, gender, and grade classification.

Table 3

Gender and Grade Classification of University Students for Midwest and Northeast University

Grade	Females		Males	
	Midwest	Northeast	Midwest	Northeast
Freshman	10	1	0	0
Sophomore	18	3	4	2
Junior	16	12	6	4
Senior	4	0	2	1
Post-baccalaureates	1	0	1	0
Total	49	16	13	7

Learning Activity

Embedded within the course requirements, students at the Midwest University were required to lead a one-time special event in the community. Specifically, students were placed in teams of seven to eight members and were asked to plan and lead a one- to two-hour special event at an assigned agency. The assigned purpose of the activity was given to the students on the first day of class. The syllabus read:

> Planning and facilitating this activity acts as a "lab" to test out the leadership theories and practices you have learned during the semester. You will be challenged to consider your own leadership/followership within the group, as well as that of your fellow group members. Please take notes throughout the process, as reflection is a key part of this experience and you will be asked to provide a thorough reflection piece at the end. Grading will be based on your leadership facilitation, individual leadership, group leadership, and evaluation/reflection paper.

Agencies included an after-school program, a residential facility for individuals with brain trauma injuries, and a retirement community. Students were given two half-class periods, averaging 40 minutes, to work during class time. Otherwise, students were expected to meet outside of class time. On average, students meet approximately 10 hours outside of class. In addition, it was reported they worked on the project through e-mail, Facebook, and Google Docs.

Students enrolled in the leadership course in the northeast also completed a service learning assignment. Through partnerships with three local elementary schools, students planned and implemented a biweekly afterschool program for 8 weeks at the schools for participants in grades 4 through 6. The assignment was listed as follows in the course syllabus: "Each student is required to plan and lead after-school activities twice a week for eight weeks at a local elementary school with a group of your peers." The college students worked in pairs or groups of three to implement the programs. Each student pairing or group was assigned to one school for the duration of the program. Students reported

meeting outside of class and lab for an additional eight hours. These eight hours included answering emails, submitting assignments, responding to text messages and sharing ideas through Google Docs.

Upon completion of the service-learning component, students were asked to reflect on their experiences. The authors, who taught the courses, developed the reflective learning journal collaboratively utilizing course objectives, theoretical concepts discussed in the classroom, and examination of 2013 COAPRT standards. All groups of students (Midwest and northeast) were given the same reflective learning tool in order to reflect on their service learning experiences and connect these experiences to the concepts discussed in each course. Gent's (2009) six elements of quality reflection were used as a framework for structuring understanding of students' experiences for learning through practice (Table 4).

Analysis

The data analyses included descriptive statistics and content analysis. The data analysis process included a search for systematic meaning (Hatch, 2002) gathering comprehensive understanding (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2005) in the qualitative reflection journals. The first step in the data analysis included the instructor's reading of each student's self-reflection paper. The instructors then used whole-text analysis methodology, and coded each paper according to emerging subcategories, categories, and themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Then, the instructors interpreted and compared categories and themes using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The last step included the instructors identifying the unique responses and common themes. The instructors discussed the emerging themes and determined what categories should be highlighted based on the themes.

While the instructors' intent was to investigate leadership-related learning outcomes of undergraduate park and recreation students during a community service learning project, the instructors discovered that the students learned more about themselves and leadership skills than was originally anticipated. Students not only indicated a thorough understanding of the course concepts but were able to critically analyze their behaviors and how the theories from class were directly applied to their service learning projects.

Results

The students in all courses and sections were asked to reflect on the same questions which included questions on their previous experience, thoughts on the service learning project, and leadership topics they found most important. For example, students were provided with some of the following prompts during their reflections, "Examine your personal communication skills with your fellow leaders throughout the service learning program;" "Describe what behaving ethically means to you? How did you handle ethical dilemmas that occurred? Did you feel this is the best strategy? Why or why not?"

Using Gent's (2009) quality reflection framework, we also asked them to reflect on the course objectives related to COAPRT accreditation standards which included questions about their knowledge of the profession and professional practice, communication skills, their ability to understand being a follower, dealing with conflict and their ability to understand and incorporate ethics and diversity into the activities they planned and implemented. For instance, the COAPRT learning objectives encourage students to demonstrate entry-level knowledge of the profession and professional practice.

