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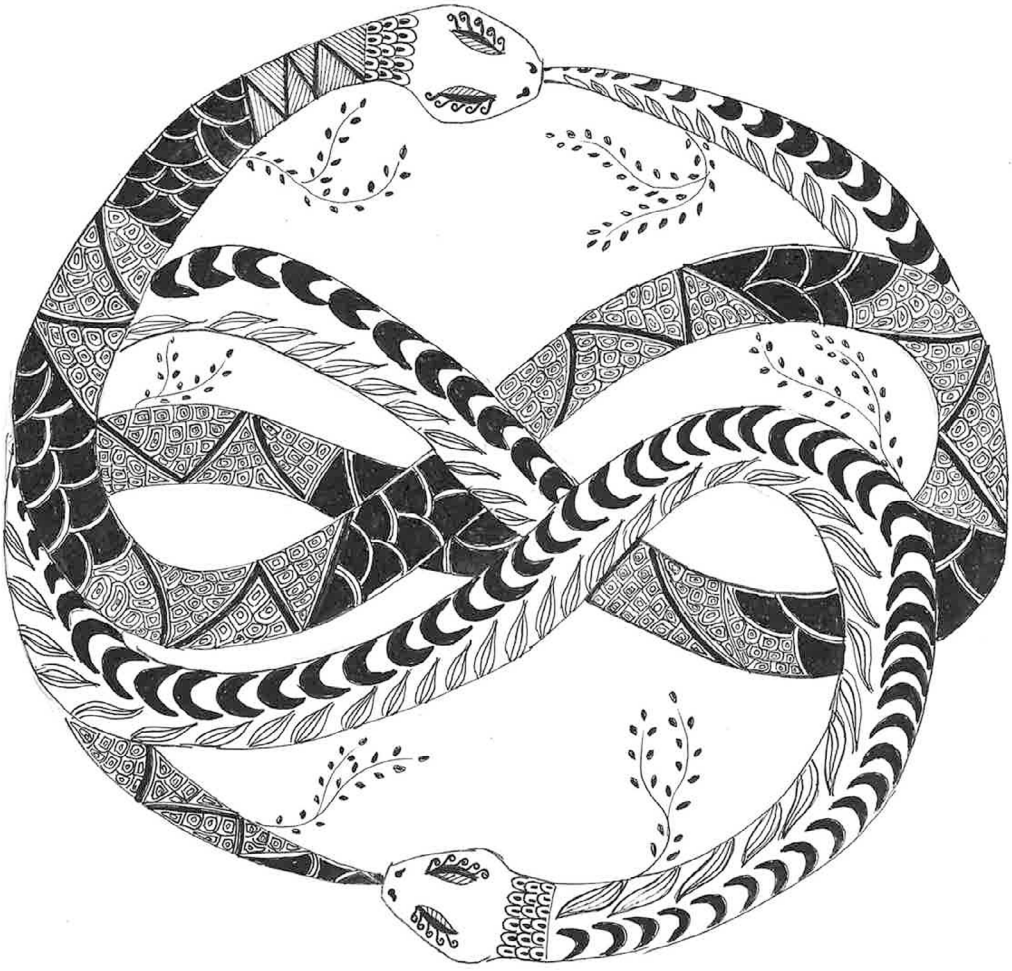
Bhavani Ramamoorthi

Relational Leadership Manifestations in a Socially Constructed Learning Environment in Higher Education



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this article dissertation is to explore manifestations of relational leadership within a multicultural student group in a socially constructed learning environment in higher education. The dissertation comprises three sub-studies. The first sub-study examines the relational and shared practices that the students create in collaboration to co-construct knowledge, as well as the factors enabling the co-creation of these shared practices. The second sub-study investigates how leadership identity development manifests within a group of multicultural students at the individual and collective levels. The third sub-study examines the forms of collective leadership uncovered when appreciative inquiry is applied as a pedagogical approach in a multicultural student group within a higher education learning environment. The article dissertation's sub-studies draw on data from a course called Collaboratories Lab. The data consists of student reflections on an online discussion forum, group discussions, and the students' final learning assignment. A qualitative research approach was adopted across all three sub-studies. In sub-study 1, the findings reveal that the students practiced co-sensing and co-shaping to acquire knowledge effectively in collaboration. Additionally, they demonstrated a broadening perception of diversity. The findings of sub-study 2 indicate that leadership identity manifests through 1) a collective impulse to achieve shared goals, 2) a collective cognition of the need to integrate diverse perspectives, and 3) a broadening view of leadership as the collective capacity for co-creation and generativity. Sub-study 3 shows that forms of collective leadership were uncovered when participatory pedagogies, such as appreciative inquiry, were used in higher education environments. These forms of collective leadership include 1) collaborative synergy as web-like relations, 2) transformative connections as social fields of deepened connection, 3) generative dialogue as generative listening and collective wisdom. The findings of the three sub-studies enrich our knowledge of how relational leadership manifests as shared relational practices, leadership identity development, and collective leadership forms. They provide instrumental ways to benefit from relations among diverse students in socially constructed learning environments. Finally, the dissertation shows how learning and leadership are interrelated and can be socially constructed in higher education settings.

Keywords: relational leadership, higher education, socially constructed learning, collaboration

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Ramamoorthi, Bhavani
Relationaalisen johtajuuden ilmenemismuotoja sosiaalisesti rakentuneessa oppimisympäristössä korkea-asteen koulutuksessa
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Artikkeliväitöskirjani tavoitteena on tutkia relationaalisen johtajuuden ilmenemismuotoja monikulttuurisessa opiskelijaryhmässä. Tutkimus tarkastelee johtajuusidentiteetin kehittymistä relationaalisessa kontekstissa ja kollektiivisia johtajuuden muotoja. Tutkimuskysymykseni ovat: 1) Millaisia relationaalisia ja jaettuja yhteistyön käytäntöjä korkeakouluopiskelijat osoittavat rakentaessaan tietoa yhdessä? 2) Mitkä tekijät mahdollistavat erityisesti jaettujen ja relationaalisten käytäntöjen yhteiskehittämisen? 3) Miten johtamisidentiteetin kehittyminen ilmenee monikulttuurisessa opiskelijaryhmässä yksilöllisellä ja kollektiivisella tasolla? 4) Millaisia kollektiivisen johtajuuden muotoja ilmenee arvostavan tutkimuksen kautta monikulttuurisessa opiskelijaryhmässä? Osatutkimuksissa hyödynnettiin Collaboratories Lab -kurssilla kerättyä aineistoa, joka koostui opiskelijoiden pohdinnoista verkkokeskustelupalstalla, ryhmäkeskusteluista ja lopputyöstä. Kaikissa osatutkimuksissa käytettiin laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Osatutkimuksen 1 tulokset osoittivat, että opiskelijat harjoittivat yhteistunnistamista ja -muotoilua tiedonhankinnassa. Lisäksi opiskelijat laajensivat käsitystään monimuotoisuudesta tehdessään yhteistyötä. Osatutkimuksen 2 tulokset osoittivat, että johtajuusidentiteetti ilmenee kollektiivisena pyrkimyksenä saavuttaa yhteiset tavoitteet, laajenevana näkemyksenä johtajuudesta ja kollektiivisena tiedostamisen tarpeesta integroida erilaisia näkökulmia. Osatutkimus 3 osoitti, että kollektiivisen johtajuuden muotoja esiintyi käytettäessä osallistavaa pedagogiikkaa. Kollektiivisen johtajuuden muotoja olivat 1) yhteistoiminnallinen synergia verkostoissa esiintyvissä suhteissa, 2) transformatiiviset yhteydet syventyneiden yhteyksien ja jaetun läsnäolon sosiaalisina kenttinä ja 3) generatiivinen vuoropuhelu luovana kuunteluna ja kollektiivisena viisautena. Tutkimukseni tulokset rikastuttavat tietämystä siitä, miten relationaalinen johtajuus ilmenee jaettuina käytäntöinä, johtajuusidentiteetin kehittymisenä ja kollektiivisen johtajuuden muotoina. Oppiminen ja johtajuus kytkeytyvät toisiinsa ja ovat sosiaalisesti konstruoitavissa korkeakouluympäristöissä.

Avainsanat: relationaalinen johtajuus, korkeakoulutus, sosiaalisesti konstruoitu oppiminen, yhteistyö

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation is based on the following three original publications, which are referred to as sub-study 1, 2, and 3 in the following chapters.

Article 1	Ramamoorthi, B., Jäppinen, A. K., & Taajamo, M. (2021). Co-sensing and co-shaping as shared and relational practices in bringing about relational leaders in higher education. *SN Social Sciences*, *1*(8), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-021-00210-w
Article 2	Ramamoorthi, B., Jäppinen, A. K., & Taajamo, M. (2023). Manifestations of leadership identity development among multicultural higher education students. *European Journal of Training and Development*, *47*(10), 147–162. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-02-2023-0027
Article 3	Ramamoorthi, B. (2024). Appreciative inquiry as a pedagogical approach for collective leadership formation among multicultural higher education students. (Manuscript under review)

The author of this dissertation is the first author of all three sub-studies. She conducted the literature review, played the leading role in collecting data and carrying out the qualitative analyses, and reported the results and findings in all sub-studies. The data were collected through a course called the Collaboratories Lab. The co-authors of the first two sub-studies performed advisory roles through commenting.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In times of complex global challenges, higher education institutions need to prepare students to make cognitively complex decisions and adapt to multiple worldviews. This dissertation focuses on how relational leadership in socially constructed learning environments in higher education manifests as relational and shared practices, leadership identity development in a relational context, and collective leadership forms enabled when appreciative inquiry is applied as a pedagogical tool. Higher education institutions can respond to this need by teaching students with varied skills, backgrounds, and knowledge how to come together and achieve shared goals. In this endeavour, relational leadership provides an important perspective. In relational leadership, students assume the lead by taking responsibility for their learning along with others. However, there is not enough understanding of how relational leadership manifests within groups of students working together, which is common in today's increasingly demanding learning environments.

Institutions of higher education have prioritized leadership development to ensure graduate employability, develop their competitive edge, and instil in their students an appreciation of lifelong learning. The higher education space has increasingly recognized value in allocating resources to train future generations of leaders and prepare them for the future (Reyes et al., 2019). This has largely been channelled through specific student leadership programmes and activities designed to bring students together and help them develop leadership capabilities (i.e. tutoring, student associations, community volunteering) (Skalicky et al., 2018). Institutions that are focused on leadership development provide funding for leadership development centres and training opportunities (Jackson, 2010). Considering that there is always a debate around how and where funds are used in higher education, this dissertation aims to provide insights into how leadership can be developed through participatory pedagogies and collaborative forms of learning. These pedagogies create opportunities for students to develop leadership skills even if they do not hold specific leadership positions or have access to a leadership training facility. Higher education

institutions need a pedagogical and learning-oriented approach to leadership to develop leadership among students (Skalicky et al., 2018).

Since we live in an increasingly complex, multicultural, and global environment, there is an emphasis on sensitivity to culture and context. Similar to a systems-level perspective, team and collaborative leadership processes challenge organizations to look beyond individual skills and focus on cultivating environments that emphasize interconnection, shared visions for the future, and collective accomplishments. Higher education institutions are exploring new ways to contribute towards building more resilient societies equipped to navigate current and future crises. As these institutions begin to take responsibility for being socially engaged and extending their influence beyond research and teaching, they must transform societal needs into actionable opportunities. Cultivating a shared, desirable future is therefore essential, beginning at the grassroots level with active involvement from student communities within higher education spaces (Krieglstein & Krolla, 2024). Higher education institutions can enable the building of a practice ground for these collective capacities through creating learning environments that support these processes and the critical leadership skills needed by society (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kezar, 2023).

While knowledge creation is at the core of what higher education institutions do, it is not a lack of knowledge that hinders societies from finding solutions to the current day global and local challenges. Rather, their challenge lies in converting knowledge into impactful change (Scharmer, 2019). What higher education needs to offer students is infrastructure to support the cultivation of the skills needed to achieve students' goals. This means striving for an ecosystem-centric model wherein education is seen as a means of co-creating the future. Educators hold the key to enabling deeper sensing and relational capacities among higher education students (Partanen, 2023). Participatory and transformative learning approaches can help shape a shared and sustainable future.

Collective and socially constructed learning is highly important in a global, interconnected society. It requires a learning environment that is fluid and has a relational flow (Gergen, 2009; Hosking, 1988). It helps to understand what factors mediate collaboration across practice boundaries as group resources are aligned and relational practices are exercised to achieve shared goals (Edwards, 2012). Hence, this dissertation includes frameworks for collective leadership embedded in relationships, referred to as relational leadership. The concept used in this dissertation combines the work of different scholars (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kezar, 2005; Komives, 2012, 2013; Komives et al., 2009; Sim, 2019; Uhl-Bien, 2006) to further understanding of how relational leadership manifests when students interact in collaboration within a group. The study aims to introduce how relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and participatory pedagogy describe relational leadership manifestations as different ways of thinking and working together—that is, as socially constructing learning with others.

The field of leadership studies has traditionally been leader-centred, with a focus on individual leaders and their traits, skills, and abilities. In such a context, leadership is understood to be a quality of certain individuals and detached from the cultural context (Gronn, 2002; Wood & Dibben, 2015). Furthermore, traditional literature on leadership has predominantly focused on what leaders should do to lead or what motivates others to follow them (Crevani et al., 2007; Pearce & Manz, 2005). The field of post-heroic leadership largely steers away from the conventional views of leadership as a quality present in certain individuals. On the contrary, relational leadership refers to the phenomenon that evolves through social interactions, specifically relationships (Crevani et al., 2010; Pearce & Manz, 2005; Raelin, 2011). Consequently, there has been a growing need to understand the types of relationships that would shape and influence the learning environments of groups in higher education (Komives et al., 2013).

The socially constructed learning environment from which this dissertation derived its data was a multicultural student group participating in a course called Collaboratories Lab. The participants were eight students, and their diverse backgrounds enriched the learning environment and provided an appropriate context for observing how relational leadership manifests. Collaboratories Lab was an intervention designed by the author in which the students worked towards building shared knowledge on collaboration and were empowered by social interaction through participatory pedagogies.

Although there are several manifestations of relational leadership, this dissertation focusses on relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and collective leadership forms through appreciative inquiry as a pedagogical tool. Examining the first of these, relational and shared practices, provides an understanding of how higher education courses and learning environments could focus on training their students for complex working life. Second, leadership identity development is significant because socially constructed learning environments are rich in the types of social relationships and interactions that are common in the complex global working environments where leadership identity will be further developed. Socially constructed learning happens at both the individual and collective levels, with each complementing the other and thus influencing leadership identity development at both levels. Third, collective leadership forms are important since they serve as threads for facilitating the relational and shared practices and leadership identity development that emerge from the learning environment.

The dissertation involves three basic theories: (1) relational leadership theory, (2) leadership identity development theory, and (3) appreciative inquiry theory. All three pertain to collective leadership forms and their corresponding theoretical model or framework, and all have their own practical applications. Relational leadership theory has drawn increasing interest in recent years (Drath, 2001; Endres & Weibler, 2017; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Many studies have adopted a relational view in investigating the interactions among personnel in organizational teams and groups (Crevani et al., 2007; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Previous relational leadership studies that focused

on students in higher education have highlighted how leadership identity is constructed and how leadership capacity among students is based on social change leadership models (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan et al., 2009; Komives et al., 2005, 2006, 2009).

Relational leadership manifests in different ways. Several scholars suggest studying it from varying perspectives (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006) to develop a deeper understanding of collective forms of leadership. Four concepts are considered to underpin the theory of relational leadership: (1) Leadership is a way of being in the world; (2) leadership encompasses working with others dialogically to determine what is meaningful; (3) leadership includes working through differences, which is inherently a moral responsibility; and (4) leadership involves practical wisdom (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). In this study, students experience relational leadership as a phenomenon enabling collaboration and enriching co-creation, through which they can achieve shared learning goals. All of this involves embracing diversity and varied perspectives, whose convergence leads to the emergence of new meanings.

The concept of leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005, 2009) emerges from studies on the relational leadership model (Komives et al., 2006, 2009). It presents a framework for understanding how individual higher education students develop social identities as collaborative and relational leaders. This framework and the interrelated leadership identity development (LID) model have been used as the theoretical lenses for this dissertation. This enables the examination of how leadership identity manifests at both the individual and collective levels while being influenced by interactions in the learning environment.

The concept of appreciative inquiry, with its dimensions of social relations and collective leadership (Bright et al., 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), is the third theoretical basis. Appreciative inquiry is applied as a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tool for further understanding of collective leadership formation within a multicultural higher education student group. The theory is grounded in the understanding that human systems move in the direction of an imagined future and that questions contain the seeds of change. Appreciative inquiry's influence on collective forms of leadership is grounded in the principles of social constructionism and generative capacity. It empowers group members to nurture their capacity to inspire an emerging future (Sim, 2019). Finally, appreciative inquiry emphasizes that students are acquiring knowledge and thus pay greater attention than others to how the context, content, and methods of instruction are designed (e.g. Assudani & Kilbourne, 2015).

The dissertation connects these three concepts by exploring how relational leadership manifests as relational leadership practices, leadership identity development, and collective forms of leadership within socially constructed learning. Thus, the study focuses on important manifestations of relational leadership that emphasize leadership as a shared and collective learning endeavour. Furthermore, the dissertation proposes that to ensure students are prepared for the challenges and complexities of working life, higher education

should provide training grounds for evolving leaders where leadership and learning are interconnected. In other words, we need socially constructed environments to activate the potential of emerging leaders. We also need a form of leadership that is collective, shared, and relational, one that embraces diverse perspectives and spurs collective mindsets and skills toward the co-creation of knowledge.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theories of Leadership

This dissertation approaches leadership from a relational standpoint. Leadership research has experienced a shift from studying individuals in leadership positions to how leadership emerges as a dynamic social process (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

2.1.1 Relational Leadership Theory

Changing demographic structures require a new kind of leadership, and higher education must be ready to prepare students to use relational leadership to lead in multicultural environments (Caviglia, 2010). A review of the leadership studies that take an explicitly "relational" approach (Clarke, 2018; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Fletcher, 2012; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012; Wood & Dibben, 2015) suggests that leadership is not necessarily linked to holding a specific leadership position but is rather a collective product of the social interactions among various actors. The idea that leadership is produced through interaction decentres the notion of leadership from individuals, fostering 'a view of leadership and organization as human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their members' (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655). Relational models of leadership emphasize that effectiveness in a knowledge-intensive workplace depends less on the heroic efforts of a few and more on the degree to which an organization has constellations of positive collaborative working relationships (Drath, 2001; Fletcher, 2012).

Prior leadership studies (Hosking, 1988, Hosking et al., 1995) have argued that rather than examining leadership within established organizational structures, we need to pay attention to the social constructions of organizing and to how leaders construct organizational realities and identities in relation to other

people. Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 672) emphasized that this relational conception of leadership has methodological consequences, as it cannot be studied with the methods generally used by traditional approaches to leadership (i.e. variables and measures). Instead, it requires "richer methodologies"— in other words, qualitative methods—that allow the observation of interactions and can capture relational dynamics as they are happening in situ. The relational perspective does not consider leadership to be something that exists in and of itself; it is rather something that is constructed through encounters and dynamic interactions between people (Clarke, 2018; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fletcher, 2012). Cunliffe and Ericksen (2011) suggest that relational leadership involves living conversations, which are critical to exploring differences and possibilities for action. Within such conversations, relational leaders are aware of the importance of the flow of present moments in making sense of complexity, resolving problems, and shaping strategic direction and practical actions.

2.1.2 Leadership Identity Development Theory

The dissertation focuses on how leadership identity manifested at both the individual and collective levels among the Collaboratories Lab participants. This manifestation of leadership identity defined the participants' identity as relational leaders. Detailed scholarly work in this domain by Komives (Komives, 2012; Komives et al., 2005, 2006, 2009) suggests that leadership is learned in group contexts and that the dynamic reciprocity of the individuals engaging in groups is critical to leadership identity development (LID).

The LID theory (Komives et al., 2005) emerged from studies on the relational leadership model (Komives et al., 2006) that focused on leadership being purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process oriented. The theory emphasizes leadership as "a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change" (Komives et al., 2006, p. 11).

The theory has implications for the design of leadership programmes. It describes how students recognize moving through different phases of how they view themselves in relation to others, including a phase of interdependence. As they move through these phases, their views of leadership shift, moving from thinking of leadership as an external "other" to holding the leader-centric view that leadership can be held by anyone in a conducive position. As students value interdependence, they view leadership as happening in non-positional roles as well as in a shared group process (Komives et al., 2009).

2.1.3 Appreciative Inquiry Theory

Appreciative inquiry theory is based on the understanding that social knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven, and inquiry is intervention. This implies that a valuable resource for generating constructive change or improvement is the collective imagination and discourse about an emerging future (Cooperrider et al., 2003). This understanding was integral to the decision to use appreciative inquiry in this dissertation. It offered the necessary

participatory pedagogy platform, with a rich foundation in social constructionism and leadership development. To be applied in practice, appreciative inquiry includes four stages: discovery, dream, design, and delivery, with participatory engagement at each stage.

Appreciative inquiry has been employed as a tool for organizational change and actively used in contexts in which organizations seek to cultivate and expand collective leadership capacity (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Sim, 2019). Appreciative inquiry's impact on leadership development is derived from the theory's generative capacity as well as the principle of social constructionism (Sim, 2019). Leadership is generated through a social influence that contributes to the emergence of social order and new approaches, attitudes, and goals (i.e. change; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Appreciative inquiry facilitates the generation of a new form of leadership owing to its collaborative process. At the same time, it empowers group members to nurture their capacity to inspire an emerging future (Sim, 2019).

2.2 Corresponding Theoretical Models for Socially Constructed Learning Environments

The two leadership models and the appreciative inquiry cycle described in this section are embedded in theories that support social constructivism (Flint, 2016; Goldhaber, 2000). This is described in detail in the next section, which describes the context of the study. The leadership models correspond to each of the leadership theories described in the previous section. The models provide an informed perspective and are applied in the examination of the interactions that took place within the multicultural student group participating in the collaborative and socially constructed learning environment of the Collaboratories Lab.

2.2.1 Relational Leadership Model

The relational leadership model outlined by Komives et al. (2013), as illustrated in Figure 1, defines relational leadership as intentional, inclusive, empowering, and morally sound. This model offers a perspective for evaluating collaborative and relational leadership practices within diverse learning groups. The model has been applied in this dissertation to examine the shared and relational practices that were enabled by the group members as they interacted. The model was complemented by the knowing-doing-being model (Snook et al., 2012) to further the analysis of the relational and shared practices.

When individuals employ shared and relational strategies established during a collective learning process, they can significantly contribute to teamwork. At the heart of this leadership model lies the concept of purpose—the pursuit of a common direction and the creation of a shared vision aimed at effecting positive change.

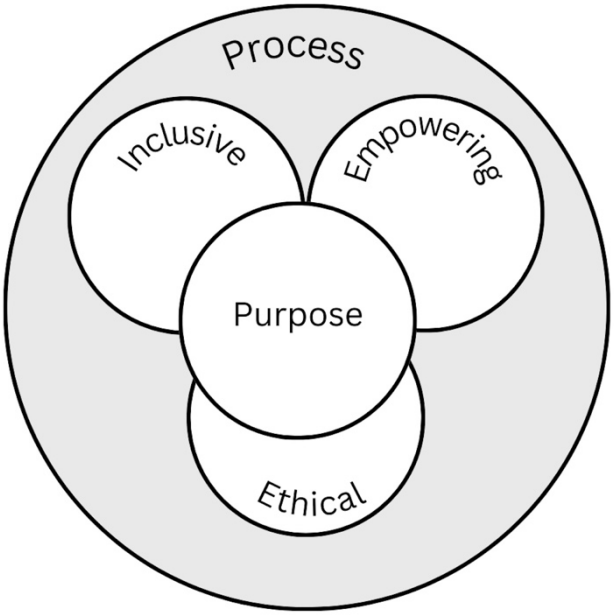


FIGURE 1 Relational leadership model
As adapted from Komives et al. (2013)

Inclusive relational leadership entails comprehending and actively engaging with a variety of perspectives. It promotes a networked thinking approach, whereby individuals recognize interconnected relationships when addressing problems. Additionally, relational leadership fosters empowerment in two main ways: first, as individuals experience a sense of self-leadership as they assert their roles within group dynamics, and second, through the creation of an environment that facilitates participation by removing obstacles that might hinder individual engagement (Komives et al. 2013; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Empowerment and enhanced individual learning contribute significantly to a team's robustness and collective advancement (Kezar et al., 2006). Lastly, the relational leadership model underscores the importance of ethical and moral leadership, asserting that ethics serve as the fundamental core of effective leadership. It emphasizes that leadership cannot effectively develop without a solid ethical foundation (Ciulla, 1995; Komives et al., 2013).

2.2.2 Leadership Identity Development Model

The leadership identity model (LID model) is an application of the theory of leadership identity development. The LID model has implications for developing leadership capacity and identity in individual students and for developing the capacity of groups to be supportive environments for shared, relational leadership (Komives et al., 2005, 2006, 2009).

The model represents LID as something that occurs in stages, but these stages may be repeatedly experienced, allowing leadership identity to deepen. The stages are also influenced by a spectrum of contextual factors from the

environment. This study adopted the LID model and applied it to the Collaboratories Lab while focusing on the three categories of LID theory (developing self, changing view of self with others, and broadening view of leadership). The LID categories are incorporated into the LID model to illustrate more fully how the LID theory can be applied in higher education learning environments (Komives et al., 2006), as shown in Table 1.

The goal of the Collaboratories Lab was to establish a conducive learning environment that would aid students in the process of knowledge co-creation. The LID model offers the necessary assistance for enhancing leadership capabilities within a group and provides a versatile framework for designing educational programmes and various learning opportunities aimed at nurturing one's sense of leadership identity (Komives et al., 2006).

TABLE 1 Leadership identity development model

LID categories	**Leadership identity development properties (Enabled through participatory pedagogy in the Collaboratories Lab)**
Developing self	Deepening self-awareness
	Establishing interpersonal efficacy
Changing view of self with others	Dependent
	Independent/dependent
	Interdependent
Broadening view of leadership	Positional
	Non-positional

Source: The above table is adapted from Komives et al. (2006).

2.2.3 Appreciative Inquiry

With regard to the socially constructed learning environment, students engaged in diverse collaborative experiences, such as appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry theory is supported by a model that has implications for practice (Figure 2). Appreciative inquiry has been applied in various contexts, including organizational change (Cooperrider, 2013), team building and leadership development (Carr-Stewart & Walker, 2003), and transformative higher education (Buchanan, 2014; Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). It is often used to create a positive and constructive organizational culture that values collaboration,

innovation, and continuous improvement (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Fifolt & Lander, 2013).

As a conceptual framework, the appreciative inquiry cycle consists of four stages (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Whitney & Gibbs, 2006). The initial phase is the discovery stage, wherein participants share narratives about the aspects of working together that they desire to carry into the future within the context of the questions they are collectively exploring. The dream stage encourages the enhancement of the positive aspirations and possibilities by envisioning potential future scenarios that have arisen from the discovery phase. The design phase involves creating the social structures, frameworks, and processes necessary to support the newly envisaged system. The destiny phase unveils novel visions of the future and constitutes an appreciative inquiry guided by a collective sense of purpose and, in the context of this dissertation, shared learning goals.

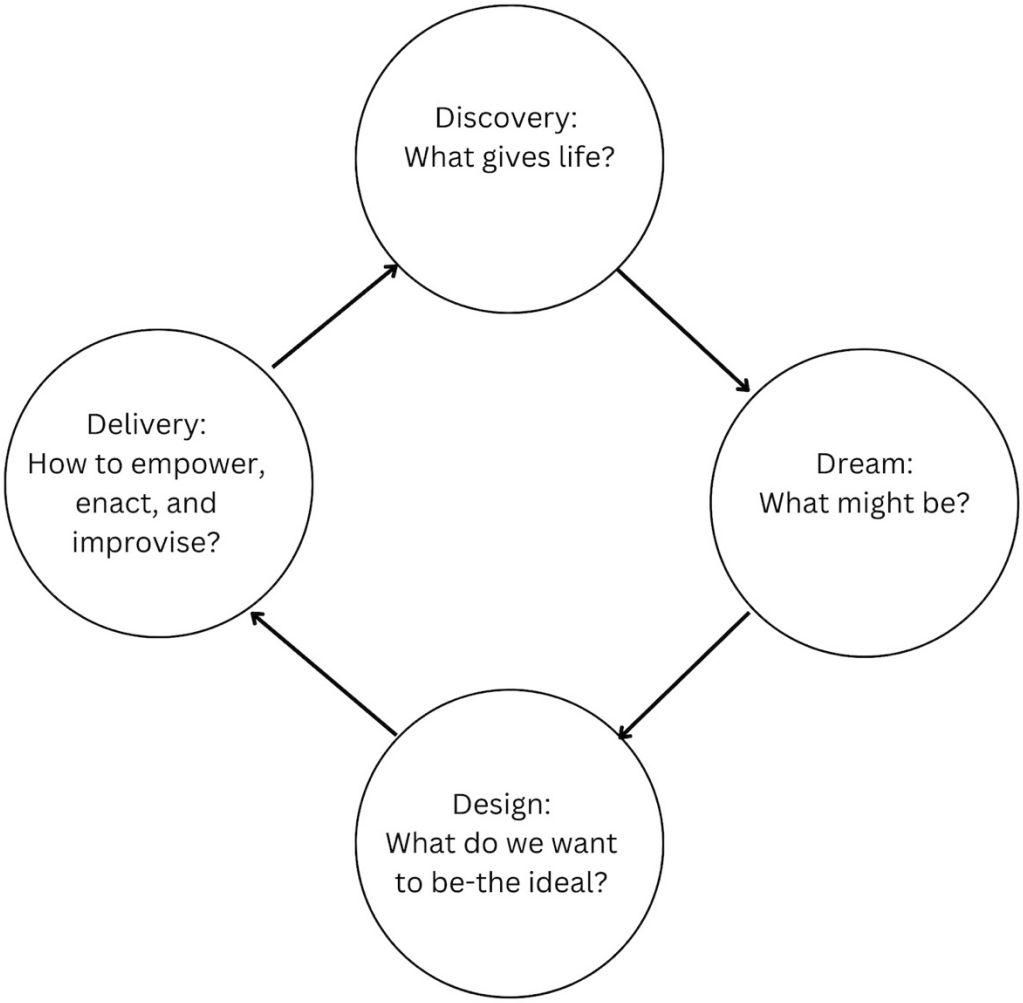


FIGURE 2 Appreciative inquiry cycle
Adapted from Whitney & Gibbs (2006, p. 48)

2.3 A Critical Analysis of the Theories Used in the Study

There are many approaches to collective or plural forms of leadership (Denis et al., 2012), but this dissertation mainly takes into consideration theories on relational leadership and those connected to the relational leadership sphere in its examination of the learning interactions among the Collaboratories Lab students. Theories relating to relational leadership generally fall under the entity perspective or the relational perspective (Uhl-bien, 2006). In the entity perspective, the epistemology is one of an objective truth, and it is assumed that knowledge is the property of individuals, who are also referred to as entities. One example is the LMX (leader-member exchange) theory, which is founded on the understanding that leadership relations develop among dyad partners, such as leaders and followers, thereby influencing the attitudes and behaviours of the followers (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). This dissertation does not choose to apply theories relating to the entity perspective. Instead, the dissertation relies on a relational orientation, which moves the focus from the individual to the collective dynamic, which is interwoven with interacting relations and contexts. The relational perspective emphasizes that the multiple realities of the self and the other are interdependent and co-evolving and that knowledge is co-constructed (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Uhl-bien, 2006).

One of the primary challenges with collective forms of leadership is the ambiguity of the space where it resides. In a collaborative learning environment such as the one that served as the focus of this study, the interactions through which leadership is produced cannot be attached to specific individuals in the group. According to Fairhurst et al. (2020, p. 606), "when leadership can no longer be attached to individuals at all, there is a danger that it may become a chimera". One way to address this challenge of ambiguity is by deciphering the configurations, the constellation of parts (small groups of individuals) emerging as a whole (organisation or community) and thereby influencing the group members' thinking and acting (Gronn, 2015).

This dissertation relies on relational leadership theories that adopt a social constructivist perspective, which is the most appropriate choice for the context of the socially constructed learning environment of the Collaboratories Lab. The ambiguity aspect of collective leadership is addressed by studying the manifestation of relational leadership within a student group whose members act as one interconnected unit and not as isolated individuals. The theories chosen for the study provide support for examining the manifestation of relational leadership as a collective endeavour. One of the study's theoretical limitations is that it adopts a rather non-traditional approach to leadership, steering away from the more conventional models that approach leadership as being situated in individual entities or examine interactions among people in positions of leadership and their perceptions of the relational space in which collaborative learning and working takes place.

3 RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation aims to study relational leadership manifestations within a group of multicultural higher education students working in collaboration. Although there are many studies on relational leadership and the perspectives from which it is viewed, there remains a limited understanding of how relational leadership manifests when the people working together are not in any formal positions of leadership but rather "lead" their own learning. Hence, the focus of this study is to develop an understanding of relational leadership manifestation as a shared and collective learning endeavour within a group collaborating in a socially constructed learning environment in higher education. This is explored through the three concepts of shared and relational practices, leadership identity development, and collective leadership forms enabled through participatory pedagogy (Figure 3). The following section explains the main concepts presented in Figure 3 and describes how they relate to the study's research questions.

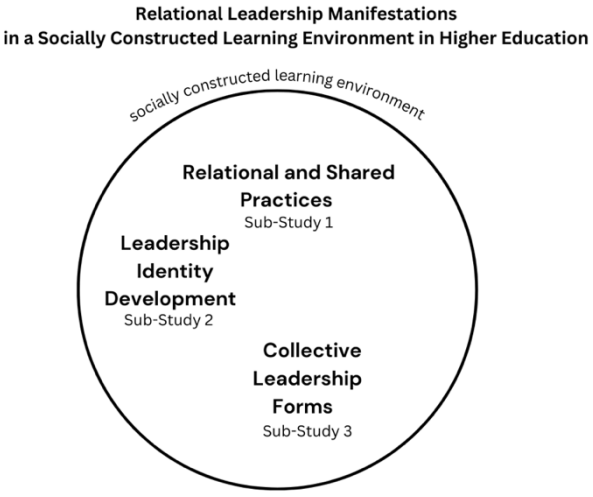
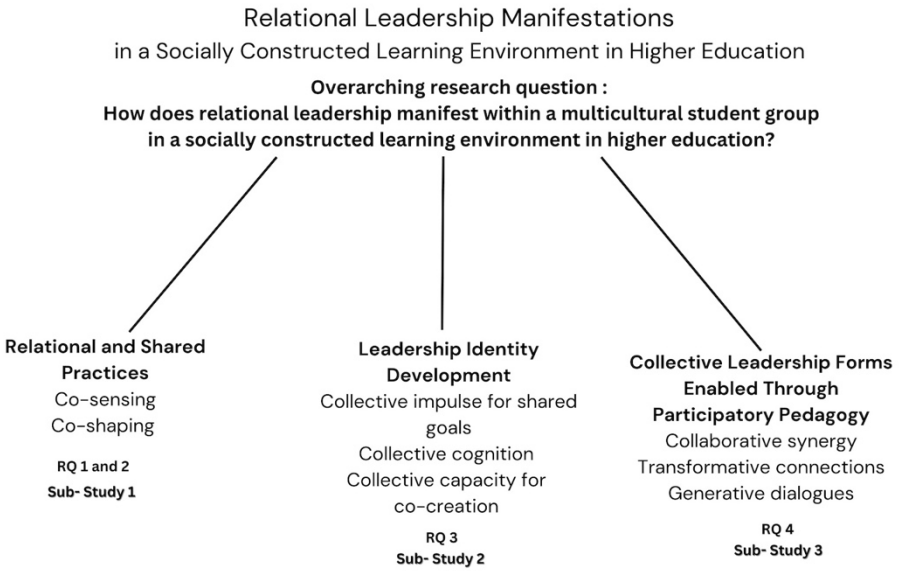


FIGURE 3 Main concepts of the dissertation

This dissertation asks the following overarching research question: How does relational leadership manifest within a multicultural student group in a socially constructed learning environment in higher education?

The sub-studies are guided by the following research questions (see Figure 4):

1. What kinds of relational and shared practices do higher education students create in collaboration to co-construct knowledge?
2. What factors enable, in particular the co-creation of shared and relational practices?
3. How does leadership identity development manifest within a group of multicultural students at the individual and collective levels?
4. What forms of collective leadership are uncovered when appreciative inquiry is applied as a pedagogical approach within a multicultural student group in a higher education learning environment



RQ1. What kind of relational and shared practices do higher education students create in collaboration to co-construct knowledge?
RQ2. What factors enable, in particular, the co-creation of shared and relational practices?
RQ3. How does leadership identity development manifest within a group of multicultural students at individual and collective levels?
RQ4. What forms of collective leadership are uncovered when appreciative inquiry is applied as a pedagogical approach within a multicultural student group in a higher education learning environment?

FIGURE 4 The conceptual model of the study and the research questions answered by the sub-studies

The dissertation consists of three sub-studies. These sub-studies examine students' learning interactions through various interconnected theoretical frameworks, all within the shared context of the Collaboratories Lab. Each study analyses the students' learning interactions from different perspectives, emphasizing the complex and multi-dimensional nature of relational leadership in practice.

Sub-study 1 introduces relational leadership as shared and relational practices and explains how relational leadership enables the social construction of knowledge. Sub-study 2 investigates leadership identity development at both the individual and collective levels to develop a better understanding of relational leadership identity and its manifestation. In sub-study 3, the aim is to uncover the collective leadership forms that manifest when appreciative inquiry is applied as a participatory pedagogy in a socially constructed learning environment. The four research questions are answered in the overview of the original publications (Chapter 6) and in the discussion (Chapter 7).

4 CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

The most prominent works on relational perspectives in leadership (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Hosking et al., 1995; Uhl-Bien, 2006) argue that to understand how leadership manifests, we must focus on the influential acts of organizing that contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships. A relational perspective does not focus on identifying the attributes of individuals involved in leadership, but instead on certain understandings of how leadership is socially constructed (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Hence, the social construction of the rich interdependencies through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (e.g. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, and ideologies) are constructed and produced (Uhl-Bien, 2006) is important. These interdependencies reframe the collectively generated realities (Dachler, 1992). To study these socially constructed realities, it becomes essential to have a context for interactions (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The context of this study was a socially constructed learning environment in higher education in which students actively collaborated to achieve shared goals. This collaborative learning environment was designed as a course for higher education students called the Collaboratories Lab. The theoretical aspects and design of this learning environment are explained in more detail in the following sub-sections (also refer to Appendix).

4.1 Socially and Collaboratively Constructed Learning Environments

A social constructivist approach is central to the context of this study. Social constructivism is based on the argument that the world becomes socially meaningful when it is interpreted in relation to other subjects. This contrasts with the idea that reality is constructed through subjective human acts (Endres & Weibler, 2017; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Hosking, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Social constructivism acknowledges the reality of the experience constructed by each

individual within the learning environment and considers that multiple individuals both construct a collective reality and impact each other's individual realities (Goldhaber, 2000). Understanding this point is essential for clarifying the elements within the study's context.

In this study, a socially constructed learning environment was the social field for the collaborative interactions within the multicultural student group. Collaborative learning entails learning from peers as students adapt to different roles in their learning processes. This involves a collaborative synergy that helps the students achieve shared goals. To achieve shared goals requires the group members' active participation and commitment (Puntambekar, 2006), and in the process of achieving these goals, relational bridges are formed. In this social field of learning, meanings are produced and negotiated, a consensus is formed, and contestation is possible (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Meanings are produced on an ongoing basis, and stable structures that allow for change are created as interactions evolve (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). To study a socially constructed learning environment, it is essential to look to individual perceptions and interactions while also considering the subjective experiences of the people involved in the relationships. This was the approach of the present study.

Past research on socially constructed approaches has focused on the spheres of collective forms of leadership (Derue & Ashford, 2010; Endres & Weibler, 2017; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010), relational leadership practices (Komives et al., 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2006), leadership identity development (Carroll & Levy, 2010), and appreciative inquiry (Heslop et al., 2018). This dissertation focuses on how relational leadership manifests as relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and collective leadership forms that develop through appreciative inquiry. I suggest that this combination of relational leadership manifestations is new in the context of higher education learning environments. I also argue that such a combination could contribute to complex and changing working environments by providing leadership that facilitates collaboration in demanding situations.

4.2 Collaboratories Lab

To study individuals in relationships, it becomes essential to have an environment that is rich in interactions. In this study, the learning environment of the Collaboratories Lab provided a context in which the students could actively engage in activities and collective inquiry through collaboration. The Collaboratories Lab course was offered to master's and exchange students in the field of education. The course was included in the curriculum of Current Issues in Learning and Pedagogy, a field of focus at a higher education institution in Finland. The programme details were shared during an in-person presentation to a new cohort of master's degree students. An invitation to participate was also extended to all exchange and master's students within the faculty. Interested participants voluntarily registered for the programme through a portal, at which

point they signed a consent form to allow their coursework, discussions, and interactions to be used as research materials. A comprehensive programme of the Collaboratories Lab can be found in the Appendix. Since all students were proficient in English, English was adopted as the common language for the programme. Students were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any point after they provided consent. One student withdrew from the study at the early stages of the Collaboratories Lab programme due to scheduling reasons, leaving the Collaboratories Lab with eight students.

In this learning environment, the students engaged in collaboration involving various forms of participatory pedagogies, such as collaborative games, theatre, appreciative inquiry, art, and dialogue. The learning outcomes of the course were clearly defined for the students, and the overall aim was for the students to create a pedagogical toolbox for participatory leadership or collaborative practices for their future roles in education or places of work.

This course was designed based on experimental collaborative exercises, such as the marshmallow challenge (Al-Khalifa, 2017; Anthony, 2014; Suzuki et al., 2016). It also included collaborative activities based on theatre and storytelling (Auvinen et al., 2013; Boje et al., 2015; Orr & Bennett, 2017). A major part of the course involved students' active engagement in the practice of appreciative inquiry, which has been used to solve problems through a creative thinking process. The field of appreciative inquiry been studied in the context of collaboration and relational leadership (Bright et al., 2006; Sim, 2019). The appreciative inquiry process (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) was guided by a question that was co-designed by the groups. All the activities encompassed both small-group work and whole-class participation, with a focus on dialogical interactions. This was followed by online discussions in which the students reflected on their face-to-face learning experiences and interactions in group work. The programme consisted of 30 in-person meeting hours spread over 11 contact sessions across three months. In addition to the in-person sessions, students devoted approximately 30 hours to group reflections and online discussions. They also spent more than 60 hours engaging in individual reading, participating in learning circles, and working on their final learning assignment, which was to design a tool kit for collaboration. The programme was valued at five credits in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, which corresponded to roughly 135 hours of work.

Each student was sent a detailed written constructive feedback report for their evaluation of the course. This included a written report stating some of the key learnings or "golden nuggets" that they brought to their final learning assignment, which was a collaboration tool kit for their future roles in education. They were each given a grade, which was a mean score based on their attendance, engagement in the discussion forum, and final learning assignment.

5 METHODOLOGY

The researcher's positioning in terms of philosophical assumptions defines the foundation of the dissertation and affects both how its objectives are framed and which methods are used (Waring, 2012). In this section, I discuss my approach to the dissertation and its epistemological and ontological assumptions. I also describe the methods employed for the data collection and analysis in each of the sub-studies.