Table 4

Framework for Structuring Reflection of Students' Experiences

Elements of Quality Reflection (Gent, 2009)	Leadership Learning Objectives (COAPRT, 2004)	Reflective Questions
Continuous	Demonstrate entry-level knowledge of the scope of the profession and professional practice (8.01).	What was your reaction of this assignment? Was your experience what you thought it would be?
Connected	Ability to design experiences reflecting application of knowledge from relevant facets of contemporary professional practice (8.06.03) Apply knowledge of professional practice, and the historical, scientific, and philosophical foundations to develop valid and solid arguments on which to base decisions about professional policies, procedures, practices, techniques, and related ethical and professional issues (8.07).	Pick five topics that we have discussed in our classroom that played the biggest role in helping you take the theory to practice.
Challenging	Group behavior, dynamics, and group leader activities and functions (8.15).	Identify your personal communication strengths and weaknesses Was there a point during the assignment that communication was not happening? Did this or did it not affect the group?
Contextualized	Ability to understand the importance of maintaining professional competence and the available resources for professional development (8.08).	What was the greatest "thing" you learned by doing this assignment? Did any leadership trait or ability change or di an "a ha" moment occur during this assignment? What leadership trait or ability do you feel needs greater development? And, how do you plan to develop in the future?
Coaching	Understand the principles and procedures of supervisory leadership, including interpersonal communication, motivation, supervisory leadership, discipline and separation, and ethics and standards of conduct (8.20)	What do you hope to change in the future and how will this impact your work and relationships with others?
Communication	The use of professional communication modalities, including technical writing, public speaking, and audio/visual/multimedia resources (8.23).	If you were to evaluate your communication skills now, how would they be different?

Based on a content analysis (Hatch, 2002) of the students' reflections on these topics, three themes emerged: self-awareness, bringing theory to practice, and skill development and improvement.

Self-Awareness

As a result of students' experiences with a service-learning project intended to prepare them to be leaders in their future endeavors, students mentioned being more aware of their various skills including their ability to communicate with others, be an effective team member and also resolve conflict. Students often compared their previous knowledge and experience with communication in a team setting to their service-learning experiences. The majority of students highlighted that communication is key to being an effective leader. For example, Paige from the northeast college stated the following when asked to evaluate her communication skills:

> Before, I was an effective instruction giver, but when giving instruction, there is often time little feedback, and it is a one-way system. I have learned to be patient when other people are talking. In the past, I would want to cut them off and finish the sentence for them because my mind goes a mile a minute and sometimes their mouth does not keep up. I realized that I do not like to be cut off, so why would others like it when I do it to them? Instead of belittling my group members, I should empower them and at least pretend that I do not know what they are going to say.

D.J. from the Midwest university reflected:

> I have learned a great deal of knowledge in the area of communication since being presented with ideas and concepts during this assignment. Everyone knew a little about communication, but I believe we were all surprised by how much depth and complicated this topic actually turned out to be. I believe I am more willing to agree with others and not force my ideas upon them all the time. There is a trust that can be built from communication and carrying goals out.

Furthermore, Melanie from the northeast college had the following to share when asked to reflect on her ability to be an effective and valuable group member for her team in the service-learning project.

> Many times after the first idea was thrown out to the group, we all would agree with it and then no one else would think of any better ideas or options. I think this style is appropriate at times but not all the time. When there needs to be a quick decision made or best possible option was the first one brought up then I believe it is appropriate to conform to the idea and implement it. On the other hand when there is time allotted to plan and think through different scenarios, I do not believe that it is appropriate to conform to the first idea, and that everyone should give their input and decide after hearing a few different ideas which one would work the best.

Many students mentioned the frustration of group projects in previous experiences. However, through the service-learning project in this leadership course, they had opportunities to work with individuals who had similar passions and interests. Kristin from the Midwest university shared her thoughts on her team.

> Another thing I wasn't expecting was the relationship that I have with my group members now. I have never had a group project that resulted in new friendships. With my past group projects, we acted like each other didn't exist after the job was completed. I am so thankful to have met the people in my group because they are kind, caring, and passionate about what they do.