5.1 Methodological and Philosophical Position of the Study

The aim of this dissertation is to examine how relational leadership manifests within a multicultural student group in a socially constructed learning environment in higher education. A qualitative method was used to address the research aim. Qualitative research entails the collection of data that are rich in descriptions of people and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). The methodological orientation of this study is one of a case study approach. According to Yin (2012), a case study design should be considered in situations in which one or more of the following applies: (a) The focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context.

All these aspects are relevant in relation to the aim of the dissertation since the dissertation studies how relational leadership manifests in a collaborative learning environment. The context of the study is relevant to examining how leadership is embedded in relational interdependencies, and the social interactional space is interlayered with how relational leadership manifests, hence blurring the boundaries between the phenomenon and context. Hence, the case study design was adopted as a suitable methodological approach to shed

light on relational leadership manifestation in relation to specific research questions. The context of a socially constructed learning environment is crucial to studying how relational leadership manifests when students are engaged in learning interactions. The three sub-studies presented in this dissertation study the learning interactions among the students through different but interrelated theoretical frameworks within the same context of the Collaboratories Lab. These studies analyse the same results through different lenses. A case study methodology should ideally use different perspectives and a multi-perspectival analysis, meaning that the researcher must consider not just the different perspectives of the students but also the relevant groups of actors and the interactions among them. Hence, this dissertation uses multiple theories to investigate the data collected. This supports the triangulation approach used in this research, enhancing the validity and credibility of the findings.

It is essential that a qualitative researcher carry and interpret the lived meanings of a study's participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). As there are few studies on how relational leadership manifests within diverse groups of higher education students who are not necessarily in formal leadership positions, the qualitative approach is appropriate for examining and understanding the interactions in such a multi-layered context. The case study approach is guided by theoretical dispositions that guide the data collection and analysis (Yin, 2012), making it a comprehensive research methodology. The present study used such an approach to answer the sub-studies' research questions on the manifestations of relational leadership.

The ontology of any study refers to the researcher's assumptions about the nature or form of the social world (Waring, 2012). These assumptions form the basis of the research. In this study, learning and leadership are interrelated, and both are involved in an environment that is socially constructed. The context is a learning environment where multicultural students collaborate as a group. In order to interweave how relational leadership manifests in a collaborative learning environment, the social constructivist perspective, which is associated with a qualitative approach, is applied in this study.

The social constructivist approach is fundamental to both the learning and leadership dimensions. The focus is on moving away from the subjective experiences of individuals, with the assumption that multiple realities are constructed by several individuals (Waring, 2012). In their definition related to interdependency, Gergen and Wortham (2001, p. 119) highlight its relational aspect: "the ongoing process of coordinating action among persons. It is to foreground the moment-to-moment interchange between and among interlocutors and locate meaning within the patterns of interdependency".

This study is based on the social construction of relational leadership and examines how leadership is constructed in social interactions by a multicultural student group who learn together. This study thus makes the ontological assumption that reality is constructed through social interactions and changes with the context. The manifestations of relational leadership in this study are

embedded in their context; they are ever-changing and dynamic, consequential based on the social practices executed by the group members (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Epistemology pertains to the domain of knowledge and forms the foundation of the research as it revolves around how one can ascertain the existence of what is presumed to be real. This inquiry delves into the essence of scientific knowledge and the methods through which knowledge is generated (Waring, 2012). In qualitative research, the knowledge obtained is considered not to be objective, but indicative of how social actors developed the knowledge through interpreting and reflecting on their experiences (Blaikie, 2007).

In this dissertation, the basic assumption is that there is no solitary, objective truth waiting to be uncovered concerning how relational leadership manifests. Rather, the focus is on the multi-faceted nature of relational leadership manifestation. Therefore, this study's primary focus is the various manifestations that signify a collective and relational type of leadership as observed within the Collaboratories Lab setting. In Uhl-Bien & Ospina's (2012) discussion of the paradigm interplay, one of the paradigmatic standpoints is that leadership is co-constructed and co-created in relational interactions between people. Relational leadership is dynamic, developing, and changing over time. Hence, this research seeks to illustrate and enhance comprehension of how relational leadership manifests within a diverse and multicultural student group, specifically exploring the relational qualities demonstrated as these students collaborate to attain common learning objectives.

The dissertation consists of three qualitative studies using a case study approach (sub-study 1, sub-study 2, and sub-study 3). In the first study, relational leadership is examined as shared and relational practices demonstrated by the student group to realize their shared learning on collaboration. These shared and relational practices are at the core of how relational leadership manifests. In the second sub-study, relational leadership is examined as leadership identity at the individual and collective levels. This study explores what specifically was activated at each level for relational leadership to manifest as a collective phenomenon within this group of students. The third study focuses on the instruments of leadership, such as participatory pedagogies, that provide a scaffolding upon which to uncover collective forms of leadership. All three sub-studies contribute to enhancing our understanding of the theoretical development of relational leadership.

The methodologies employed in this study provide support for understanding collective leadership as situated in relational spaces or as relational leadership. The qualitative approach of studying learning interactions in a socially constructed learning environment and the case study methodology and design of the intervention aid in addressing the main aim of this dissertation.

5.2 Data Collection

The data were collected from the Collaboratories Lab, an experimental learning environment for dialogue and collaboration. As described in Chapter 4, The Collaboratories Lab was offered as course to master's and exchange students in the field of education. The Collaboratories Lab consisted of five exchange students and three master's degree students in the discipline of education. The group was culturally diverse and included two men and six women ages 18 to 30 years old. The students on the course are referred to as multicultural in the sense that they came from distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Clayton, 2009). However, multiculturality as a concept is not theorized in this study. The students' areas of specialization in their respective degree programmes were multidisciplinary. Pseudonyms were utilized to safeguard the students' anonymity (Table 2). The students in the Collaboratories Lab had no specific background in leadership training. One student had worked as a teacher trainer, and the rest had some exposure to teaching experiences but not any formal leadership training.

The data collected for the research include several instruments. First, there are photographs of the students engaged in learning during the marshmallows challenge and theatre games. Second, there are visual materials in the form of the students' story mappings (see the appendix for details on the each of the sessions and the data collected from each). Third, there are audio recordings collected using an audio recorder when the students were engaged in the appreciative inquiry sessions and small group discussions. There were also video recordings of these sessions using a camcorder and a video camera. The audio and video recordings total 14 hours and seven minutes.

The data for this dissertation also includes extensive textual data generated from the individual reflections of the students and their dialogue on the online discussion forum created during the Collaboratories Lab course. The text length of the reflections from this discussion forum totalled 74 pages. The course also included a visual art session on the experience of collaborative working as a diverse group of students. The outcomes consisted of paintings from each participant. There was a final group discussion conducted after this session that was audio and video recorded and transcribed. This recording is one hour 18 minute long, and the transcription is about nine pages in length. To gain feedback on the course and to assimilate their learning, the students engaged in an exercise called the silent dialogue, which generated visual mappings with textual content on their overall learning and course feedback.

For the final learning assignment, the students submitted their own toolkits for collaboration upon which to draw in their future roles in education. This assignment yielded 76 pages of textual content. Notably, the data also included artwork and visual content, such as paintings and photographs, although these were not utilized in the data analysis for this dissertation. Nevertheless, they hold potential for intriguing insights in future research endeavours.

There were no interviews conducted for the data collection; rather, the data instruments included the data generated from the Collaboratories Lab course. The data used for the analysis in this dissertation and its three sub-studies include primarily the 74 pages of written reflections and narratives from the online discussion forum, the transcription of the audio and video recordings of the final group discussion (nine pages in length from one hour 18 minutes of recordings), and the 76 pages of text from the students' final assignment. The intention was to use this data with all ethical and data usage standards set forth by the institution in which the course was offered. The group discussion was facilitated by me as a teacher, with question prompts and moderation used to gain a deeper perspective of what working together as a diverse group of students meant for them individually and collectively. The textual data helped to identify themes and patterns within the qualitative data that numerical or structured data might not have been able to capture. The research permission form for this study provided the required consents to use of all the audio, video, textual and visual data generated from the Collaboratories Lab course.

TABLE 2 Demographic information of the study participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Country	Student Role	Degree Programme
Audrey	Female	Taiwan	Full-time student	Master's degree
Cecilia	Female	Wales	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
Diana	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's and master's five-year degree programme
Emma	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
Gina	Female	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
Samantha	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's and master's five-year degree programme
Steven	Male	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
Thomas	Male	Japan	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree

I held two roles in relation to the participants of this study, first as the teacher in the Collaboratories Lab and second as a researcher of the course. The role that consumed the most attention during the course was as a teacher. The intention and purpose of the course was for the students to identify and build knowledge collectively on factors that enable and inhibit collaboration as a group of diverse people working together. My main intention as a teacher was not to engage in a traditional form of teaching in which I would share from previous scholarly work and research work on collaboration. Rather, I sought to facilitate a collaborative

learning environment that was experimental and experiential in nature. The collaborative practices that were part of the design of the lab were based on previous research on collaboration and leadership. Reading circles were facilitated, and textual material was provided when required to organize the activities in the lab. The intention was to create a co-creational space where students could work together using these methods and create their own knowledge and understanding on collaboration. Passive teaching has its own challenges because the teacher is not always at the centre of the room. I had to remain intentional in my role as a facilitator of the students' experience, intervening through generative questions and providing supporting materials when the need arose for more clarity or engagement.

My role as a researcher was to remain curious about what learnings emerged from the Collaboratories Lab and stay consistent with the organization of the data collection. As a researcher, I ensured that the students were aware that the learning generated from the lab would be used for research and that their interactions would be captured through audio and video recordings and through the materials they produced during the course. The necessary research permissions were organized for the students to confirm their participation and withdraw voluntarily if they chose to. They were provided with a research agreement form that detailed the purpose of the research and the data that would be collected. This form sought their permission for using the data for research and information and informed them of their right to withdraw their consent during any period of the course or the research.

5.3 Data Analysis

The dissertation involved separate analyses for each of the three sub-studies, each beginning with a thorough examination of the data, which were reviewed multiple times. The intention was to objectively study and become familiar with the data. As I engaged with the learning outputs from the Collaboratories Lab, I not only became familiar with the data but also developed a deepening curiosity about how the students perceived their learning experiences in the course. Although the number of participants was small, the data obtained and the analysis were supposed to be rich, deep, and profound.

The coding of the data was guided by relevant theoretical frameworks and the corresponding theoretical models embedded in social construction for each sub-study. Data can be analysed more systematically if a study is based on theoretical propositions or a conceptual framework (Mayer, 2015). Hence, the data analysis in each of the sub-studies was guided by the relevant theoretical framework for the main concept of relational leadership that that sub-study focused on. The data analysis for all three sub-studies was qualitative in approach. The studies used deductive or inductive data analysis, and in some studies both forms of analysis were applied (Clarke & Braun, 2017). These analyses are described in more detail below for each of the sub-studies.

Qualitative methods entail choosing specific representative segments from a dataset and specifying the codes applied for each segment. In my analysis, each code was described to identify what it represented concerning the different analytical units (i.e. parts of sentences, whole sentences, or larger sections).

Subsequently, each data segment was analysed to clarify the themes to which it referred. By adopting this approach, the researcher ensures transparency in their interpretation and coding process, making it observable to external readers or evaluators. This enhances the credibility of the interpretations made about the dataset (Lester et al., 2020). All three sub-studies included a tabular presentation of examples from the data set and the themes to which these examples were referring, ensuring transparency and trustworthiness in the interpretations of the data set. Examples of the codes and themes from each sub-study are shown in Table 3.

In all three sub-studies, the analytical process was informed by both theoretical literature and empirical data, and the qualitative analysis approach was adapted to fit within the context of a socially constructed learning environment. Sub-studies 1 and 3 followed a qualitative thematic analysis according to the six-step data analysis of Clarke and Braun (2013). Such an analytical approach entails becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, combining the codes into themes, reviewing the themes, determining the significance of the themes, and reporting the findings. Thematic analysis offers tremendous "theoretical flexibility" and has the potential to be used as "just an analytic method, rather than a methodology, which most other qualitative approaches are" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 120). Accordingly, thematic analysis can result in a theory-driven or data-driven set of findings and engage a range of research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Sub-studies 1 and 3 were theory-driven and guided by a deductive thematic analysis.

TABLE 3 Sample codes and code definitions for each of the sub-studies

Sub-Study	Codes and Their Descriptions	Themes / Attributes	Data Samples
Sub-study 1	**Being congruent:** Being in harmony, coming to a common consensus about an idea or action	Ethical	There was no hierarchy, no competition, and we worked together out of our interest… We were united by our motive, which made our personal differences unnoticeable. (Gina)
Sub-study 2	**Web-like thinking:** The thinking of group members as one organism	Broadening view of leadership	I believe that the…approach ultimately eliminates the pressure of roles…and instead allows…an enriching moment of collaborating or co-creating. (Cecilia)
Sub-study 3	**Commitment to mutual support** When the group members supported each other in reaching a shared goal	Collaborative synergy	What is in common between 'collaboration' and 'appreciative inquiry' is that we can collect our [every] thought and connect them to reach higher consensus, which leads us to more positive and sophisticated achievement. (Thomas)

Sub-study 2 followed a qualitative content analysis with a hybrid approach that included both a deductive and inductive analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a method used for the analysis of textual data. This approach is most appropriate for understanding patterns and connections within data. It involves the systematic reduction of the data into manageable segments through the application of inductive and/or deductive codes. This process allows for the reorganization of the data, facilitating the extraction and validation of the conclusions. The product of this kind of process is an interpretation of the meaning of the data within a particular context (Forman & Damschroder, 2007).

5.3.1 Analytical Procedure for Sub-study 1

This study followed a qualitative research paradigm aimed at investigating the manifestations of relational and shared practices among multicultural students working collaboratively in a socially constructed higher education setting. A secondary objective was to examine the factors that enabled these shared and relational practices. The data sources included reflections and narratives from the online discussion forum, data transcribed from the group discussions, and the final learning assignments. These data instruments captured participants' experiences and reflections on collaborating as a diverse group while working towards a shared goal.

The textual data generated from these data instruments were analysed by identifying data segments that aligned with the four core concepts of the relational leadership model: purpose, inclusivity, empowerment, and ethics. To unpack the complexities within each concept, I applied the knowing-being-doing framework (Snook et al., 2012), which further contextualizes relational dynamics by breaking them down into related dimensions. A comparative table integrating concepts from both frameworks (Komives et al., 2013, p. 98) served as a guiding framework, facilitating a structured and detailed approach to data analysis in this study.

I used ATLAS.ti software, which is ideal for analysing qualitative data. I began coding according to the thematic analysis approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). After I had familiarized myself with the data, the data were examined through the lens of the theory and model of relational leadership (Komives et al., 2013) and the knowing-being-doing framework (Snook et al., 2012), both of which are complementary leadership frameworks. This generated an initial set of 71 codes. Each of these codes was given a definition to describe the relational and shared practice that it broadly represented. The next stage involved synthesizing the coded data into shared practices that represented the key concepts in the relational leadership model and the knowing-being-doing framework. They were combined and grouped together (see Table 2 in Ramamoorthi et al., 2021, p.10; also Komives et al., 2013). This yielded 33 codes. Combining the conceptualizations arising from the two frameworks informed the theme development. These paradigms served as lenses through which to study interactions among students and their co-created shared and relational practices. As a researcher, I had to review and refine the themes and see the insights emerging from the whole data set beyond the individual codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This meant looking across the themes to develop a holistic understanding of the relational and shared practices and their interconnected patterns.

The two major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were representative of the shared and relational practices among the students of the Collaboratories Lab. Each theme had to be clearly defined and given a description that captured its essence. The analysis also clarified how the practices enabled the group to overcome the barriers that inevitably arose, as they tend to do in multicultural higher education settings.

Two major themes of co-sensing and co-shaping as shared and relational practices arose from the thematic analysis. The criss-crossed conceptualizations for co-sensing mainly included thinking in a web-like manner, being open to differences, believing everyone can make a difference, encouraging and affirming others, and building coalitions. These all represent practices that enabled the students to experience themselves as one interconnected working organism with rich interdependencies integral to their learning interactions. Co-shaping was a synthesis of the conceptualizations of common purpose, commitment, envisioning, framing and reframing, the promotion of self-leadership, and the willingness to share power. Co-shaping described the way the students operated as one collective team as they moved towards a shared goal. Examples of the data segments that represent the major themes of co-shaping and co-sensing are presented in Table 3 in Ramamoorthi et al. (2021, pp.12-13).

This thematic data analysis also helped clarify the secondary objective of this study, which was to examine the factors that enabled these shared and relational practices. The two major themes of co-sensing and co-shaping revealed two enabling features to the shared and relational practices. Data segments that aligned with these emerging themes were identified and categorized under the themes of broadening perception of diversity and perception of barriers as doorways to new relational possibilities. The co-creation of shared and relational practices was led by these two enabling factors.

5.3.2 Analytical Procedure for Sub-study 2

The aim of Sub-Study 2 was to examine how leadership identity development manifests among a group of multicultural students at both the individual and collective levels. The study followed a qualitative content analysis approach that combined deductive and inductive methods. The data instruments included students' individual and group reflections, which were shared on an online discussion forum after an in-person working session, during face-to-face group discussions, and in the final learning assignments (see data samples in Ramamoorthi et al., 2023, p.153). Group discussions were audio and video recorded, and the audio recordings of the group reflections on collaboration were transcribed.

The analysis process began with an immersion stage. As a researcher, I engaged deeply with the data, creating notes and recording analytical insights on a comment sheet. Next, I repeatedly listened to audio recordings of the group discussions and reviewed the transcripts to derive meaningful insights (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). This iterative review enabled me to identify data segments that were rich in narrative detail, particularly in the context of learning interactions among the students. This stage presented challenges; as Sandelowski (1995) suggests: "one of the most paralyzing moments in conducting qualitative research is beginning analysis, when researchers must first look at their data in order to see what they should look for in their data" (p. 371). Having worked with similar data for sub-study 1, the intent in sub-study 2 was to develop a

systemic approach to the data, reorganizing the data into categories to address the research question.

I started to code the data in accordance with existing theoretical frameworks. The deductive analysis of the study was guided by the theoretical concepts of leadership identity development (LID) theory. The study focused on the three major categories of LID and their related attributes (Komives et al., 2005, p. 599). While the original theoretical model has several attributes under each of the categories, I chose those that were most relevant to this study's context and that appeared distinctly as I engaged with the data:

- the development of the self,
- a changing view of the self with others, and
- a broadening view of leadership and the related attributes of each category.

Starting with deductively developed codes derived from LID's broad categories allowed for the emergence of new topics suggested by the data as inductive codes. The three major categories of LID are connected in a cyclical manner theoretically. The attributes relevant to the data segments would often merge with one another, and I had to systemically reduce them to manageable themes and thematic segments.

As a result of this process, an interpretation of the data's significance within the specific context of the students learning in collaboration emerged. In qualitative content analysis, data are categorized using categories that are generated, at least in part, inductively (i.e. derived from the data) (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). This led to the themes of LID manifesting at both an individual and collective level, which were themes consistently emerging from the data (see Table 5 in Ramamoorthi et al., 2023, p.154) . This hybrid analysis provided evidence for the three categories of the LID theory in a relational context at the individual and collective levels. The main findings of this study hence showed how each of the LID categories manifests at the collective level in a relational context.

5.3.3 Analytical Procedure for Sub-study 3

Sub-study 3 employed a qualitative approach and thematic analysis. The typical phases of thematic analysis include familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with a close reading of the whole dataset followed by analysis using ATLAS.ti software. As the author, I was primarily responsible for the analytical process. However, debriefing sessions were held with the supervisory team to ensure rigor and triangulation (Flick, 2004) in the analysis.

The thematic analysis was deductive and followed a coding frame derived from appreciative inquiry theory and its two key concepts of social relations and generativity. After reviewing the data, initial codes were created by identifying segments that highlighted aspects of social relations and generativity resulting from the students' engagement in appreciative inquiry. Themes arose from connecting the codes and identifying patterns in the data (Pearse, 2019), and these

were systematically organised using ATLAS.ti software. The themes related to social and relational space included coalition building, mutual empowerment and support, inclusivity, openness to differences, and the ways in which students related to each other and as a group when in collaboration. The themes related to generativity included insights for an emerging future, envisioning of what students were collectively aiming to build, knowledge co-construction, web-like thinking, and framing and reframing of expanding perceptions.

An initial set of 34 codes related to the representations described above was generated using ATLAS.ti. These codes were structured systematically into sub-themes and finally into themes for this sub-study. The deductive analysis resulted in three main emerging themes related to collective leadership forms. These themes have been termed collaborative synergy, transformative connections and generative dialogues. These themes were new collective forms of leadership that manifested in relation to the Collaboratories Lab participants when appreciative inquiry was applied as a participatory pedagogy. The data sample for sub-study 3 is shown in Table 3.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

The entire research process followed the ethical guidelines laid out by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2012, 2019). This was of particular importance since the data for the sub-studies were collected from human beings.

The institution's orientation courses on ethical and open science research, and constant guidance and supervision from the supervisory team ensured that I maintained a meticulous and ethical approach in recording, presenting and evaluating the research results. The following sections provide additional information on the ethical considerations for this dissertation.

5.4.1 Participants and Research permissions

The Collaboratories Lab course was offered to master's students and exchange students in the field of education. The course was included in the curriculum of Current Issues in Learning and Pedagogy, a field of focus at a higher education institution in Finland. The programme details were shared during an in-person presentation to a new cohort of master's degree students. An email invitation to participate was also extended to all exchange and master's students within the faculty. This invitation mentioned that the course was part of a doctoral dissertation study and that those interested could access more detailed information through a link on the university portal. Interested participants voluntarily registered for the programme through the portal. In the introductory email and introductory session of the course, the students were again informed of the course's learning objectives and reminded that it was a part of a doctoral dissertation study. The students indicated their consent to participate by signing a form allowing their coursework, discussions, and interactions to be used as

research materials. Since all students were proficient in English, English was adopted as the common language for the programme. Students were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any point after they provided consent. One student withdrew from the study at the early stages of the Collaboratories Lab programme due to scheduling reasons, leaving the Collaboratories Lab with eight students.

The participants of the study were presented with an information sheet and a research permission form. The information sheet provided detailed aims and reasons for the study. The participants were informed that the study aimed to understand relational leadership and the co-creation of knowledge through relational dialogue. The research permission form informed the student participants that their participation in the research was voluntary and that their consent could be withdrawn at any point of the research process. They were also briefed that the research data would be handled and used in a confidential manner that would ensure the research participants' anonymity. The transcriptions and research publications used pseudonyms to mask the participants' identities. The mutual informed consent form was signed by both me and the participant in order to confirm that the ethical issues were clearly understood.

All the research data, the document connecting the pseudonyms and original data, and research permissions of the participants in every phase of the study were stored and handled through a secure location, so as to protect the privacy of the participants.The data were presented in person to the supervisory team when they need to be vetted for scientific rigour and accuracy.

5.4.2 Evaluation of the Students' Learning Assignments

The data the students generated during the Collaboratories Lab were all meant to be used for research purposes. The main data instruments for this dissertation included the students' learning reflections from the online discussion forum and the audio recordings of their group discussions, particularly the recordings related to their reflections on working together as a diverse group. The data for this research also included the learning assignments from the course. While the aim of the course was for students to build toolkit for collaboration upon which they might draw in their future roles in education and the workplace, the aim of the research was to study the manifestation of relational leadership among the students in a collaborative learning environment. Although both aims were interwoven, the entire course was designed through a range of participatory pedagogies that both supported and challenged this diverse group of students as it worked towards a common goal. In this manner, the learning goals of the Collaboratories Lab course were kept distinct from the research aim. Still, the course provided a rich context for studying learning interactions. The students' final course evaluations were based on their participation in the class sessions and in the online discussion forum as well as on the academic quality of their final learning assignments. The evaluation of the course yielded what was called "golden nuggets", or the students' key learnings of what could lead them from

collaboration to the co-creation of knowledge as a group of diverse learners. My students' insights and learning reflections helped me broaden my own perceptions about facilitating a diverse group of learners. I returned constantly to the course's learning objectives and outcomes while evaluating the course to overcome any unconscious bias.

6 OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

6.1 Sub-Study 1: Co-Sensing and Co-Shaping as Shared and Relational Practices in Bringing About Relational Leaders in Higher Education

The first aim of sub-study 1 was to investigate how and what kinds of relational and shared practices were demonstrated within a group of multicultural students in a collaborative and socially constructed learning environment in higher education. The second aim was to study which factors enabled shared and relational practices. The qualitative study drew data from student reflections and group discussions that took place during the Collaboratories Lab, an experimental lab for collaboration and generative dialogues.

There is an extensive literature on how relational leadership is experienced as interdependencies among group members when the group involves dynamic relations. The shared and relational practices were studied through the idea of relational leadership. The study also used the knowing-doing-being framework, a framework interrelated with relational leadership, to examine the shared and relational practices as knowledge, attitudes, and skills, which are integral pillars of leadership.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What kinds of relational and shared practices do higher education students create in collaboration to co-construct knowledge?

2. What factors enable, in particular the co-creation of shared and relational practices?

Sub-study 1 followed a thematic analysis wherein the data were examined through the complementary lenses of the relational leadership model (Komives

et al., 2013) and the knowing-being-doing framework (Snook et al., 2012). The findings showed that shared and relational practices manifest in two forms. The first is the shared and relational practice of co-sensing. This refers to the students' awareness of their relational interdependence when functioning as a group. There existed a richness in the human connections, along with a simultaneous openness to differences and new perspectives and views. The second shared and relational practice is co-shaping, which refers to individuals operating as a group and working towards a collective vision. Co-shaping refers to the process by which a group shares a common vision and works as a whole. Here, they worked toward their goal of acquiring knowledge on collaboration, thereby realizing their collective potential.

With regard to the second aim of the study, which was to examine the factors that enable co-sensing and co-shaping, it was found that there was a broadening perception of diversity. The students also demonstrated an ability to perceive barriers to collaboration as new relational opportunities. These were instrumental in enabling the shared and relational practices to manifest and flourish.

Overall, the findings show that the shared and relational practices of co-sensing and co-shaping are inclusive, empowering, ethical, and purposeful and provide the essential synergy for knowledge construction. Co-sensing and co-shaping are, therefore, defined in this study as amalgamations of shared and relational practices inherent to relational leaders. The findings also show how a group of students working synergistically became relational leaders and overcame barriers to collaboration through shared and relational practices.

6.2 Sub-Study 2: Manifestations of Leadership Identity Development Among Multicultural Higher Education Students

Sub-study 2 addressed the following research question: How does leadership identity development manifest at the individual and collective levels within a group of multicultural students? Leadership identity development theory and the leadership identity development model, which are interrelated and form a leadership identity development framework, were used to examine the data for this study. This framework originally emerged from studies on relational leadership theories. The thematic content analysis, which was conducted both deductively and inductively, indicated that leadership identity developed uniquely at the collective level.

Leadership identity development was studied in relation to three major categories: the developing self, the changing self with others, and the broadening view of leadership. Each of these was studied at the individual and collective levels. The main findings of this study show that the developing self was represented by the collective impulse, manifesting in an intensifying willingness

and motivation to contribute towards achieving shared goals. The changing view of the self with others was represented by collective cognition. This is defined by how students synthesize the experiences of others to create new meanings, and how they integrate these new meanings with their own experiences. This helped the students build a stronger understanding of how to work together. The broadening view of leadership was represented by co-creation at the core of the group. This is defined by how everyone in the group exercised their strengths and skills, creating fluidity in roles, and how the group enabled a space of co-creation and generativity.

Essentially, the study points out that leadership identity development manifests at the collective level in unique ways that can support a group of students in their ability to collaborate. This would enable young emerging leaders to experience the power of co-creation, innovation, and change.

6.3 Sub-Study 3: Appreciative Inquiry as a Pedagogical Approach to Collective Leadership Formation Among Higher Education Students

The purpose of sub-study 3 was to explore collective leadership formation within a multicultural student group when appreciative inquiry was applied as a participatory pedagogy. The results were obtained by examining the interactions among the students using the theory of appreciative inquiry, with its fundamental concepts of social relations and generativity. The study posed the research question: What forms of collective leadership are uncovered when appreciative inquiry is applied as a pedagogical approach within a multicultural student group in a higher education learning environment?

The data analysis was conducted deductively (deductive qualitative analysis) using the theory of appreciative inquiry and through two main theoretical lenses: social relations and generativity. The data analysis yielded a set of codes that were correlated with these theoretical lenses and three emerging collective leadership themes. The study suggests three collective leadership outputs: (1) collaborative synergy, which enabled the students to find common ground and build their ability for collective envisioning and action; (2) transformative connections, which provided the social fields on which radical connections could be made; and (3) generative dialogues, which were characterized by generative listening and inviting the collective wisdom of the group. Appreciative inquiry is hence a creative pedagogy that allows for embodied narratives to emerge and can generate shifts in attitudes and values with deepening self-awareness. With an increasingly diverse student population in educational spaces and workspaces, there is a growing need to learn the skills necessary for working together towards an emerging and collectively desired future. Appreciative inquiry is highlighted as pedagogical scaffolding that can support this much-needed process in higher education. Appreciative inquiry

acted as a support, helping students identify new forms of organising themselves and possibilities for collective forms of leadership that are open to change and reconstruction as situations evolve. Research on appreciative inquiry and collective leadership (Sim, 2019) indicates that further investigation is needed into how collaboration and generativity interconnect and give rise to leadership and how to create processes that amplify the dimensions of collaboration and generativity This sub-study contributes to a further understanding of this intersectional space and specifically to understanding how the collective leadership forms of collaborative synergy, transformative connections, and generative dialogues are supported by applying appreciative inquiry as a pedagogical approach to a collaborative learning environment.

7 DISCUSSION AND SUMMARIZED RESULTS

This dissertation aims to develop an understanding of relational leadership manifestations in a socially constructed learning environment. These relational leadership manifestations were studied in terms of relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and participatory pedagogies that enable forms of collective leadership. In this section, I will present how the dissertation's three main concepts are interconnected and summarize my results, contributions, and conclusions from an academic and practical perspective. I evaluate the study, discuss its limitations, and put forward ideas for future research on this topic.

7.1 Summary of the Results: Synthesis of the Sub-Studies on Relational Leadership Manifestations in Higher Education

This chapter bridges the results obtained from the three sub-studies, answering the research questions and complementing the findings with more recent scholarly work on relational leadership in socially constructed learning environments in higher education. Figure 5 shows the main concepts of the dissertation, which are interconnected. The objective in this discussion is to examine what has emerged from these three sub-studies. The synthesis of the key findings from the three studies provides a deeper understanding of relational leadership manifestations in a collaborative and socially constructed learning environment.

The basic assumptions of this dissertation have been guided by several core findings from previous research on relational leadership. First, leadership situated in relationships goes beyond hierarchical roles (Fletcher, 2012; Gronn, 2015; Kezar, 2006). Second, leadership is grounded in rich interdependencies that foster the emergence of social order and action (Endres & Weibler, 2017; Uhl-bien, 2006). Third, at a collective level, relational leadership involves the process through which social systems evolve, shaping the socially constructed roles and

relationships that can be identified as forms of leadership (Crevani et al., 2010; Engelsberger et al., 2022; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) argue further that leadership occurs through experience and relationship, suggesting that researchers need to study leadership and its development through examining what emerges in interaction (Reynolds et al., 2023).

The dissertation describes relational leadership manifestations in a socially constructed learning environment in higher education as students participate in learning interactions. The relational perspective of leadership addresses the interactions and relationships among individuals as an emerging social influence (Endres & Weibler, 2017; Uhl-Bien, 2006). A relational view of leadership has implications not only for how leadership is conceptualized and studied but also for how leadership development can be practiced in educational settings and communities (McCauley & Palus, 2021). The findings from this dissertation yield an understanding of how relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and collective leadership forms can be enabled in learning environments in higher education, adding to the understanding of relational leadership manifestations and, more importantly, augmenting relational leadership in practice in higher education settings.

As shown by the results of sub-study 1, individuals can make meaningful contributions to group work when they utilize shared and relational practices created within the learning environment. Moreover, groups of people "working together for collective outcomes" generate leadership (McCauley & Palus, 2021, p. 2). From this emerging collaboration, a social order evolves, and new values, attitudes, and behaviours are produced through students' engagement in true relational leadership (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Fletcher, 2012; Uhl-Bien, 2006). In this sub-study, all the shared and relational practices were considered integral parts of a socially constructed learning environment. Importantly, the socially constructed learning environment builds the essential synergy for the manifestation of shared and relational practices. These relational and shared practices emerged in this study as two major themes, co-sensing and co-shaping, as applied from Scharmer's work (2009). The shared and relational practices of co-sensing and co-shaping resulted from relational leadership when the student group started to sense itself as one whole, as an interconnected organism working towards a shared goal. Moreover, shared and relational practices that are inclusive, empowering, ethical, and purposeful (Komives et al., 2013) provide the essential synergy and momentum for acquiring appropriate knowledge.

When a group of higher education students are engaged in a shared learning endeavour with emergent coordination (Crevani et al., 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006), they are relational leaders in a socially constructed learning interaction. This also influences the leadership identity development of the students (Komives et al., 2005, 2006; McCarron et al., 2023) at both the individual and collective levels. Results from sub-study 2 show how leadership identity manifests within a relational training context (i.e. the Collaboratories Lab) in a multicultural student group in higher education at the individual and collective

levels. Leadership identity development, as articulated in Komives et al.'s (2005, 2006) theory and model, is a complex, dynamic, and cyclical process through which individuals move from a fundamental awareness of leadership identity to an integration of leadership into their core being (McCarron, 2023). This is in alignment with the findings from sub-study 2, where students stepped into being a collective with a broadening view of leadership and integrated this view as a part of their leadership identity. Leadership identity development at the collective level enabled them to achieve their shared goals, allowing for framing and reframing (Crevani, 2015) of how they related to each other. The three categories of leadership identity development—the developing self, the self with others, and a broadening view of leadership—were activated with a cyclical flow, with one influencing the other and allowing for leadership identity development to manifest and evolve.

By emphasizing the collective and the power of relationships in collaboration (Haber-Curran & Pierre, 2023), this dissertation suggests that leadership identity development manifests through open will and motivation to contribute to a collective impulse to achieve shared goals (Boettcher & Gansemer-Topf, 2015), to nurture the collective cognition while integrating diverse perspectives (McCarron et al., 2023), and to build a collective capacity for co-creation, generativity, and innovation (Scharmer, 2021). These findings contribute to how the leadership identity development of the participants manifested at the individual and collective levels.

The ability to learn effectively together and build generative capacities requires participatory pedagogies that facilitate students' learning interactions. Sub-study 3 suggests that participatory pedagogies work as a scaffolding for individuals to achieve their shared learning goals. Sub-study 3 explains the manifestation of collective leadership formation that emerges when appreciative inquiry is employed as a participatory pedagogy. Appreciative inquiry and appreciative perspective involve human connections for some kind of transformation: "individual, group, organizational, and/or societal" (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012, p. 64). In exercising collective leadership, a group or team works towards a common vision, creates inclusive spaces, and encourages empowering dialogues (Komives et al., 2013) that support collective forms of leadership.

Research on appreciative inquiry and collective leadership (Sim, 2019) indicates that further investigation is needed to understand how collaboration and generativity interconnect and give rise to leadership and how processes that amplify these dimensions can be created. Sub-study 3 contributes to a further understanding of this intersectional space, specifically about how the collective leadership forms of collaborative synergy, transformative connections, and generative dialogues are developed in a higher education learning environment within a group of students. The three collective leadership forms are interwoven, and each drives the others.

Relational leadership manifests in three distinct ways in this dissertation: (1) in relational and shared practices, (2) in leadership identity development in a

relational context, and (3) in forms of collective leadership when participatory pedagogy is applied. Each of these manifestations is represented by unique socially constructed forms, as discussed earlier in this section and shown in Figure 5. These three manifestations help us to see that rich connections, the intentional inclusivity of diversity, and the integration of diverse perspectives lead to a generative outcome in this relational, social field. The students in the Collaboratories Lab can be perceived as one social body moving towards their shared learning goals through these relational leadership manifestations.

Relational leadership manifestations have not been researched as a combination of these three distinct concepts in the context of higher education. These three concepts of relational leadership manifested and were studied in the same socially constructed learning environment of the Collaboratories Lab. The collaborative learning among the students in the Collaboratories Lab was inclusive, empowering, purposeful, and ethical (Komives et al., 2013). Hence, the dissertation shows how learning and leadership are interrelated and can be nurtured simultaneously in socially constructed higher education environments. This is discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter. The three sub-studies all incorporate these elements of learning and leadership, with each enabling the other.

A model that depicts how learning and leadership are intertwined and supported by the three concepts of relational leadership manifestations is presented in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5 The model of relational leadership manifestations in a socially constructed learning environment in higher education

7.2 Learning and Leadership and Their Interconnections in Higher Education

The connection between learning and leadership is an important area of research in higher education and allows us to conceptualize leadership in creative ways (Clair, 2020; Dempster, 2009; Kezar et al., 2006; Quinlan, 2014). Many of the studies centre around leadership in learning and teaching (Macneill et al., 2005; Richards, 2012; Zhang, 2021), effectively leading teaching teams (Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2018), and promoting quality teaching experiences for students (Bovill, 2020). In this dissertation, the findings show that learning and leadership can be interconnected by relational leadership manifestations in a socially constructed higher education learning environment.

The aim related to learning in the Collaboratories Lab was for students to acquire knowledge on collaboration through setting shared learning goals. The Collaboratories Lab was not conceived of as a leadership training programme

but rather as an experimental learning environment for collaboration. This learning environment furthered the connection between leadership and learning.

The literature that connects learning and leadership has identified significant leadership growth through engagement with diverse people and varied experiences and ideas. These kinds of learning engagements shape leadership self-perceptions, which are influenced by both social constructs and internal reflections (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Jones et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2021). By bringing meaningful experiences into the learning space through relational and shared practices and participatory pedagogies, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of relational leadership manifestation as grounded in relational processes. These relational manifestations enabled participants to contribute to each other's leadership identity development.

The findings from this dissertation show that when we design the learning environment using participatory pedagogies, such as appreciative inquiry, it allows participants to share their learning experiences and build their collective leadership capacities. Consequently, the learning environment holds potential for both learning and leadership. This can create impactful learning in higher education settings while nurturing leadership through relational practices and building collective capacity to meet challenges in a more conscious, intentional, and inclusive way (Scharmer, 2018).

7.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have many practical implications. In complex global situations, we need to focus on building groups that can make cognitively complex decisions and adapt to multiple worldviews. Leadership is a collective process found among many distinct groups of individuals in higher education.

First, the findings of sub-study 1 suggest the importance of relational and shared practices. The practices of co-shaping and co-sensing, an integration of many shared and relational practices, provide higher education student groups with effective learning and knowledge acquisition in a collaborative and socially constructed learning environment. The expanding mindset that individual students bring to leadership through shared and relational practices contradicts the idea that leadership is situated only in hierarchies or informal positions of leadership. Hence, higher education can encourage the design of courses that are experimental and grounded in research-based theory. This can help create safe, open learning environments and allow for experiential learning. The use of creative teaching tools and the powerful, reflective questioning that helps in directing learning goals, dialogical interactions, assessment, and feedback are essential ingredients to learning.

Second, the findings from the three sub-studies suggest that pedagogical practices should help students observe and perceive the presence of diverse perspectives. This enables them to understand how these perspectives can co-

exist and be used as a resource for furthering knowledge consciously and objectively. Creating learning spaces that acknowledge diversity as a resource and a scaffolding for integrating varied perspectives can lead students to build stronger and more empowering learning relationships. This, in turn, enables relational practices and leadership identity development that nurture collective forms of leadership. University teachers, researchers, and students who wish to co-design learning processes can be trained in various forms of participatory pedagogy so that learning experiences may become more open to experimentation and reflection.

Third, the dissertation suggests that learning environments that encourage students to take ownership of the learning process are key to sustaining socially constructed learning and leadership. Opportunities should be provided for students to set learning goals collectively and in alignment with larger course objectives. This activates the co-construction of knowledge and leadership.

Fourth, the dissertation indicates that leadership and learning can be nurtured simultaneously in higher education learning environments. The findings from this study can be applied in the design of collaborative and socially constructed learning programmes in higher education. They could also be used by organizations that design leadership training programmes or by individuals designing curricula for university students who wish to incorporate leadership learning into the study programme, irrespective of the field of study.

The findings from this dissertation indicate how a group of students working together manifested relational leadership through relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and collective forms of leadership. This helped them overcome barriers to collaboration. The study results can be used by co-working student groups to develop a self-evaluation tool or a reflective tool for evaluating collaboration among the group members. This study also adds emphasis to how learning environments serve as nourishing spaces in the formation of relational leaders ready for the complexity of changing workplaces. Finally, the findings provide fresh perspectives for building stronger learning relationships in higher education settings among multicultural learning communities.

7.4 Evaluating Research Trustworthiness

The studies in this dissertation are founded on the paradigm that reality is socially constructed, both shaped by and shaping context. Researchers must be aware of their positioning and be able to evaluate research quality. In this section, I look at the aspects of trustworthiness evaluated through the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korjstens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility refers to the researcher's training and experience as well as the techniques and methods used for collecting and analysing data (Patton, 1999). The data collected for this dissertation were rich in terms of the volume of text

collected as well as its quality and depth, as explained in the methodology in Chapter 5. I gained familiarity with the data as it was being collected and reviewed. My analysis and interpretations of the data were shared with the supervisory team and in collegial meetings throughout the course of the research to serve the purpose of triangulation (Flick, 2004). I built my knowledge on the subject and extant literature steadily throughout the dissertation process. The beginning of the research period was spent in an in-depth study of the related literature on collective forms of leadership and qualitative research techniques. My conference presentations and resulting discussions enabled further learning in this sphere. My work experience in teaching higher education students and my leadership training and interactions with educational leaders during training were beneficial in helping me build a deeper understanding of this area of knowledge.

The credibility of this study is also reflected in the credibility of the sub-studies' results. The main aim of the study was to understand how a group of students working together manifested relational leadership during their learning interactions. The extant theoretical understandings of relational leadership were guiding factors in the data collection and analysis. Sub-study 1 relied on works from scholarly literature on relational leadership and the literature on the knowing-doing-being framework for leadership. Both frameworks enabled a deeper understanding of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills employed by the students from a relational leadership perspective. This understanding helped in the creation of a set of codes and respective definitions and the eventual development of an analysis guided by the theoretical frameworks in the relational leadership literature. While there may have been some bias in the interpretations of the meanings of the shared and relational practices uncovered in this study, the approach was justified by criss-crossing the meanings from both leadership frameworks, assuring the credibility of sub-study 1.

In sub-study 2, the concept of leadership identity development in a relational context was examined at an individual and collective level within the student group. The analysis, the categorizations of the data, and the credibility of the results were guided by previous scholarly work on leadership identity development among students who were not in a position of leadership. The LID theoretical framework that guided the data analysis for sub-study 2 was developed based on extensive research in the domain of relational leadership (Komives et al., 2005, 2006). The credibility of the sub-study was further evaluated by discussing the interpretations and results during supervisory meetings and discussions.