Finally, other students were able to think about their experience in its totality and how it contributed to their overall development as an individual and a leader much like Robbie (northeast college).

> My first reaction to the after-school program was somewhat negative. I was nervous having to deal with children because I have never dealt with this age group before. I thought I was not going to like this class because I have some severe anxiety, and being put on the spot in front of people triggers this deficiency. I also thought about dropping the class because I did not want to deal with children. Now that the program has been completed, my experience was not what I thought it would be. I enjoyed leading activities and playing with the kids. I feel that I have grown as a leader and I have discovered qualities in myself I didn't know I possessed.

Antonio at the Midwest university captures the common voice of students who were inspired and motivated with this service-learning experience even though they were not excited when they read the syllabus.

When I first learned of this assignment, I was very nervous and thought it was going to be a lot of work and didn't think it was going to be fun. Now that I have completed this assignment it was nothing I thought it was going to be. I was very surprised to see how much I actually truly enjoyed the event we put on. The whole time when we were planning, I thought it was truly just going to be a joke because our activities did not seem suitable. The biggest thing I learned is not only preparing for the event but also deciding what you're going to say and how you're going to act.

Bring Theory to Practice

Another important theme that emerged from the students' reflection on their service learning and leadership experience was bringing theory to practice. Many of the students commented on their previous misconceptions with various topics including the importance of being a follower, dealing with change and the importance of delegation, among various other topics. Some also mentioned not being familiar with a particular leadership topic and that the service learning experience enabled them to apply principles discussed in class to their practical experiences.

For example, Emilee (northeast college) shared the following:

Change was another topic that allowed me to take theory into practice. It is important to understand why the children resist change, strategies to minimize the resistance and understanding the process to implement the change. Changes constantly occurred throughout the after-school program, so it was important as leaders to be able to handle the situations properly when they would occur. We would take strategies from the eight stage model to help us make quick decisions on a day-to-day basis.

Brianna (northeast college) also shared how her experience allowed her to close the seemingly large gap between theory and practice.

It is important to take control. It is important to follow but it is just as important to lead. When we were in class and had to bring a game on Friday and lead it for the class, which really helped us practice our leadership skills. Being a leader, people look up to you for inspiration and direction. Being a leader takes confidence, competence, control, and the ability to accept change and adapt to it.

Markus (Midwest university) stressed his "a ha moment" came during the project.

I think it was during this project that I truly realized that not only is leadership an art, but it can also very well be situational. I've always thought that leadership roles were like the role of president, senator, or principal in the fact that once appointed you were going to be the leader throughout each process. After this project, it's my opinion that leaders aren't just long-term appointed leaders, but rather people who step up into the role after the group or they decided their skills match up with the task ahead.

Aubrey (northeast college) also shared a similar feeling related to her ability to apply what she had learned in class to her service learning experience.

It was so beneficial to be learning about the different techniques of leadership and then watch them play out when we were at the schools. It seemed tedious when we were learning everything in class and self-explanatory but then when the situations came up at the schools or while working in the groups I felt like I knew of a better way to solve the problems.

Skill Development/Improvement

Many students felt that as a result of their participation in the service learning project they were able to enhance leadership skills that they felt needed some improvement. Some also felt that the experience was welcomed because it enable them to develop skills they felt were lacking. For example, Brendan (northeast college) and Kelly (Midwest University) talk about how they previously struggled when it came to conflict resolution and that this experience gave them the confidence to deal with conflict in other situations.

This [conflict resolution] is the practice of recognizing and dealing with dispute in a rational balanced and effective way. I found this useful in dealing with conflict among the children rather than within the group. This especially helped when

children would get into arguments over winning or the rules. This area I found that after time I improved in greatly and I am now able to manage conflict better. (Brendan)

My leadership traits changed. I would say I developed more of an awareness of my attitude and how I only have a small amount of courage to stand up to what I think is right. I noticed throughout this project that I did a lot of agreeing and I wish I would have come up with my own ideas more. (Kelly)

Amy (northeast college) talked about how her desire to learn the essential traits of a leader will benefit her in a summer camp position where she will be responsible for young girls.