The research objectives of this study did not influence or bias the students, as reflected in the fact that they never used the phrases "relational leadership", "leadership identity" or "collective leadership" in the Collaboratories Lab. The focus of the course was for the students to build their own knowledge on collaboration and create a toolkit of practices that would aid their future roles at work. The data collected from the students thereby remained undiluted. These data consisted of students' expressions of their experiences of working together

as a diverse group and reflections on the factors that enabled them to navigate this space to achieve their shared goals. This further supports the credibility of the results from the sub-studies and this dissertation.

Sub-study 3 uncovered the collective leadership forms that were enabled when appreciative inquiry was applied as a participatory pedagogy. Here again, appreciative inquiry had been extensively studied, and a thorough literature review had been undertaken to aid in understanding the theory of appreciative inquiry, its principles, and social constructivist dimensions. There was limited literature on the application of appreciative inquiry as a pedagogical approach in educational contexts. Hence, the data analysis relied on the attributes of appreciative inquiry in relation to collaboration and leadership. The results have expanded our understanding of appreciative inquiry as a pedagogical approach and as a tool for collective leadership, which was the aim of sub-study 3. The results were discussed and reviewed by the supervisory team to assure credibility.

Transferability addresses the extent to which the results of a study can be reproduced in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results of the three sub-studies originated in a particular context and learning environment. There is sufficient information provided about the context in terms of design and content to allow for the study to be reproduced. Contextual elements play a critical role in this kind of qualitative study. The results do indicate that participatory pedagogies can strengthen learning relationships and provide an example for future research. Sufficient context was provided to enable potential future research transfer by other researchers.

Dependability refers to the extent to which other researchers and readers can follow the way research is presented and conducted and their ability to repeat it even if the same results are not obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is achieved through transparent methodologies, clear documentation of procedures, and confirmation of the study's results through a systematic and reliable process. In sub-study 1, the research process has been outlined along with tables that demonstrate the crisscrossing of the two leadership models through which the data were analysed. Sub-study 1 also includes a table illustrating the data segments and showing how the emerging themes are embedded in the data.

This shows how the research was conducted and presented and allows for transparency. In sub-study 2, the data were analysed through a hybrid analysis, and the codes and emerging themes were discussed thoroughly with the supervisory team to reduce any existing bias. Sub-study 3 presents a visual of how the themes were generated and a table illustrating sample data segments. The methodology and analytical process are clearly detailed to clarify how the research was conducted.

Confirmability refers to the researcher's objectivity. This involves ensuring that the findings are derived from the study participants' experiences and are not influenced by the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). Sub-study 1 exploited a thematic analysis, which was carried out systematically according to the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). The coding theme development and

analysis findings were reviewed systematically along with the supervisory team and in regular meetings with post-doctoral students to reduce the element of bias. For sub-study 2, the analysis was both inductive and deductive. This hybrid approach helped me look at the data more deeply and develop the research findings. Sub-study 3 includes a detailed diagrammatic description of the codes and categories. For all sub-studies, there is a tabular representation of the data segments and the themes to which they correspond, allowing for transparency about how the interpretations were made.

7.5 Limitations of the Research

This research has some limitations. First, this study was empirically conducted at a single university in Finland with a small group of students. The results might be different in teams or groups that include students from a broader demographic spectrum. In addition, the students' diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds may have hindered them to some extent in being able to relate to their fellow participants' personal or educational experiences in their home countries. Despite the limited number of student participants in this study, the three-month-long duration of the Collaboratories Lab and the depth of the data generated make the sample size adequate for this specific research.

Second, the multiculturality of the students was both an advantage and disadvantage in the context of this study. If one were to apply the study's findings in culturally homogeneous groups, the ways in which the students adapt would perhaps be different and yield distinctive results. The presence of multiculturality influenced how the students collaborated since they were all functioning from the common ground of being from foreign cultures and studying in a new country and learning environment. The way that students from the same cultural background collaborate might be noticeably different from the way students collaborate when they come from different cultural backgrounds.

Third, while the results of the study do provide an example for future research, one challenge could be that the facilitation of the Collaboratories Lab had elements of teaching and learning that cannot be entirely generalized and may require specific prior training or knowledge. This includes training or orientation in applying collaborative methodologies and participatory pedagogies in higher education settings and among diverse groups of students.

7.6 Future Research

We need more research on the best practices within student groups and on how students can overcome barriers to collaboration and build working groups that have the potential to act effectively in a global society. This dissertation was a

step in that direction. Replicating the Collaboratories Lab and offering it as a course in varied university settings could be a very interesting extension to this study. Developing more creative ways to study and understand leadership, such as awareness-based methodologies and the embodied experiences of groups, would add layers of deep data that help us conceptualize and understand leadership as a shared and collective endeavour.

Another perspective to future research could be to use focused group interviews to follow the academic or professional journeys of the participants of courses that conjoin learning and leadership. The intention could be to examine how and if the relational aspects of leadership continue to exist and evolve, thereby deepening our understanding of how relational leadership development happens in practice among individuals and groups over extended periods.

In terms of methodology, this study presents rich data sets, but these could not all be used in this dissertation. Future research teams could carry out studies collecting data from student groups and employing varied analytical methodologies, such as the diary method and focus group interviews, to have more detailed narratives of students' learning experiences. In addition, the data analysis could include methodologies such as narrative analysis, discourse analysis, or conversational analysis. Such approaches could yield new insights in the domain of relational leadership within student groups.

7.7 Conclusions

This dissertation aimed to provide a new understanding of how relational leadership manifests in a multicultural student group in higher education. The findings reveal three distinct manifestations, each with its unique set of relational and shared practices, leadership identity development, and collective forms of leadership.

First, the findings from the study indicate that the students observed themselves as a part of a diverse group, embracing alternative worldviews through co-sensing and co-shaping while recognizing themselves as a single, unified entity. Moreover, barriers to collaboration were perceived as opportunities to strengthen relational bridges, allowing a broadening view of diversity.

Second, leadership identity manifested at a collective level in three ways: as the collective impulse to achieve shared goals; as collective cognition, which is defined by how students synthesize the experiences of others to create new meanings and integrate them with their own experiences; and as co-creation at the core, which is how groups exercise their strengths and skills and create fluidity in roles.

Third, the collective leadership forms of collaborative synergy, generative dialogues, and transformative connections were formed in higher education learning within a group of students when participatory pedagogies were applied to the learning environment. These were all demonstrated as inherent practices

by the students, who were relational leaders and not necessarily in any formal positions of leadership.

Finally, I observed that when the students experienced positive collaboration in working towards their shared learning goals, there was a synergy developed through the learning interactions. This synergy was created and sustained through relational leadership manifestations throughout the learning period. In addition, responding to the lack of adequate training for leadership in higher education (Kezar et al., 2006), the findings of this study could provide a fresh understanding of how leadership training could be developed at the student level, both individually and collectively.

YHTEENVETO

Tänä globaalien haasteiden aikana korkeakoulujen on valmistettava opiskelijoita tekemään kognitiivisesti haastavia päätöksiä ja sopeutumaan moniin eri maailmankatsomuksiin. Vastatakseen tähän tarpeeseen korkea-asteen oppilaitokset voivat opettaa erilaisia taitoja, tietoja ja taustoja omaavat opiskelijat tekemään yhteistyötä ja saavuttamaan yhteisiä tavoitteita. Pedagoginen ja oppimislähtöinen lähestymistapa johtamiseen on olennainen yhteisöllisen johtamisen valmiuksien kehittämiseksi ja johtajuuden sosiaalisen pääoman kartuttamiseksi korkeakouluopiskelijoiden keskuudessa. Suhdetaitojen ja johtamiskyvyn välttämättömyyden sekä tulevien johtajien ja opiskelijoiden aiheesta käyvän keskustelun seurauksena tämä väitöskirja tarjoaa näkökulmia siihen, miten johtajuutta voidaan kehittää osallistavan pedagogiikan ja yhteistoiminnallisen oppimisen avulla. Tällainen lähestymistapa luo opiskelijoille mahdollisuuksia kehittää johtamistaitoja riippumatta siitä, toimivatko he myöhemmin johtotehtävissä tai saavatko oppilaitoksessaa muodollista johtamiskoulutusta.

Väitöskirjassani tutkin, kuinka ihmissuhteissa tapahtuva johtajuus ilmenee korkeakoulujen yhteisöllisesti rakennetuissa oppimisympäristöissä. Väitöskirjassa tarkastelen suhteiden välisiä yhteisiä käytäntöjä, johtamisen identiteetin kehittymistä yhteisöllisessä kontekstissa sekä arvostavan tutkimuksen (*appreciative inquiry*) mahdollistamia kollektiivisia johtajuusmuotoja, kun sitä käytetään pedagogisena työkaluna. Tutkimuksessa keskityn erityisesti suhteissa tapahtuvaan johtajuuteen monikulttuurisessa korkeakouluopiskelijoiden ryhmässä.

Väitöskirjan kolme erityistä painopistettä ovat suhteiden väliset ja jaetut käytännöt sosiaalisesti rakennetuissa oppimisympäristöissä, johtamisen identiteetin kehittäminen suhteissa tapahtuvassa johtajuuden kontekstissa sekä yhteisölliset johtajuusmuodot, kun arvostavaa tutkimusta käytetään pedagogisena työkaluna. Väitöskirjassa tarkastelen seuraavia tutkimuskysymyksiä: 1) Millaisia relationaalisia ja jaettuja käytäntöjä korkeakouluopiskelijat osoittavat yhteistyössä rakentaessaan tietoa yhdessä? 2) Mitkä tekijät mahdollistavat erityisesti jaettujen ja relationaalisten käytäntöjen yhteiskehittämisen? 3) Miten johtamisidentiteetin kehittyminen ilmenee monikulttuurisessa opiskelijaryhmässä yksilöllisellä ja kollektiivisella tasolla? 4) Millaisia kollektiivisen johtajuuden muotoja ilmenee arvostavan tutkimuksen kautta monikulttuurisessa opiskelijaryhmässä?

Väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta osatutkimuksesta. Tiedot tutkimukseen kerättiin Collaboratories Lab -nimiseltä kurssilta. Kurssiin sisältyi ryhmäkeskusteluja, oppimistehtäviä, opiskelijoiden pohdintoja verkkokeskustelufoorumissa sekä kurssin lopputyönä toteutettu opiskelijoiden itse suunnittelema interventio. Osatutkimukset olivat tapaustutkimuksia, ja niissä käytettiin tutkimusmenetelmänä kvalitatiivista tutkimusta. Osatutkimukset lisäävät ymmärrystä suhteissa tapahtuvasta johtajuudesta, johtajuuden identiteetin kehittämisestä ja kollektiivisen johtamisen muodoista. Ensimmäinen osatutkimus osoitti, että opiskelijat näkevät itsensä osana monimuotoista ryhmää. Opiskelijat omaksuivat vaihtoehtoisia maailmankatsomuksia yhdessä. Yhteistyön esteet nähtiin mahdollisuuksina vahvistaa opiskelijoiden välisiä suhteita ja laajentaa näkemyksiä

monimuotoisuudesta. Toisessa osatutkimuksessa johtajuuden identiteetti ilmeni kollektiivisella tasolla kolmella tavalla: kollektiivisena impulssina yhteisten tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi, kollektiivisena kognitiona eli toisten opiskelijoiden kokemuksien yhdistämisenä uusien merkitysten luomiseksi ja yhteisenä luomisena, jossa ryhmä sujuvoitti erilaisia yksilörooleja vahvuuksiensa avulla. Kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa havaittiin, että yhteistoiminnallista synergiaa, generatiivista dialogia ja transformatiivisia yhteyksiä syntyi, kun osallistavaa pedagogiikkaa sovellettiin korkeakoulujen oppimisympäristöissä. Opiskelijat harjoittavat näitä käytäntöjä suhteissa johtamalla ilman muodollista johtoasemaakin.

Väitöskirjassani osoitan, kuinka oppiminen ja johtaminen kytkeytyvät toisiinsa, ja kuinka ne voidaan sosiaalisesti konstruoida korkeakouluympäristöissä. Tulokset tarjoavat käytännöllisiä tapoja hyödyntää erilaisten opiskelijoiden välisiä suhteita sosiaalisesti rakennetuissa oppimisympäristöissä. Väitöskirjassani kannustan korkeakouluja ja johtamiskoulutusta soveltamaan yhteisöllisiä oppimisohjelmia. Lisäksi väitöskirjassa tarjotaan opastusta opetussuunnitelmien tekijöille johtajuuden integroimiseksi korkeakoulujen opetusohjelmiin koulutusalasta riippumatta. Tämä tutkimus korostaa oppimisympäristöjen merkitystä ihmissuhteissa tapahtuvalle johtajuudelle, koska opiskelijoiden on tärkeää valmistua nykytyöpaikkojen moninaisiin haasteisiin, ja tarjoaa tuoretta näkemystä entistä vahvempien oppimissuhteiden rakentamiseksi monikulttuurisissa korkeakouluympäristöissä.

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APPENDIX

The following chart shows the flow of Collaboratories Lab course. It lists the activities, materials, and projects in which the students engaged during the course.

Collaboratories Lab

Theme	What does it contain?	What does it involve?	Data collected
Invitation to the course	Pre-task: To support your personal and professional aspirations, please send a short write-up (150–200 words) by email on what your expectations are from the Collaboratories course and what kind of space you envision it to be.	Email	
Group games	Some simple drama-based games (e.g. heads up, heads down, and energy circle) as ice breakers and an introduction	Group games	Photographs
Collaborative games	The marshmallow challenge, besides being an icebreaker, promotes collaboration, leadership, design thinking and prototyping, and self-reflection as a peer and collaborative learner. It can also be a pedagogical tool.	Group games and dialogue	Photographs

	Some reflection questions based on your experiences of the first thread of discussion on this forum: What did you notice about your team? What did you notice about yourself? What happened during this exercise? Highlight learning in the context of any of the above themes.	Online discussion forums Literature on collaboration and the marshmallow challenge	Online discussion forum text 17 pages
Leading and being led	Being in a team and envisioning roles	Mirroring-drama game Story mapping: highs and lows from personal and professional life experiences of collaborating, being led, or leading	Photographs Story Mapping Visuals
	Questions to explore: • In a team, which role do you prefer: being a leader or being led? • Are there other roles we have not thought about in a team other than a leader and a follower? • What would a collaborative team look like to you? • What new roles (or the way you relate to each other) do you think people would take up in a collaborative effort?	Online discussion forum Literature on collaboration and leadership	Online discussion forum text 12 pages

Experiencing and understanding working in groups; Being part of a team **Exploring diversity through experiential stories**	Warm-up (theme based on a recent event at the university)	Mini exercise on collaborative poetry writing	
	Storytelling: Beeble Bee and Beeble Boo story, followed by a small group discussion Question prompts • Do we see differences among us when we work as a group/team? • How do these differences manifest? Do they really exist?	Dialogue	Photographs
	Based on Herman's grid, share: • Have you ever had the wrong first impression of someone with a different background? • Has someone from a different background had the wrong first impression of you?	Herman's Grid activity Small group discussion	
Introduction to the Appreciative Inquiry model	Introduction to appreciative inquiry, a story of how and why appreciative inquiry started How and why is it different from problem-solving, and how and why does it still solve problems?	Teacher-led session with an introduction to appreciative inquiry	

The art of designing powerful questions	Explore videos and texts about the appreciative inquiry model and share briefly in groups what you discovered.	Suggested texts, video links Reading circles (literature) Sharing in small groups	
	Design a relevant, powerful, collective question that each group wants to explore for the appreciative inquiry exercise.	Collaboratively designing a powerful question	Charts and Written material from the groups of their brainstorming process
Appreciative Inquiry model: Session 1	Exploring the appreciative inquiry question together, based on the powerful questioning session	Working as a team through the discovery phase	Audio recordings Group 1 2 hours 15 minutes Group 2 2 hours 33 minutes Video recordings Group 1 2 hours 15 minutes Group 2 2 hours 33 minutes
	Some reflections questions based on your experience for the first thread of discussion on this design thinking model: • What did you notice about your team? • What did you notice about yourself? • What happened during this exercise? • Highlight learning in the context of col-laboration, co-crea-tion, knowledge	Online discussion	Online discussion forum text 3 pages

	building, or collective inquiry		
Appreciative Inquiry model: Session 2	Exploring the appreciative inquiry question further Working as a team through the dream phase	Working in groups	Audio recordings Group 1 1 hour 38 minutes Group 2 1 hour 38 minutes Video recordings Group 1 1 hour 38 minutes Group 2 1 hour 38 minutes
	Some reflections questions based on your experience for the first thread of discussion on this design thinking model: • What did you notice about your team? • What did you notice about yourself? • What happened during this exercise? • Can you highlight your learning in the context of collaboration, co-creation, knowledge building, or collective inquiry?	Online discussion	Online discussion forum text 11 pages

Appreciative Inquiry model: Session 3 (Design phase)	Here are the reflection questions for the forum. Please address each question in your reflections.	Working as a team through the design phase	Audio recordings Group 1 1 hour 11 minutes Group 2 1 hour 20 minutes Video recordings Group 1 1 hour 11 minutes Group 2 1 hour 20 minutes
	• Did you observe any new roles and dimensions in a collaboration that came up during a collective inquiry project? • Having been through the course this far, what are you learning at this point in terms of enablers of and constraints to collaboration? • Have you experienced moments when you were leading or when you were being led during the appreciative inquiry project? • How were your experiences different from what you had experienced before?	Online discussion	Online discussion forum text 14 pages

Sharing and presenting the school change models designed by the groups	Groups share their models and a visual representation and share their experiences of being through the appreciative inquiry exercise. Exploring and brainstorming the applicability of the design models and what to keep in mind if they must be put through the deployment phase	Presentation Collective brainstorming Mind mapping	Video Recordings Group 1: 16 Minutes Group 2: 22 minutes
Divergence; convergence; emergence	'All That We Share' video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc	Video-based discussion and reflection	
	The divergence, emergence, and convergence model	A brief explanation of the model followed by question prompts	Audio Recordings Group 1 1 hour 26 minutes Group 2 48 minutes
	How do we experience this space individually and collectively? Express through visual art your experience and understanding of this space.	Art session: individual work time Students explore the question prompts with individual writings and then express the writing in art or visual format.	Paintings Photographs
	Painting prompts for a dialogue-based workshop on diversity and the experience of working with and within diversity Exploration through art and dialogue	Online discussion: the same question prompts throughout the art session and online discussion	Online discussion forum text 11 pages

	• Does some newness always emerge from divergence? • What does the space of convergence feel like? What do you think it contains? • How do we assimilate individually and collectively from diverse ideas or opinions? • What does emergence look, feel, or sound like? • How do any of these phases connect/appear/evolve in the space of collaboration? Express your experiences working as teams.	Live-group discussion using paintings as prompts	Online discussion forum text (descriptions of the paintings) 4 pages Audio Recording 1 hour 18 minutes Video Recording 1 hour 18 minutes
Feedback session **Closing session**	Conversation mapping (silent dialogue) A technique using three provocative questions or statements that help you get multiple views from a large group over a short period Wisdom board The final assignment asked students to develop a toolbox for collaboration for use in their future aspirational roles in the space of education. An essay based on the readings, experiences, and learnings from the Collaboratories Lab was the final assignment.		Visual mapping on charts Online discussion forum text 2 pages Final assignment includes 76 pages of text

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

CO-SENSING AND CO-SHAPING AS SHARED AND RELATIONAL PRACTICES IN BRINGING ABOUT RELATIONAL LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Co-sensing and co-shaping as shared and relational practices in bringing about relational leaders in higher education

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to investigate how and what kinds of relational and shared practices were co-created within a multicultural team in a higher education collaborative learning environment. The students interacted while working towards the shared goal of co-constructing knowledge. The study provides insight into how student teams can actively build collaboration in learning spaces through manifesting relational leadership. Shared and relational practices refer broadly to all the knowledge, attitudes and skills that emerge from team interaction. A compound theoretical framework combining relational leadership and leadership trichotomy was adapted to study what particular factors enable shared and relational practices. The qualitative study drew data from students' reflections and group discussions in an intervention which served as a space for experimentation in collaboration and dialogue. The results showed that the students practised Co-sensing and Co-shaping to effectively allow knowledge co-construction. A broadening perception of diversity and the perception that barriers were a doorway to new relational possibilities enabled Co-sensing and Co-shaping to work in collaboration. The results of the study could provide new insights for other kinds of higher education learning environments.

Keywords Higher education · Relational leadership · Shared and relational practices · Collaborative learning · Knowledge co-construction

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Introduction

A large number of studies in higher education examine learning from a perspective that draws on knowledge co-construction in collaboration (e.g. DamŞa et al. 2013; Heo et al. 2010; Van Schalkwyk and D'Amato 2015). A majority of them examine online virtual learning environments (Heo et al. 2010; Putambekar 2006; Zheng et al. 2015) and a few focus on class-based learning in the context of higher education (Ahn and Class 2011; Van Den Bossche et al. 2006).

It is by *social interaction* that individuals in these environments construct knowledge, share existing ideas and create new ones as a collective accomplishment by means of *shared and relational practices* (Greeno 2006). The perspective of sharing and relations is adopted in this article to explore how shared and relational practices in social interaction contribute to knowledge co-construction in higher education learning processes.

Studies that focus on collaborative learning in higher education include knowledge as an important aspect of the environment (Hong and Sullivan 2009; Lai 2015). Many studies relating to collaborative learning examine knowledge building, knowledge creation, problem solving and the implementation of ideas regarding learning in interaction, especially in small group settings. Among current studies in higher education, few concentrate on face-to-face learning with a focus on how students work together towards knowledge co-construction. In such a context, social interaction becomes a fundamental element of collaboration (Valsiner 1994).

Collective and socially constructed learning is highly important in the global, interconnected society. Consequently, it is essential that higher education research also focuses on practices in collaboration (Kezar et al. 2006) for effective learning processes. This article looks particularly at the *co-creation of relational and shared practices* in collaborative interactions among a multicultural team of higher education students. In examining this, we benefit from the idea of social constructivism. This study does not use this theory to examine shared and relational practices but rather utilizes it as the context for knowledge construction in shared learning environments. In these environments, learning and knowledge co-construction are not viewed as individual experiences but as a shared one, realized through shared and relational practices (Järvelä and Järvenoja 2011; Wilkinson 2011).