Leadership played a big role for me and my group in this afterschool program. Leadership is something that I continue to struggle with every day. Through taking this course and have great group members I was able to overcome my leadership skills and show them throughout leading games. By taking this course I was able to show off my leadership traits and what it is to be a good leader.

Alexis (northeast college) and Amber (Midwest university) reflected on how their previous experience with leading had led them to be forceful leaders and how their experiences with the service learning project enabled them to learn other strategies in order to be more effective and respected.

I learned to manage conflict in a better way than telling kids to suck it up and play. I realize that people have so many different things going on in their life that it might be something else causing their bad day. I handle conflict with a lot more understanding then I did before. (Alexis)

Although I came out of my box and felt more as a leader, I need to be more confident. I need to use my experience and skills to not only my advantage, but everyone's advantage. Everyone has something to offer to a group and I need to focus on what I'm good at and use those to enhance the group as a whole. (Amber)

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to utilize the newly established 2013 accreditation standards established by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT) to assess undergraduate leadership skill development through reflection in a service-learning course. In addition, the researchers wanted to determine whether students could recognize and describe their use of various leadership theories during their service-learning experiences through reflection. Undergraduate parks and recreation students enrolled in leadership courses from two accredited parks and recreation programs were engaged in service-learning projects in order to develop or enhance their leadership skills. Written reflections from the students' service provided insight into their perspectives on their leadership development. Three overarching themes emerged from the data: self-awareness, bringing theory to practice, and skill development

and improvement. These themes suggest that service learning programs at the undergraduate level are needed for leadership development and also meeting course and accreditation learning outcomes. Specifically, students were challenged with an experience that provided opportunities for them to test their leadership skills and were given the duration of a semester to take theory to practice.

The students were allowed to learn and practice various aspects of being a leader in a learning environment that encouraged them act, reflect, and evaluate themselves and their peers. This learning environment enhanced their learning and reinforced the course learning outcomes. It is also important to note that while both exams and quizzes were given throughout the duration of these courses, learning and application of COAPRT learning objectives were more readily observed through the reflection process. The results of this study indicate that self-reflection may be a more effective assessment tool of understanding and conceptualization of leadership skills and strategies. Our research findings also support previous research that experience along with reflection enables students to learn and practice essential course concepts (Dunlap, 2006; Gent, 2009; Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004).

Future research in the area of reflection and service learning should examine whether the reflection was essential to the students' understanding of leadership skills, techniques, and theories or whether the service learning component was most important. Future research should also examine whether either of these methods (service learning and reflection) enable students and educators to achieve 2013 COAPRT learning outcomes.

Finally, we believe reflection guides us to be better teachers and keeps our teaching relevant. We all face the time pressures of being a faculty member and we cannot be expected to develop a rigorous report for each course or learning assignment we teach. However, reflective inquiry, as it has done to us, will make teaching more meaningful as faculty take time to reflect on what works and what does not work in assigned courses.

We also encourage our colleagues to take time to read about higher education assessment. Recommend readings include *Assessment for learning in higher education* (Sambell, McDowell, & Montgomery, 2013) *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education* (Astin & Antonio, 2012), or *Inquiry into the college classroom: A journey toward scholarly teaching* (Savory, Burnett, & Goodburn 2007).

References

Astin, A., & Lising Antonio, A. (2012) *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education* . Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Boyer, E. L. (1996). The Scholarship of Engagement. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, *49*(7),18–33.

Bringle, R. G., Phillips, M. A., & Hudson, M. (2004). *The measure of service learning: Research scales to assess student experiences.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Brukardt, M. J. (2006). *Creating a new kind of university: Institutionalizing community-university engagement.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Butcher, J., Howard, P., McMeniman, M., & Thom, G. (2005). *Engaging community-service or learning?* Canberra: Department of Education, Science, and Training.

Butin, D. W. (2010). *Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian.

Byrd, E. T. (2009). Howling wolves: Active experiential learning in event management. *Schole: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education, 24,* 148–154.

Chambers, D. J. & Lavery, S. (2012). Service learning: A valuable component of pre-service teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(4), 128–137.