In knowledge co-construction, the theory of relational agency in practice (Edwards 2005a, 2011) adds knowledge on how the ability to engage with the world is enhanced by working with others. Knowledge co-construction requires an environment or system that is open and allows for relational agency to emerge. There is fluidity in the learning space (Hosking 1988) that allows for one to seek help and give help when needed. It helps to understand what mediates collaboration across practice boundaries (Edwards 2012) as team members align their resources towards achieving a shared goal (Edwards 2005b).

In order to study shared and relational practices that are co-created in a socially constructed learning environment, the theory *of relational leadership* is

used (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Pearce and Manz 2005; Uhl-Bien 2006). Relational leadership is a relational and ethical process wherein people attempt to effect positive change (Komives et al. 2013). The theory has gained interest in recent years (Drath 2001; Endres and Weibler 2017; Uhl-Bien 2006), and a large number of studies have concentrated on organizational teams and the interaction among team personnel (Crevani et al. 2007; Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien 2012).

This paper contributes to the existing need for literature of relational leadership in higher education with a focus on the students. Studies on relational leadership in the context of higher education are limited and fall mainly into two categories. First, there are studies on leadership within systems, which focus on people in positional roles in leadership (Biddix 2010; Branson et al. 2016; Kezar et al. 2006). Fewer studies focus on relational leadership among higher education students (Caviglia 2010; Komives 2012; Komives et al. 2006). Those that do exist usually aim to understand how leadership identity is constructed, and how leadership capacity is built among students. These studies are based on social change leadership models (Komives 2012; Komives et al. 2009). Our study adds a fresh perspective, specifically relational and shared practices executed in collaboration.

These practices are examined through a leadership 'trichotomy model' of *knowing-being-doing* (Komives et al. 2013; Snook et al. 2012). In applying this model, we gain understanding of how a multicultural group functioned as a team and achieved its purposes in collaboration through shared and relational practices. The reason to conduct the study among a multicultural group of students was to examine the phenomenon in an environment that requires a deeper sense of relational connection and interdependence, integrated through shared and relational practices. This learning process differs fundamentally, for example, from the process involved when students have similar cultural backgrounds and share the same language.

Consequently, the study was conducted in a particular learning environment—called the Collaboratories Lab—with a group of multicultural students whose learning interactions were led by inquiry and deep questioning. The lab provided an adequate context within which to examine shared and relational practices and, in particular, the factors that enabled the students to flourish despite inevitable barriers. It was a self-designed intervention in which the students worked towards building shared knowledge on collaboration and were empowered by social interaction. The shared and relational practices that were co-created during their collaborative interactions were examined. The students' individual and group reflections and learning assignments were viewed through the relational leadership theory and the knowing-being-doing model.

Collaboratively and socially constructed learning

Individuals acquire knowledge from interaction in social situations. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) state that in collaborative knowledge-building communities, students increasingly take charge of their learning, lead discussions, offer new perspectives and learn in dynamic social environments. Thus, groups of people are

acknowledged as the source of knowledge construction. Consequently, it is expected that student teams that bring together people with different experiences, values and knowledge are more effective than individuals at solving problems. However, to be able to solve problems adequately, the students may face challenges in integrating different perspectives and developing a shared understanding of the problem at hand. This can be accomplished through rich interaction, interactive discussion and negotiation (Van Den Bossche et al. 2006). An essential ingredient of collaborative learning is the interaction between individuals and collaborative learning activities, which are intrinsically interactions between diverse perspectives that enable shared knowledge building (Puntambekar 2006). Individuals bring their unique knowledge and perspectives to the learning space, creating new understandings based on the interactions.

A large number of studies on collaborative learning in higher education rely on the theory of social constructivism (Gewerc et al. 2014; Marzouki et al. 2017). Therefore, we will use social interaction as the larger framework to aid in understanding how higher education students co-create shared and relational practices. Social constructivism emphasizes that social realities are intersubjectively constructed in everyday interactions (Endres and Weibler 2017; Prawat and Floden 1994). It represents knowledge as a human product and states that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities such as interaction and collaboration (Von Glasersfeld 1995).

Social constructivism emphasizes that the world becomes socially meaningful when it is interpreted in relation to other subjects rather than reality constructed through subjective humans acts (Endres and Weibler 2017; Fairhurst and Grant 2010; Hosking 2011; Uhl-Bien 2006). Meanings are produced on an ongoing basis while structures are created that are stable but allow for change as interactions evolve over a period of time (Fairhurst and Grant 2010). Instead of focusing on the subjective experiences of people involved in relationships, another way to study these team interactions is to synthesize the relational spaces among team members as relational leadership (Crevani et al. 2010; Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011), which is at the core of this article.

Relational leadership as the theoretical perspective to examine shared and relational practices

There is a growing body of leadership literature that examines leadership as a collective phenomenon, that is, in plural terms in which different people interact with a shared goal and purpose (Crevani et al. 2007; Endres and Weibler 2017; Raelin 2011). Diverse labels such as ‘shared’ (Fletcher and Kaufer 2003; Kocolowski 2010; Lambert 2002), ‘distributed’ (Drath et al. 2008; Spillane 2005), ‘collective’ (Hilliard 2010; Raelin 2011, 2014), ‘relational’ (Crevani et al. 2010; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien 2012; Uhl-Bien 2006) and ‘post-heroic’ (Collinson 2018; Crevani et al. 2007) are used to define the phenomenon. Literature on plural notions of leadership consider leadership to be a process that stretches across many actors (Denis et al. 2012; Spillane 2005).

Leadership in plural is more likely to develop in contexts where individuals have distinctive expertise requiring them to exert some autonomy to achieve task integration with others (Denis et al. 2012). This collaboration is more than the sharing of knowledge and information. The purpose is to create a shared vision and strategies that address concerns that go beyond the scope of any particular party (Komives et al. 2013). Consequently, scholars highlight the need for a new vocabulary that emphasizes the practices contributing to setting a direction (Barge and Fairhurst 2008; Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011).

The perspective that leadership is situated in interactions can be associated with the term relational leadership and constitutes an effort to view leadership as embedded in rich human connections and interdependencies among members in an organization (Denis et al. 2012; Uhl-Bien 2006). Consequently, we will use the concept of relational leadership as our first theoretical framework to examine shared and relational practices in co-constructing knowledge.

There has been a strong need to re-conceptualize leadership as something that evolves in social interactions with an emphasis on relationships (Crevani et al. 2007; Pearce and Manz 2005; Raelin 2011). From a relational perspective, leadership is viewed as a social reality and emergent property that is embedded in a context (Dachler and Hosking 1995; Hosking 1988). In relational leadership, diverse people shape and create the context, contributing new meaning to a shared purpose and goal (Caviglia 2010; Komives et al. 2013). Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 655) defines relational leadership as 'a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (e.g. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors and ideologies) are constructed and produced'.

In relational leadership, the interdependencies among team members leads to an emerging social order (Hosking 1988). Hence, leadership is not restricted to hierarchical roles but occurs in dynamic relations throughout an organization, among a group of people. When the focus on individual attributes associated with leadership is removed, the attention shifts to exploring the ways by which members collaborate and move relationally through dialogue with each other (McNamee 2012). Here, shared and relational practice become the focus.

Connecting two complementary leadership models to examine shared and relational practices

In order to examine the shared and relational practices that were co-created by the student teams, this study utilizes two leadership models, the relational leadership model and the knowing-being-doing model.

The relational leadership model

The first model is the relational leadership model (Komives et al. 2013), which describes relational leadership as *purposeful, inclusive, empowering* and *ethical* (see Fig. 1). This model is essentially developed from higher education studies

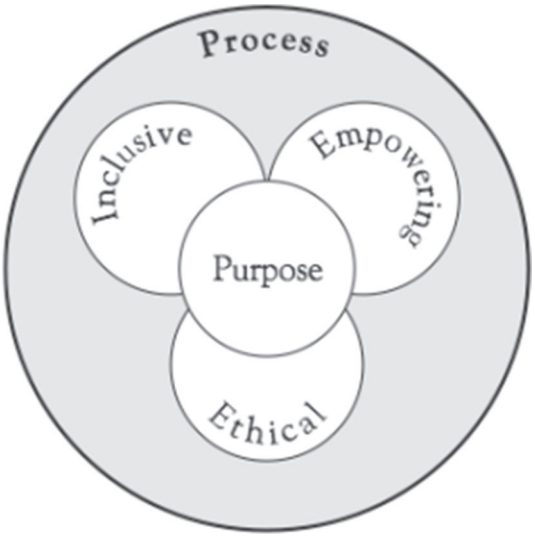

Fig. 1 Relational leadership model. *Source* Komives et al. (2013)

that relate to the development of leadership identity (Komives et al. 2009) and socially responsible leadership (Dugan and Komives 2010).

This model provides a perspective to examine shared and relational leadership practices within diverse learning groups or teams. Individuals can make a meaningful contribution to teamwork when they utilize shared and relational practices created within the common learning process. *Purpose* is situated at the center of the model since it provides the context and focus of leadership. According to Komives (2013), relational leadership is purposeful when it refers to one's commitment to a goal or activity, finding a common direction and building a shared vision to create a positive change.

Inclusive relational leadership means understanding and engaging in a diversity of views, approaches that include aspects of individuality, gender and culture. Valuing equity and exercising web-like thinking where one sees webs of connection in resolving issues are essential elements of inclusivity. Relational leadership is also *empowering*. The two main dimensions of empowerment are the sense of self-leadership felt by an individual who claims a place in the group process and the environment that promotes participation by mitigating any barriers to individual involvement (Komives et al. 2013; Shertzer and Schuh 2004). Empowering and increased learning at the individual level contribute to a team's strength and collective progress (Kezar et al. 2006). Finally, the relational leadership model emphasizes *ethical* and moral leadership; ethics are at the core of leadership, and without ethics leadership cannot emerge (Ciulla 1998; Komives et al. 2013).

In this study, all the shared and relational practices are considered integral parts of a socially constructed learning environment, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Importantly, the socially constructed learning environment builds the essential synergy for the co-creation of shared and relational practices.

The knowing-being-doing model

The second leadership model is that of knowing, being and doing (Snook et al. 2012), which examines knowledge, attitudes and skills as the three essential pillars of leadership. The relational leadership process calls for those who are engaged in it to be knowledgeable (knowing), to be aware of self and others (being) and to act (doing); the knowing-being-doing model as the second perspective is a holistic approach toward leadership development (Komives et al. 2013; Snook et al. 2012). The three components are interrelated, with Komives et al. (2013, p. 100) explaining that 'the knowledge you possess can influence your ways of thinking, which can influence your actions'. In addition, the way that one exists in this world (being) influences actions and behaviors. This interrelated pattern is a circular path (Komives et al. 2013). The 'being', or the attitudinal domain, is characterized by deep, enduring structures of the self: how the learner engages issues of personal integrity and purpose, with a focus on the ethical dimensions of life. Educators have considered this to be the most crucial goal of higher education (Mentkowski & Associates 2000, as cited in Snook et al. 2012).

To study the learning process of relational leadership and the shared and relational practices that result from this process, it is important that one acquires knowledge (knowing), integrates that knowledge with beliefs and attitudes (being) and applies these attitudes and knowledge in daily life as action (doing). This framework is used to study an individual and a group for leadership in its three key dimensions. Consequently, this article uses the knowing-being-doing model as its second source of theory (Komives et al. 2013).

Students who already possess wisdom and expertise enter an educational context with questions, a history of learning relationships and diverse ways in which they connect to the subject matter. The richness of their learning and knowledge co-construction is further heightened with added understanding of the relational space where they exercise shared actions with fellow students. This can lead to deeper shared and relational practices in higher education learning environments (McNamee 2012) in terms of relational leadership embedded in social interactions.

The two models used in this article to study the relational space arise from two different paradigms. These paradigms serve as lenses through which to study interactions among students and their co-created shared and relational practices. Both models have their own distinct features of leadership, enriching our understanding of the relational space of knowledge construction. This lends new meanings and deeper connections to socially constructed higher education learning environments.

Method

We will exploit the relational leadership model combined with the knowing-being-doing model as our theoretical framework to examine the shared and relational practices that a multicultural group of higher education students created in knowledge construction together. Consequently, the research questions are as follows: 1. What kind of relational and shared practices do higher education students create in

collaboration to co-construct knowledge? 2. What factors enable, in particular, the co-creation of shared and relational practices?

Study context

The paper is based on an international study course called the Collaboratories Lab. The Collaboratories Lab was a self-designed intervention designed by the first author where students worked towards building knowledge capital on collaboration. Their areas of specialization (in their degree) included psychology, teacher education, special education and educational leadership. Prior to the start of the course, the participants were informed of the study's content and aims as well as their rights to anonymity. The main element of the course was to introduce collaborative activities centered on education that involved working in small groups or as a class. Dialogue was an integral part of these activities. This was followed by an online discussion with reflections based on students' face-to-face learning experiences, around their experiences of working in groups.

In the Collaboratories Lab, the students engaged in immersive collaborative activities enabled through multimodal engagement, such as collaborative games, theater, appreciative inquiry, art and dialogue. This lab was designed based on experimental collaborative exercises such as the marshmallow challenge (Al-Khalifa 2017; Anthony 2014; Suzuki et al. 2016). It also included collaborative activities based on theater and storytelling (Auvinen et al. 2013; Boje et al. 2015; Orr and Bennett 2017). A major part of the course involved students actively engaging in the practice of appreciative inquiry, which is a model for solving problems through a creative thinking process that has been studied in context to collaboration and relational leadership (Bright et al. 2006; Sim 2019).

Data

The Collaboratories Lab included eight students, five of whom were exchange students and three of whom were pursuing a master's degree in education. The multicultural group consisted of two men and six women from five different countries: India, Taiwan, Japan, Wales and Italy. The students were assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity (Table 1). The group interacted face to face in class meetings of either two hours or four hours each. In total, there were 30 contact hours. The students also spent approximately 30 h in group reflections and online discussions following class interactions, and the course was worth 5 ECTS (requiring approximately 135 h of work). They met for 11 contact sessions over a three-month period.

The data for this paper include students' individual and group reflections on the discussion forum and their final learning assignment, which was to assemble a collaboration tool kit meant to aid their future roles in education. Their face-to-face group discussions were audio- and video-recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed into text, and thematic data analysis was conducted. Paintings and visual products were also produced by the students as part of the course. However, these visual data were not used in this article.

Table 1 Details on the study participants

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Country	Student role	Degree program
Audrey	Female	Taiwan	Full-time student	Master's degree
Cecilia	Female	Wales	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
Diana	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's + master's five-year degree program
Emma	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
Gina	Female	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
Samantha	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's + master's five-year degree program
Steven	Male	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
Thomas	Male	Japan	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree

Analysis

Data coding followed the model of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The thematic analysis was conducted deductively so that existing theoretical concepts informed the coding and theme development, allowing the analysis to move beyond the obvious meanings in the data. The themes were derived by connecting the relational leadership model and the knowing-doing-being model, in accordance with Komives et al. (2013) (Table 2). The data were first scrutinized through the lens of these models so that existing criss-crossed conceptualizations informed the coding and theme development (Table 2).

The research team consisted of three members. The first author was in charge of analyzing the data. The second and third authors were involved in the article writing process and provided support with the necessary literature, guided the methodological process and checked the analysis systematically. The first author provided the data to all of the team members. The data were discussed during the research team meetings, and it was determined that the data accurately represented the information provided by the participants. The first author marked and coded in the text those places that represented the criss-crossing conceptualizations of the two models. Each code was given a description to identify what it represented with regard to the different analytical units (i.e. parts of sentences, whole sentences or larger sections). The practical data coding was conducted using the Atlas.ti software.

Two major themes of co-sensing and co-shaping as shared and relational practices arose from the thematic analysis. The criss-crossed conceptualizations for co-sensing mainly embodied web-like thinking, being open to differences, believing everyone can make a difference, encouraging and affirming others and building coalitions. These all represent practices that enabled the students to experience themselves as one interconnected working organism with rich interdependencies integral to their learning interactions. Co-shaping is a synthesis of the conceptualizations of

Table 2 Criss-crossing conceptualizations of the two models

Knowing-being-doing model			
Relational leadership model	Knowing	Being	Doing
Purpose	Common purpose Shared values	Commitment	Creative thinking Envisioning Involving others in the vision-building process
Inclusive	Self and others	Web-like thinking Open to differences Values equity Believes everyone can make a difference	Building coalitions Framing and reframing Listening skills Civil discourse
Empowering	Power	Willing to share power Values others' contributions	Individual and team learning Sharing information Promoting a sense of self-leadership Encouraging or affirming others
Ethical	Ethical decision-making Self and others' values	Establishing sense of personal character (being authentic) Expects high standards	Being congruent Being trusting Having courage

Applied from Komives et al. (2013)

common purpose, commitment, envisioning, framing and reframing, the promotion of self-leadership and the willingness to share power. Co-shaping represents the students operating as one collective team leading them towards a shared goal. Examples of the major themes of co-shaping and co-sensing are presented in Table 3.

Criss-crossing the two leadership models also helped clarify how the practices enabled the team to exceed the inevitable barriers that always arise in multicultural higher education learning settings. Here, the data from co-sensing and co-shaping were utilized based on the answer to the first research question and the theoretical framework of relational leadership. The theory lends the elements synonymous to co-shaping and co-sensing that enabled the team to overcome barriers. Integral to relational leadership are a shared vision (Komives et al. 2013) and the way in which diverse people shape and create the context and contribute new meaning to a shared goal (Caviglia 2010; Komives et al. 2013). Embedded in these interactions are rich human connections and interdependencies (Denis et al. 2012; Uhl-Bien 2006) with the emerging social order and the new values, attitudes, approaches and behaviors that are constructed and produced (Hosking 1988; Uhl-Bien 2006). Members collaborate and move relationally through dialogue (McNamee 2012), actively practicing relational leadership and exercising shared and relational practices.

Findings

The first research question aimed to examine what kinds of relational and shared practices multicultural higher education students use in collaboration to co-construct knowledge. The purpose of the first research question was to define the concept of shared and relational practices. Several conceptualizations (Table 2) were identified. They concerned the way the team operated when they worked to co-construct knowledge in collaboration. From the thematic analysis (Table 2), two main themes arose: co-sensing and co-shaping (Table 3).

The shared and relational practices of co-sensing

The students were aware of their relational interdependence in functioning as a team to achieve a common purpose. Being able to observe themselves and their interconnectedness in the team helped them work towards knowledge co-construction with commitment and inclusivity. We labeled this *co-sensing*. This term originates from a leadership Theory U designed by Otto Scharmer (2009) to use systems thinking and learning to collectively actualize an emerging future. Co-sensing involves creating a social field of relationships between individuals, exercising deep observation to connect diverse people and places and sense the system as a whole. Here, the criss-crossed sections utilized were web-like thinking, being open to differences, encouraging and affirming others, believing everyone can make a difference and building coalitions (Tables 2, 3).

Consequently, in this article, co-sensing refers to the relational and shared practices of the team when the members sensed themselves as one interconnected organism. Even though the students came from varied cultural and learning backgrounds,

Table 3 Examples of the conceptualizations in criss-crossing the two models

Knowing-being-doing model			
Relational leadership model	Knowing	Being	Doing
Purpose	*Common purpose* In the beginning, we weren't aware of others' thoughts and ideas, but when we spoke for hours, we found a common ground[a]. I think this common ground helped you to put the linguistic competence in the back and put your ideas in front. (Gina)	*Commitment* It expresses and underlines a passion perspective that makes me think that an effective collaborative team of people not only should share a common aim ground[a] but should also be passionate and determined. ground[a] (Diana)	*Envisioning* By learning in this context and thanks to collective inquiry, we can see others' points of view[b] and build new horizons on the topic, and then we can come up with more effective solutions[a] or ideas about the issues, whether the issue is positive or negative. (Thomas)
Inclusive	*Self and others* I think most people experience some factors or conditions that may limit them from fully enjoying the experience…. I sympathized…that you were not able to express your opinion or share stories fully because of the language barrier… It is particularly important to acknowledge the 'negative aspects' and appreciate their presence to work with them[b] = appreciative inquiry. (Cecilia)	*Web-like thinking* Collaboration involves 'people', co-creation involves 'partners[b]'. (Steven)	*Building coalitions* Being in a small group I was stimulated to give my opinion and I felt part of the group[b] and even if my difficulty with English did not always favor the work, the members of the group were very patient so the work was not limited by this[a]. (Samantha)

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Table 3 (continued)

Knowing-being-doing model			
Relational leadership model	Knowing	Being	Doing
Empowering	*Power* For the strategies on how to overcome fear…For me usually is to get to know better the problem, I found this power in knowledge that helps me overcome fear[a] (Diana)	*Lack of hierarchy, willing to share power* There was no hierarchy, no competition and we worked together[a] out of our own interest. There was no compulsion and no necessity to please higher authorities. We were united by our motive, which made our personal differences unnoticeable[b]. (Gina)	*Promoting a sense of self-leadership* In the second lesson my attitude changed, I wanted to be more active and give my contribution. I was less afraid of being limited by linguistic weakness because I had focused more on wanting to design in my team. …If the intention is positive and constructive, it will certainly lead to more results[a]. (Emma)
Ethical	*Self and Others Values* Collective inquiry, for me, is a very interesting process. Not only does it present participants with the opportunity to learn from multiple minds but it also generates tremendous scope for meta-thinking[a]. …I mean that one can think about the thinking of self and others, think about the nature of the participants' (including your own) questions, responses, reactions and ideas[a]. (Steven)	*Establishing sense of personal character* I basically did not express myself well and relied on someone else who had a very active attitude. Neither did I think about the topic really deeply. But in a small group such as this class, it is easier to express myself aloud, and in addition, I spontaneously think deeply. (Thomas)	*Being trusting* Another significant factor during this experience was the theme of trust in each other [which] allows you to have more motivation in achieving the goal[a]. (Emma)

[a]Co-shaping

[b]Co-sensing

their ideas formed a scaffolding of web-like connections. With their openness to differences and belief that everyone can make a difference, they built rich human connections. The following statement by one of the participants expresses the emphasis on relationships when in collaboration and the students' sense of themselves as one energetic whole.

> The other two aspects of collaboration that I identified are energy and relationship building….The group had a positive energy, and as we had continuous discussions our relationships became stronger. …even though we are from completely different set-ups, we are connected by our ideas. (Gina)

In working collectively towards a common purpose, the team found it essential that they felt aligned to each other. The following quote is a reflection on the sense of co-creation that arose out of the feeling of connectedness within the group and the students' sense that they were able to bring themselves with authenticity to the learning space. It is representative of coalition building, which is fundamental to co-sensing.

> I was able to connect better with the persons I was talking to. It comes down to feeling comfortable emotionally with the people I was interacting and feeling in line with myself.… Emotional alignment is crucial when it comes to co-creation. (Audrey)

The practice of encouraging and affirming others adds to an empowering environment for knowledge co-construction, and it aids in building coalitions:

> Thinking of 'being encouraging'…the ability to understand when and how to be encouraging; to listen to evaluate if and how to help those in front of you; to be helpful without changing or influencing…aspects that belong to the person. (Samantha)

The students' experiences are representative of web-like thinking and of awareness of the coalitions they were building and supporting with the necessary relational practices. Through co-sensing, they maintained their self-awareness and sustained their alignment with others at a cognitive and emotional level.

The shared and relational practices of co-shaping

The other major shared and relational practice is *co-shaping*, which is realized when individuals operate as a team—as one whole organism—working towards a collective vision. The conceptualizations exploited from Komives' criss-crossing were common purpose, commitment, envisioning, framing and reframing, the promotion of self-leadership and the willingness to share power (Tables 2, 3). The term co-shaping also originates from the Theory U developed by Scharmer (2009), which refers to co-shaping as embodying and institutionalizing the new. The Theory U argues that when we are more fully aware of our interior condition from which our attention and actions originate, we can contribute to situations more effectively, co-shaping a desired future.

Thus, in this article, co-shaping refers to the process by which a team shares a common vision and works as a whole towards its goal of knowledge co-construction, thereby realizing its collective potential. The following quote expresses how a shared goal is fundamental when a team works together. Listening becomes an essential practice that increases the team's ability to operate effectively.

> A collaborative team should have a common goal and…motivation at its base… another important aspect is recognizing oneself as a member of the group, so feeling a sense of belonging, no matter if the members do not know each other well. …to have a climate of listening and respect to make the group work effectively. (Emma)

Framing and reframing is a relational practice that helps the team work as one whole. The quote below shows how students practised framing and reframing when working as a team and remaining conscious of the cognitive shifts necessary to enhance collaboration:

> I tend to capture only those ideas that resonate with my train of thought.…I will make a conscious effort to stay engaged and focused in the present and to keep my eyes, ears and mind constantly open to others. (Steven)

The team members described how they practised self-leadership to broaden their contributions to the team in working towards the shared goal.

> At first…I have [had] almost no idea about what we can handle with the topic. But thanks to the collective inquiry, I listened to many varieties of ideas about it from other colleagues, and I could build something. (Thomas)

During the interactions, the students reciprocally moved between leading and showing willingness to be led. The students perceived power as a shared resource. The following quote reflects upon the aspect of willingness to share power and an ability to see leadership in the collective.

> I like juggling between leading and being led and in both cases, value trust, empathy, high expectations, pursuit of excellence, vulnerability and autonomy. …It could be said that the shared desire to achieve a particular outcome is the foundation of a team. (Steven)

The students' awareness of being committed to a common purpose drove the shared and relational practices of co-shaping. This was further supported as they created spaces of shared responsibility, envisioned a desired future collectively and furthered their capacity for self-leadership.

Enabling co-sensing and co-shaping

The second research question addressed the factors that would enable the creation of co-sensing and co-shaping. The data related to the shared and relational practices of co-sensing and co-shaping revealed two enabling features: a broadening perception of diversity and the perception of barriers as relational possibilities.

A broadening perception of diversity

In their reflections, the students considered diversity as an enabler of shared and relational practices. The practice of being able to sense themselves as one interconnected team (co-sensing) and the shared goal of working towards knowledge co-construction (co-shaping) were enabled by the perception of diversity as an invitation to further relational practices. The students observed themselves as diverse individuals—as a diverse team—and worked towards building coalitions. As diverse people, they shaped and created the context by contributing new meaning to a shared purpose and goal (Caviglia 2010; Komives et al. 2013). Being open to differences and believing that everyone can make a difference are essential to knowledge co-construction, wherein group members collaborate and move relationally through dialogue with each other (McNamee 2012). This required that the students carry themselves in this space of diversity with the willingness to connect to different ideas and establish web-like thinking, broadening their perception of working together. This is expressed in the following quote:

> Even when 5 people from different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and religions collaborate…differences can engage stories and past experiences... I also learned to appreciate different aspects of dialogue and discussion by giving time to lead, listen, question, contrast and reflect, and in turn, all members enhanced inquiry. (Cecilia)

In their interactions, the students invited all voices with an open mind and connected with realities outside their existing mental models. Framing and reframing occurred at an individual level, with the intention to move beyond existing mental maps and past experiences of working in groups. This shared practice allowed co-sensing and co-shaping to emerge and required the students to immerse themselves in the space of uncertainty that normally lies within diverse learning settings, directing the inquiry process towards the shared goal:

> In the past I often had the perception that components of a group ended up having perhaps only stress in common. …Thanks to the work done on the basis of this method I was able to directly experience…effective…true collaboration. (Samantha)

The presence of diversity encourages students to build new perspectives and orientations, leading them to carry out relevant actions and move towards a process of evolving social order with emergent coordination (Uhl-Bien 2006):

> One aspect that was both an enabler and a constraint is our diversity. It enables us to widen our horizons of thinking and get exposure, but at the same time, we tried hard to find a common context to move forward. (Gina)

Perceiving barriers as doorways to new relational possibilities

A multicultural student team engaging in collaborative learning interactions also faces barriers due to its diversity. Whenever faced with a barrier, the students relied on shared and relational practices that were inclusive, purposeful, empowering and ethical for a desired course of action. These were fundamental for the emergence of the shared and relational practices of co-sensing and co-shaping. The students perceived barriers to collaboration as doorways to new relational possibilities. For example, they expressed that a lack of fluency in English was a limitation. They felt there were instances when they could not share enough information, limiting their contributions to the shared vision. The solution was to construct shared and relational practices as their learning interactions evolved, with an emphasis on relationships (Crevani et al. 2007; Pearce and Manz 2005; Raelin 2011). The following quote shows how students felt supported and how they supported others in their interactions despite language difficulties:

> Communication is a two-way responsibility. …The listeners have just as much responsibility to try and understand the speaker, such as…[using] the mirroring technique by paraphrasing what the speaker said to make sure he or she understood the message correctly. (Diana)

The fundamental factors enabling co-shaping were the team members' feelings of connection to the realization of the shared goal, their commitment to the process despite barriers and their promotion of a sense of self-leadership:

> I was quite critical of myself because I was aware of my language limitations, but I wanted to participate and contribute.… I didn't manage to make myself understood as I would have liked, but inside me it's very strong and clear the desire to collaborate in the realization of this project. (Emma)

In sum, practising the art of listening, being open to differences and practicing web-like thinking helped the students believe each team member could make a difference. Reinforcing relational practices enabled co-sensing and co-shaping. These occurred in the dynamic relations among the students (Hosking 1988), leading them towards more meaningful and purposeful learning interactions. This is evident in the following quote.

> There was [an]...atmosphere in which everyone could feel listened to. …[A] significant factor during this experience was the theme of trust in each other, …To know that others trust you…allows you to have more motivation in achieving the goal. …One of the few experiences of my life in which I felt a collaborative atmosphere…(Emma)

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this research was twofold. First, it sought to examine the shared and relational practices that were co-created in higher education within a socially constructed learning environment by a multicultural student team. The second aim was

to understand the issues that enabled the co-creation of shared and relational practices despite inevitable barriers. The shared and relational practices were studied through the lens of the theory of relational leadership by criss-crossing two models: the relational leadership model and the knowing-being-doing model.

The thematic analysis, conducted deductively, uncovered a range of shared and relational practices that were synthesized by criss-crossing the models onto two major practice themes (Table 3), labeled co-sensing and co-shaping (Scharmer 2009). They appeared essential to the achievement of common purposes in higher education, such as knowledge construction. The shared and relational practices of co-sensing and co-shaping resulted from relational leadership when the student team started to sense itself, over a period of three months, as one whole, interconnected organism working towards a shared goal.

Co-shaping represents the team's ability to operate with relevant actions to realize a shared goal. It comprises the conceptualizations of common purpose, commitment, envisioning, framing and reframing, the promotion of self-leadership and willingness to share power. Co-sensing is a synthesis of web-like thinking, openness to differences, encouragement and affirmation of others, the belief that everyone can make a difference and coalition building. Both practices were the result of the student team feeling connected to the collective aim of knowledge co-construction in collaboration.

The ability to exploit co-shaping and co-sensing was enabled by two major features: a broadening perception of diversity and the perception of barriers as doorways to new relational possibilities. Each of these was enabled by being open to differences, undergoing cognitive shifts through framing and reframing, building coalitions, listening, encouraging others and promoting a sense of self-leadership. For example, research on relational leadership and 'leadership in the plural' (Denis et al. 2012) confirms our results by highlighting the importance of perceiving diverse perspectives and finding collective pathways to lead a team towards a desired goal (Fairhurst and Grant 2010; Kezar et al. 2006). The findings also show that the students observed themselves as a part of a diverse team, embracing alternative world views through co-sensing and co-shaping while recognizing themselves as a single, unified entity. This manifested as an effort to make a cognitive shift to build new experiences of working in groups, particularly enabled by creating relational bridges through dialogue (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Hosking 2011; McNamee 2012). Co-sensing and co-shaping are, therefore, redefined in this study as amalgamations of shared and relational practices inherent to *relational leaders,* which in this case are the students in the team.

The main findings from this study correspond to four out of six strands of relational leadership as defined by Kezar et al. (2006, p. 69). They argue that (a) relational leadership is a collective and collaborative process; (b) teams are viewed as cultures in which all members are believed to be equal and individual differences are affirmed; (c) relationship building is emphasized; and (d) differences in team settings are believed to advance cognitive complexity. As to research that presents relational leadership as a relational and collaborative process intended to create positive change, this study indicates that special attention should be paid to shared and relational practices that enable the manifestation of relational

leadership in diverse higher education learning environments (Kezar et al. 2006; Komives et al. 2013). These practices enable the formation of relational leaders through socially constructed learning interaction.

These practices are enabled through attempts to build a broadening view of diversity and through the perception of existing barriers as relational doorways (Fig. 2). Moreover, shared and relational practices that are inclusive, empowering, ethical and purposeful provide the essential synergy and momentum for knowledge co-creation. From this, a social order evolves through emerging collaboration and new values, and attitudes and behaviors are produced through students' engagement in true relational leadership (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Dachler and Hosking 1995; Fletcher 2012; Uhl-Bien 2006).

The connection between learning and leadership is an important area of research in higher education and allows us to conceptualize leadership in creative ways (Clair 2020; Dempster 2009; Kezar et al. 2006; Quinlan 2014). Our main findings suggest that the major practices of co-sensing and co-shaping, embedded with many shared and relational practices, provide higher education student teams with effective learning and knowledge construction in a collaborative, socially constructed learning environment. Even though the sample size was limited and the findings of this study cannot be generalized to different higher education contexts, it is important to note that the multicultural student group demonstrated effective shared and relational practices while functioning as relational leaders to lead themselves to their shared goal. Thus, the findings might provide valuable insights into how to foster relational leaders in other higher education contexts. The findings also highlight the expanding mind-set that individual students bring to leadership through shared and relational practices and contradict the idea that leadership is situated only in hierarchies or among students who are presidents of

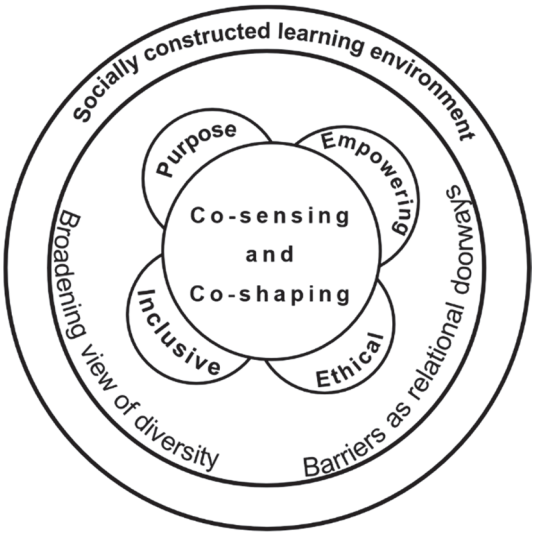

Fig. 2 Shared and relational practices of relational leadership in a socially constructed learning environment

university organizations. Hence, the findings suggest that leadership and collaborative learning can co-exist in higher education classrooms.

Learning environments that encourage students to take ownership of the learning process are key to sustaining collaboration and leadership. Opportunities for students to set learning goals collectively and in alignment with larger course objectives activate collaboration and leadership. Pedagogical practices should help students to consciously and objectively observe and perceive the presence of diverse perspectives, enabling them to understand how diverse perspectives can co-exist and be used as a resource for furthering knowledge. This, in turn, enables collaboration and relational practices that nurture leadership.

In these times of complex global challenges, we need to focus on building teams that have the ability to make cognitively complex decisions and adapt to multiple worldviews. It is evident that leadership is a collective process that can be found among many different groups of individuals on university campuses. Our findings indicate how a group of students working together became relational leaders and overcame barriers to collaboration through relational practices. This study also adds emphasis to the ways in which learning environments serve as nourishing spaces in the formation of relational leaders who can go on to become future change agents. Finally, the findings provide fresh perspectives for building stronger learning relationships on campuses among multicultural learning communities. In this way, higher education institutions could better prepare their students to be competent, both in their lives and in their work within the global society.

This study had limitations that should be considered. The relatively small sample size of eight students makes it difficult to generalize the findings beyond the scope of the study. Thus, future research could include several teams across more diverse learning settings. Another limitation is that the course was conducted in English, which was a foreign language for some of the students. However, the students used their full proficiency of English to express their reflections and showed themselves to be sufficiently competent in the group discussions. They also used technological tools or peer-support in discussions and when writing their reflections to maintain clarity in expression. In addition, the students' diverse cultural and ethnical backgrounds may have caused some limitations in being able to relate to the contexts of their personal or educational experiences in their home countries. Methodologically, further studies could use richer methods of data gathering and analysis, such as quantitative analysis, diary method or discourse analysis. Follow-up interviews and more structured discussions with the students could also be utilized.

In conclusion, our findings offer implications for further research on how both relational and task-oriented skills could be involved in higher education learning environments and how student teams could maintain attention to fruitful goals and objectives and build stronger relationships (Caviglia 2010; Kezar et al. 2006). As is the case with most studies in leadership that focus on students, students in leadership roles and leadership identity development among university students (Komives 2012; Komives et al. 2009), future research may aim to understand spaces of social interaction in learning settings and the manifestation of shared leadership within those spaces. We need more research on the best practices of student teams and on

how student teams overcome barriers to collaboration to build teams that will act effectively in global society.

Finally, we suggest that higher education should focus more on students as the key actors of relational leadership (i.e. as relational leaders) and thereby help build transformative learning spaces within different kinds of demographic settings. Higher education might choose to focus on training, or on developing and researching tools, techniques and university pedagogies that are inclined towards building shared and relational practices and establishing these practices as key components of the learning culture. Designing courses that are experimental in nature but grounded in research-based theory can help create open, safe learning environments that allow for experiential learning The use of creative teaching tools and powerful, reflective questioning that assists in directing learning goals, dialogical interactions, assessment and feedback are essential ingredients to learning. Creating learning spaces that acknowledge diversity as a resource and as a scaffolding for integrating varied perspectives can lead students towards building stronger, more empowering learning relationships.

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Data availability The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available (as they may contain information that could compromise the privacy of the research participants), but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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II

MANIFESTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AMONG MULTICULTURAL HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

Bhavani Ramamoorthi, Aini-Kristiina Jäppinen & Matti Taajamo 2023

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Manifestations of leadership identity development among multicultural higher education students

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how leadership identity manifests at the individual and collective levels within a relational training context among a group of multicultural higher education students.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a case study and examines the interactions among eight multicultural students through the theoretical lens of leadership identity development (LID) theory.

Findings – The main findings of this study suggest that LID manifests through an open will and intensifying motivation to the collective impulse of achieving shared goals through nurturing the collective cognition to integrate diverse perspectives and a broadening view of leadership as a collective capacity for co-creation and generativity.

Research limitations/implications – Although the paper builds on a case study with a limited number of participants and the ability to generalise its findings is partial, the study may provide practical applications for training leadership in other collaborative contexts and supporting it at the individual and collective levels.

Originality/value – The LID theory and LID model have been applied simultaneously to a training lab to examine how LID manifests among a multicultural group of higher education students. The lab emphasises a participatory leadership-oriented pedagogy.

Keywords Leadership identity development, Higher education students, Collaboration, Multiculturality

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Understanding leadership identity and how it develops over time is a continuous process of evolution. A world that is constantly changing requires leaders who are collaborative and socially responsible through the influence of relationships (Kezar *et al.*, 2006;

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Komives, 2009). Hence, developing leadership capabilities in higher education students is essential. In particular, such leadership capacities are needed to develop a leadership identity (Carroll and Levy, 2010; Venus *et al.*, 2012). Complexities of global challenges and the need to find solutions through relations invite researchers to think beyond the traditional idea of leadership identity being invested in single leaders and focus on developing collective leadership capacities (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2016; Day and Harrison, 2007; Komives *et al.*, 2009) such as networks (Weibler and Rohn-Endres, 2011), teams (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2016) and groups (Kershaw *et al.*, 2021; Komives *et al.*, 2005).

Based on what is known about the development of leadership identity, there is still very little understanding of how leadership identity develops in a collaborative context (McKenzie, 2018). There is some evidence of how leadership identity continues to evolve in the context of students interacting in group settings (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a). This understanding led to the construction of the leadership identity development (LID) theory and an interrelated LID model (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a). From now onwards, we use the acronym "LID theory" to point to the theory and LID to refer to the domain of LID. Recent studies have validated how LID is enhanced in various contexts using different tools, whereas very few have investigated how LID development takes place (McKenzie, 2018; Nagda and Roper, 2019; Owen *et al.*, 2017).

The LID theory (Komives *et al.*, 2005) presents a framework for understanding how individual higher education students develop the social identity of being collaborative, relational leaders and has been used as the theoretical lens of this study. It comprises five key categories of leadership identity: developing self, changing view of self with others, broadening view of leadership, developmental influences and group influences.

Each of these LID categories includes different attributes, and we focused on those that are most relevant to the context of this study (Figure 1). The developing self includes the attributes of deepening self-awareness and establishing interpersonal efficacy. The category of changing view of self with others includes the attributes of being independent, dependent

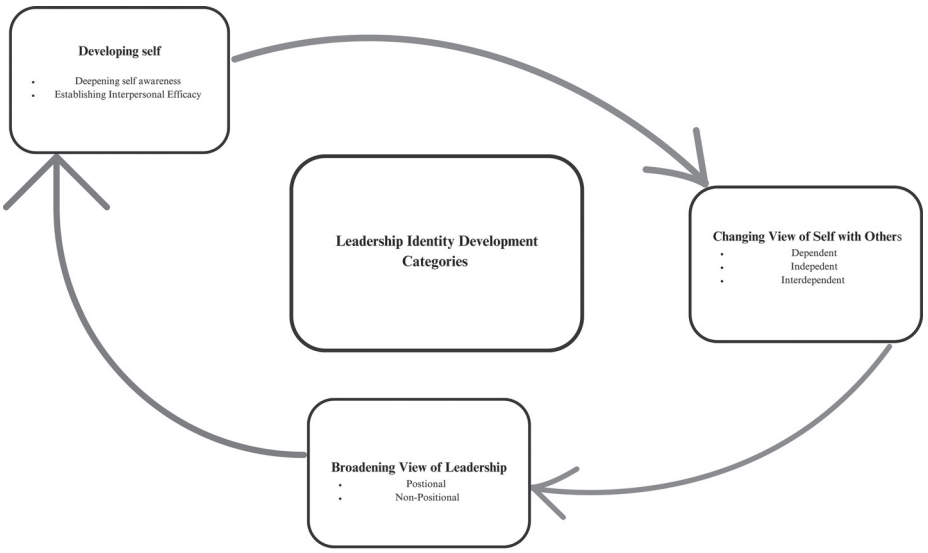

Figure 1.
Developing a leadership identity

Source: The above figure is an adaptation of Komives *et al.* (2005, p. 599)

and interdependent. The category of broadening view of leadership includes the attributes of being positional and non-positional. In this paper, we look at the first three categories, namely, developing self, changing view of self with others and broadening view of leadership and the specific attributes under each of these categories (Figure 1). We excluded the last two categories from this study because we were not interested in the developmental (i.e. childhood) and group (e.g. family) influences of the participants.

There is an interrelated LID model (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b), which is a practical framework to apply the LID theory. The model shows that individuals go through diverse stages, such as awareness, exploration, leadership identity, leader differentiation, generativity and integration, that are experienced continually, resulting in a deeper understanding of their leadership identity (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Each of the categories includes all these stages. However, we did not focus on the diverse stages but presumed that they were all included in a higher education training programme called Collaboratories lab and had an overlapping effect on the background.