Coll, R. K., Taylor, N., & Grainger, S. (2002). Assessment of work-based learning: Some lessons from the teaching profession. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *3*(1), 5–12.

Crews, R. (April, 2005). *University of Colorado at Boulder service-learning handbook: What is service-learning?* Boulder, CO: University of Colorado at Boulder.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* New York: Touchstone.

Dempsey, M., Halton, C., & Murphy, M. (2001). Reflective learning in social work education: Scaffolding the process. *Social Work Education, 20*(6), 631–641.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2003). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Dunlap, J. C. (2006). Using guided reflective journaling activities to capture students' changing perceptions. *Tech Trends, 50*(6), 20–26.

Dyment, J. E., & O'Connell, T. S. (2011). Assessing the quality of reflection in student journals: A review of the research. *Teaching in Higher Education, 16*(1), 81–97.

Edginton, C. R., Hudson, S. D., Scholl, K. G., & Lauzon, L. (2011). Leadership for recreation, park, and leisure services. Urbana, IL: Sagamore.

Fried, J. (2012). *Transformative learning through engagement*: *Student affairs practice as experiential pedagogy.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction.* (7th ed). Boston: Pearson Education.

Gent, P.J . (2009). Great ideas: Using service-learning and differentiated instruction to help your students succeed. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Co.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Adine.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational setting.* Albany, NY: Suny Press.

Hodges, D., Smith, B. W., & Jones, P. D. (2004). The assessment of cooperative education. In R. Coll & C. Eames (Eds.), *International handbook for cooperative education (*pp. 48–65.). Boston, MA: World Association.

Hurd, A. R., & Garrahy, D. A. (2009). Video assessment: A high-tech approach to teaching leadership skills in recreation. *Schole: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education, 24,* 162–168.

Iwaoka, W. T., & Crosetti, L. M. (2008). Using academic journals to help students learn subject matter content, develop and practice critical reasoning skills, and reflect on personal values in food science and human nutrition classes. *Journal of Food Science Education*, 7, 19–29.

Jordan, D. (2007). *Leadership in leisure services* (3rd ed.). State College, PA: Venture.

Klimoski, R., & Amos, B. (2012). Practicing evidenced-based education in leadership development. *Academy of management: Learning & Education, 11*(4), 685–702.

Lussier, R. N. (2013). *Leadership: Theory, application, & skill development (5th ed).* Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning.

Merriam, S. B. (2009*). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Minott, M. A. (2008). Valli's typology of reflection and the analysis of pre-service teachers' reflective journals. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *33*(5), 55–65.

National Recreation and Parks Association (2013). Council on accreditation of parks, recreation, tourism, and related professions (COAPRT): Learning outcomes and standards and assessments. Retrieved from http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/ nrpa.org/Professional_Development/Accreditation/COAPRT/2013%20COAPRT%20 Standards_04-30-13.pdf

Patton, M. Q. (2005). *Qualitative research.* John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Percy, S. L., Zimpher, N. L., & Brukardt, M. J. (Eds.). (2006). *Creating a new kind of university: Institutionalizing community-university engagement.* Bolton, MA: Anker Pub.

Pritchard, F. F., & Whitehead, III, G. I. (2004). *Service and learn: Implementing and evaluating service learning in middle and high schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Sambel, K., McDowell, L., & Montgomery, C. (2013). *Assessment for learning in higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Savory, P., Nelson Burnett, A., & Goodburn, A (2007). *Inquiry into the college classroom: A journey toward scholarly teaching*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.

Strait, J. R., & Lima, M. (2009). *The future of service-learning: New solutions for sustaining and improving practice.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Watkins, M., & Braun, L. (2005). *Service learning from classroom to community to career.* JIST Publisher.

Webber, K. L. (2012). The use of learner-centered assessment in U.S. Colleges and Universities, *Research in Higher Education*, *53*, 201–228.

Wurr, A. J. & Hamilton, C. H. (2012). Leadership development in service-learning: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 16*(2), 213–239.

Wurdinger, S. D., & Carlson, J. A. (2010). *Teaching for experiential learning: Five approaches that work*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Education.