The Collaboratories lab included eight higher education students from multicultural backgrounds. The multiculturality of the group worked as a driving force in building relational bridges among the students, which is essential for leadership identity manifestation. One of the main purposes of the Collaboratories lab was to build a toolkit of collaboration for LID, particularly for future working life needs. Hence, we applied the LID model (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b) as a practical framework to apply the LID theory. The model and theory are closely interlinked; as such, we used the theory as an interpretive lens for data analysis. The LID model was simplified and applied (Table 1) as a practical tool by the trainer throughout the Collaboratories lab.

Social interaction through collaborative relationships is crucial for LID (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Denis *et al.* (2012, p. 214) suggest that:

> Producing leadership in interaction decentres the idea of leadership not being situated in individuals but rather a view of leadership as a human social construction that emanate from rich connections and interdependencies (see also, Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655).

Thus, for LID to manifest, group influences are an important factor (Komives *et al.*, 2005). In the Collaboratories lab, the major focus was on the group working together. However, the LID model shows that individuals go through diverse stages in their personal LID process (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b); hence, both individual and collective levels of LID are essential.

Consequently, the theoretical aim of this study was to augment the knowledge of LID in the wider area of higher education training and to investigate how LID manifests at the

Table 1. Leadership identity development model

LID categories	Leadership identity development properties (enabled through participatory pedagogy in the Collaboratories lab)
Developing self	Deepening self-awareness Establishing interpersonal efficacy
Changing view of self with others	Dependent Independent/dependent Interdependent
Broadening view of leadership	Positional Non-positional

Source: The above table is an adaptation of Komives *et al.* (2006a)

individual and collective levels. The practical aim was to implement the LID model in collaboration with higher education training. Thus, the research question was framed as follows:

RQ1. How does leadership identity development manifest within a group of multicultural students at individual and collective levels?

To answer the research question, we first explain the idea of LID and the related theory and model. This is followed by an introduction to the Collaboratories lab and the method used.

Leadership identity development

The development of leadership identity is created through purposeful acts and interactions (Karp and Helgø, 2009). The studies conducted by both Komives *et al.* (2005) and Gibson *et al.* (2018) used a grounded theory approach to LID, and both studies demonstrated that there is a shift from an earlier stage of leadership identity to a deeper understanding of self and leadership. Individual shifts in their view of leadership develop themselves and understand the influence of groups throughout this process (Day *et al.*, 2009; Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Miscenko *et al.*, 2017).

Recent studies suggest a narrative framework for exploring the experiences and sense-making of LID in emerging adults in higher education (McCain and Matkin, 2019). Among these exist leadership identity studies that focus on building leadership identity as a multifaceted process that encompasses expanding boundaries, recognising interdependences and discerning purpose (Zheng and Muir, 2015). Another major theme in the LID literature is the concept of the identity development spiral. The more people have an integrated identity of themselves as leaders, the more likely they are to engage in leadership experiences, which build leadership competencies and further inform their leadership identity (Day *et al.*, 2009; Wagner, 2011).

A study conducted by Wolfinbarger *et al.* (2021) with 14 higher education students of diverse backgrounds applied the LID model. The findings suggest an understanding of leadership as a relational process that enhances the LID of most participants. In a study of 50 student leaders of diverse backgrounds (Sessa *et al.*, 2016), LID prefigured an understanding of leadership. There, students identified themselves as individual leaders, which is contradictory to leadership being viewed as shared, relational and collaborative (Crevani, 2007) and for which they would need support and scaffolding from mentors (Sessa *et al.*, 2016).

In sum, in the field of leadership identity studies, there is a need for more studies on "developing collective leadership identities, processes that involve participants in engaging across boundaries (functional, hierarchical, geographical)" (Day and Harrison, 2007, p. 360). With scholars increasingly emphasising leadership as a relational process (Uhl-Bien, 2006), a relational perspective on leadership identity has emerged (DeRue *et al.*, 2009; Komives *et al.*, 2006a), but few studies exist with a relational perspective on leadership identity and a focus on LID as a multilevel phenomenon (DeRue *et al.*, 2009; Komives *et al.*, 2006a).

Leadership identity development theory and model

The LID theory (Komives *et al.*, 2005) emerged from studies on the relational leadership model (Komives *et al.*, 2006b) that focused on leadership being purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical and process-oriented. The theory emphasises leadership as "a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change" (Komives *et al.*, 2006b, p. 11). The theory has implications for the design of leadership programmes.

The LID theory and model have implications for developing the leadership capacity and identity of individual students and for developing the capacity of groups (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b).

In 2006, based on the LID theory, Komives and colleagues developed the interrelated LID model, which describes the stages students go through in their understanding of leadership as a relational process and their identity as leaders (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2009). The LID model has been used by several researchers to better understand students' experiences or pedagogical approaches that improve students' leadership development (Schmiederer, 2018).

As mentioned above, we extracted from the LID theory (Komives *et al.*, 2005, p. 599) three of the five major categories: developing self, changing view of self with others and broadening view of leadership. The categories are interconnected and influence each other and explain how the leadership identity develops. All the categories of the LID theory include within themselves the individual and collective levels through the various attributes that exist for each LID category. Our study aims to understand how LID manifested among a group of higher education students. We considered it from two perspectives:

(1) members of a group as unique components; and

(2) the members functioning as an interconnected collective.

Thus, we studied each of these three leadership identity categories at the individual and collective levels.

Methods

Study context and participants

This paper is based on data derived from a case study called Collaboratories lab, in which students built knowledge capital through collaboration. It was offered as a training programme as part of the curriculum on "Current Issues in Learning and Pedagogy" in a higher education institution in Finland. Programme details were shared in a face-to-face presentation with a new cohort of students pursuing a master's degree at the Faculty of Education and Psychology. It was also sent as an invitation to all exchange and master's students in the Faculty of Education. The participants voluntarily signed up for the programme via a university portal. The consent process included signing a form granting permission to use the coursework, discussions and interactions as research material. A detailed programme plan is included in Appendix. All students spoke English but with varying competencies. Consequently, English was used as a common language in the programme. The students signed a consent form for the research and were advised they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any point.

The programme aimed to introduce collaborative educational activities that involved small-group work or working as an entire class. Dialogical interactions were integral. This was followed by an online discussion with reflections based on the students' face-to-face learning experiences and their experiences of group work. There were 30 contact (in-person meeting) hours, and the students met for 11 contact sessions over three months. The students also spent approximately 30 h on group reflections and online discussions following class interactions, and the programme was worth five European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System credits, which required approximately 135 h of work.

The Collaboratories lab included eight students, five of whom were exchange students and three who were pursuing a master's degree in education. The multicultural group consisted of two men and six women (see Table 2) in the age group of 18–30 years. Their areas of specialisation (in their degrees) were multidisciplinary. We used pseudonyms to

Demographic details				
Participant pseudonym	Gender	Country	Student role	Degree programme
Audrey	Female	Taiwan	Full-time student	Master's degree
Cecilia	Female	Wales	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
Diana	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's + master's five-year degree programme
Emma	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
Gina	Female	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
Samantha	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's + master's five-year degree programme
Steven	Male	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
Thomas	Male	Japan	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree

Source: Authors' own work

Table 2. Details of the study participants

protect the students' anonymity. The students in the Collaboratories lab had no specific background in leadership training. One student had worked as a teacher trainer, and the rest had some exposure to teaching experiences but not necessarily any formal leadership training.

The Collaboratories lab was an experimental intervention for team members to explore how collaboration works. The lab was designed based on experimental collaborative exercises, such as the marshmallow challenge (Anthony, 2018), in addition to theatre and storytelling (Boje *et al.*, 2015). A major part of the programme involved students actively engaging in the practice of appreciative inquiry, which is a creative thinking model well-researched in the context of collaboration and relational leadership (Sim, 2019).

Data and analysis

This is a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2011) with a detailed analysis of a group of students in the context of the Collaboratories lab while describing their leadership identity manifestation. The data included students' individual and group reflections on an online discussion forum written after an in-person working session. It also included face-to-face group discussions and their final learning assignment (data samples are shown in Table 3). Group discussions were audio and video recorded, and the audio recordings of the group reflections on collaboration were transcribed.

Data analysis for this study follows a qualitative content analysis that is both deductive and inductive. Qualitative content analysis is one of the many ways to analyse textual data and focuses on reducing it into manageable segments through the application of inductive and/or deductive codes and reorganising data to allow for the drawing and verification of conclusions (Forman and Damschroder, 2007). It often starts with deductively developed codes but remains open to new topics suggested by the data (inductive codes). The product of this process is an interpretation of the meaning of the data in a particular context.

This hybrid approach balanced the research question for the study and allowed theories of LID to be integral to the process of deductive analysis while allowing for themes to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding. The deductive analysis was guided by

Data source	Sample data extract
Discussion forum (online)	*Experiencing different cultures through collaboration exercises like this one . . . enables me to re-examine my personal belied (belief) system and notice what is working for me and what is not (Audrey)* Category: Developing self
Group discussions (face-to-face)	*At a community level, individuals . . . come together with variety of opinions . . . and converge at the . . . centre which in turn leads to change in perspectives (that penetrates at an individual level) (Gina)* Category: Broadening view of leadership
Learning assignment	*The work done in groups made me reflect on how I portray myself to others . . .and the aspects I still need to work on to fully appreciate and benefit collaboration (Diana)* Category: Self and others

Source: Authors' own work

Table 3. Data sources and sample data extracts

the theoretical concepts of LID theory (see Figure 1). Thus, we focused on the three major themes of LID:

(1) the development of the self;

(2) a changing view of the self with others; and

(3) a broadening view of leadership and the related attributes of each category.

Subsequently, the data were analysed inductively. The data provided evidence of the individual and collective levels for the three categories of the LID theory (as shown in Table 4).

The first author was primarily responsible for the analytical process. The analysed data sets were presented to other authors who conducted debriefing processes to ensure a systematic and scientific approach to the data analysis. These authors examined the codes

LID categories	Individual	Collective
Developing self	*I was quite critical of myself. . . but. . . inside me it's very strong and clear the desire to collaborate in the realization of this project* (Emma)	*I am able . . .notice the different in collaborating whilst feeling "fully involved" or discussing whilst feeling "fully alive or dedicated" (Cecilia)*
Changing views of the self with others	*That in some situations, I could get help and that I could not do it alone I realized that this has also allowed to increase relations whit [with] the people* (Emma)	*I feel like the most important thing . . . was . . . rethink the role of others in my own knowledge convergence and in the productive outcome of the group (Diana)*
Broadening view of leadership	*The working definition I would propose for the term collaboration is the activity of learning, design and co-creation by open minded and passionate individuals* (Gina)	The flow was persistent and effective. . . I cannot say with certainity that there defined roles (Diana)

Source: Authors' own work

Table 4. Data organization: examples of individual and collective levels

and categories developed and provided important feedback and comments. The data examples of this study were chosen by the first author, and the manuscript was checked by two other authors. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 5.

Findings

The findings section connects the students' narratives and reflections to the three LID categories and their related attributes. The developing self refers to how each student perceived their personal growth and their own LID. The changing self with others is connected to how their developing self was influenced by the collaborative interactions within the group. The broadening view of leadership is connected to how their changing view of self with others influenced their perception of being in collaboration and leadership. We elaborate on each of these leadership identity categories at the individual level and collective level and summarise the key findings.

Category 1: developing self

Attribute of deepening self-awareness: individual level. Through continual reflections, the students expressed their motivations, deepening their self-awareness and interpersonal efficacy. They observed how their behaviours and mental constructs helped them transition towards inclusivity as they evolved in their interactions. Students observed that as they built their confidence, they were willing to take steps to become more involved and build a sense of personal integrity. When they acknowledged they had the potential to contribute to the shared goals of the group, they were willing to overcome their limitations and find solutions to overcome these barriers, as Emma reflected:

Table 5.
Examples of individual and collective levels of leadership identity manifestation

	Relational context	
LID categories	Individual level	Collective level
Developing self	Deepening self-awareness Expanding motivation Commitment to a shared goal Exercising self-leadership to overcome limitations	Openness to new perspectives Expanding interpersonal self-efficacy through new relational skills
Changing views of the self with others	Accessing collective wisdom Self-growth through relational bridges Critical thinking influenced by others Moving from dependence to interdependence	Foundation of trust Creating a democratic space Integrating and synthesizing the varying perspectives Knowledge construction as a collective
Broadening view of leadership	A positional view of leadership entails being sensitive to the individual and collective levels of desire among the group members Operating from a positional leadership can also mean a shared space of authority Experiencing leadership as evolving and not located in one person	Empowering spaces for every group member Leadership was web-like, fluid and dynamic, moving among the group members Enabling spaces of co-creation and generative listening

Source: Authors' own work

> I was quite critical of myself because I was aware of my language limitations, but I wanted to participate and contribute. [. . .] [Inside] me, it's very strong and clear, the desire to collaborate in the realisation of this project.

As they learned to integrate their sense of self with new ideas and perspectives introduced by their fellow group members, the students experienced a change in their sense of self. There is a deepening of the self-reflection process. This is encouraged by the views and opinions brought about through experiential stories by other individuals in the circle. This led one to observe a change in their values and how their own identity evolves. Gina described this as follows:

> I believe that there is an evolution of your identity because [. . .] you [. . .] tend to start to question your own beliefs based on the perspectives of other people, based on their backgrounds [. . .] their views and opinions, you [. . .] reflect more.

Attribute of building interpersonal efficacy: collective level. We noted how the students' deepening self-awareness and reflections on themselves as individual entities influenced their efficacy in working as a collective. They developed a willingness to receive new perspectives as this improved their ability to interact and relate to others. They observed that this was a necessary skill if they had to work with a group and achieve shared goals, as explained by Cecilia:

> I've always believed that someone learns from experience, but someone can learn from others' experiences too, and with a collaboration of both, the result can be very powerful.

The students noted that they required new interpersonal skills and levels of self-awareness that were aligned to practising these interpersonal skills efficiently. They operated as part of a larger interconnected group with expanding motivation and exercising self-leadership. Thomas emphasised this as follows:

> When our views were contradictory, I could think critically and deeply [. . .] the existence of others helped me think about the topic and join in the [. . .] conversation actively.

Category 2: category of changing views of the self and others

Attributes of being independent/dependent: individual level. The students reflected upon their collaborative dialogues and their changing views of themselves and others. Their views fluctuated between phases of being dependent or independent but consisted largely of expressions of being interdependent. To clarify the meanings of these terms, independent is a mindset based on enlightened self-interest, interdependent is a mindset based on shared discovery and collective learning, and dependent is a mindset based on authority or compliance (Drath *et al.*, 2010).

The developing self is influenced by group interactions in a variety of ways. Emma, reflecting on the collective wisdom that existed in the group, shared how initial dependence on others for support could lead to situations in which interdependence could begin:

> I realised that [. . .] I could get help and that I could not do it alone. It was a nice discovery to be aware that asking for help is not a limit, but rather is wealth. [. . .] I realised that this has also allowed [me] to increase relations [with] the people.

The students attributed their critical thinking to the active presence of others in the group. They experienced that they were empowering themselves to contribute actively to the group, while the presence of others functioned as scaffolding. They considered that depending on others while asking for help supported mutual growth and built relationships.

Attribute of being interdependent: collective level. Students reflected on how the relational dynamics of independence or interdependence came to the foreground during the learning interactions and thinking about the nature of their group work. The foundational aspect of trust helped them stay interconnected as a group. The element of trust also contributed to how each found their own democratic space without being influenced by power.

> Another significant factor during this experience was the theme of trust in each other, before starting the project and during the activity. (Emma)

The students' transition to a space of feeling as a collective was facilitated by the rising awareness of how they perceived their roles. They frequently expressed the need to integrate the diverse perspectives that came from the group members and embrace varying points of view. This allowed them to create new frames of thought. In exercising interdependence, they constructed something together. Diana and Cecilia shared the following on this aspect:

> [. . .] freedom and the opportunity to create a space where the roles are adapted following the group needs [. . .] where everybody can collectively construct something. (Diana)

> Then the [. . .] phase acted like an opportunity in which we all found a common [. . .] passion that instantly put our differences aside, and emergence was embraced. (Cecilia)

Category 3: broadening view of leadership

While examining the findings of this study, we attempted to determine whether the students expressed a perspective on leadership as positional or non-positional, with positional leadership referring to someone who is assigned a role of authority or the responsibility of being a leader and non-positional leadership referring to anyone in a group (i.e. without hierarchy).

Attribute of positional leadership: individual level. Steven expressed that a leader nurtures a collaborative and empowering environment; he emphasised leadership as entailing the formal position of an assigned leadership role to share power and of a leader being sensitive to individual and collective levels of desire among group members. He reflected as follows:

> A true leader, as I see it, fosters a truly collaborative team [. . .] empowers as many members as possible [. . .] and is responsive to individual and collective desire levels.

Audrey reflected on one of her past experiences considering the current experiences in the Collaboratories lab. Audrey had taken the role of a positional leader and taken on the responsibility and tasks to achieve the outcome. In hindsight, she felt that there was an opportunity to be a positional leader and yet recognise and include the diversity of talents that the group might have brought into co-creating the event:

> The only role of leader I can think of that I took up [. . .] decorating the venue of a charity breakfast. [. . .] I wanted to make the venue reflect my vision. [. . .] Now that I reflect, I think I could have shared my leadership roles a bit more with my peers.

Attribute of non-positional leadership: collective level. Group members worked towards a shared goal while exercising relational interdependencies. The students described leadership as an empowering process for the whole group while offering powerful spaces for each other. Some highlighted the organic nature of the group and leadership, while others

shared how they found that the absence of designated roles enabled a space for creativity and co-creation.

Gina reflected on this explicitly:

> I struggle to assign or identify roles for myself and others [. . .] as I observed, all of us were inquiring, expressing, critiquing, leading and writing our thoughts at one point or another.

Many narratives expressed ways in which group members strove towards congruence and attempted to articulate "the link" that held the group together through these endeavours. Even if none of the students owned the "leader" title, they found leadership to be actively taking shape. This is evident in one of Steven's reflections:

> I think that it is hard for a group to be organic in the absence of leadership, which is what makes the organic aspect special in our case.

Witnessing and adapting strong dialogical and relational practices, the students led themselves, both as individuals and collectively, towards a space of co-creation and listening that generated creativity and transformative conversation:

> I believe that the [. . .] approach ultimately eliminates the pressure of roles [. . .] and instead allows [. . .] an enriching moment of collaborating or co-creating. (Cecilia)

In summary, the main findings of this study show that the developing self is represented by an intensifying willingness and motivation to contribute to the *collective impulse* of achieving shared goals. The changing view of self with others is represented by *collective cognition*, which is defined by how students synthesise the experiences of others to create new meanings and integrate them with their own experiences. This helps them build a stronger understanding of how to work with one another. The broadening view of leadership is represented by *co-creation at the core*. This is defined by how everyone in the group exercises their own strengths and skills, creating fluidity in roles and enabling a space of co-creation and generativity.

Discussion

This article aimed to examine how leadership identity manifests within a relational training context (Collaboratories lab) among a group of multicultural higher education students at the individual and collective levels. This was studied through the lenses of LID theory. The thematic content analysis, which was conducted both deductively and inductively, indicated that leadership identity develops uniquely at the individual and collective levels.

The findings from this study correspond to observations of other leadership scholars. Our main findings show that in LID, multiple students expressed their relational space with their fellow group members as they worked together towards a collective goal. This finding is supported by Komives *et al.*'s (2005, p. 608) description of leadership identity as the growing ability "to intentionally engage with others to accomplish group objectives". Emphasising the collective and the power of relationships in collaboration, Haber-Curran and Pierre's (2023) study suggests that LID manifests through open will and motivation to contribute to a collective impulse of achieving shared goals (Boettcher and Gansemer-Topf, 2015), nurturing the collective cognition while integrating diverse perspectives (McCarron *et al.*, 2023) and building a collective capacity for co-creation, generativity and innovation (Scharmer, 2021).

Hence, trainers must augment the efforts of participants to contribute with an open will to a collaborative effort by using different tools. Training programmes should enable participants to synthesise the learnings and experiences of others and integrate them with

their own to create cognitive shifts and stronger working relationships. Higher education training programmes must include tools and methodologies that allow participants to experience the power of co-creation and evolve in their ability to collaborate while generating creativity, innovation and change.

We suggest that our study may provide higher education trainers and training programmes with a new understanding of LID. Firstly, the original LID model was taken and simplified so that it could be applied to a multicultural team. The connection to multiculturality could give rise to fresh ideas in designing training programmes, especially for multicultural teams. Secondly, the study focuses both at the individual and collective levels on LID. The results at the individual and collective levels may provide trainers in other relational contexts new possibilities to observe how their students' LID manifest and become resources for a collective. These observations and understanding may provide trainers with essential cognitive and relational ideas to assist their students in working in diverse future environments.

Our study has some limitations. Firstly, it was conducted with a small student group. The results might be different in larger teams or groups that include students or participants from a broader demographic spectrum. Secondly, the Collaboratories lab used collaborative pedagogies as a learning design. Leadership practitioners seeking to follow-up on the results of our study need to apply them consciously and adapt them to their specific circumstances. Thirdly, the theories applied in this study were chosen specifically from within the scope of LID, and applying other leadership theories may provide different results. Data collection techniques and the length of time spent on student engagement may also be critical to the validity of the study findings.

Conclusion

Importantly, in the working world, there is a great need to create teams that are often formed to address multifaceted issues and generate creative solutions. Supporting this need and building capacity for transformation requires cultivating the interior conditions of emerging leaders, and this inner cultivation work needs support (Scharmer, 2021). These emerging leaders need practice fields that help them adopt new behaviours and work with new tools in safe, supportive and generative environments. The Collaboratories lab training programme aimed to provide this social and relational context, offering students a complement to their core curriculum and linking learning with opportunities for real-world action and change while cultivating the necessary interior condition. Regarding future research, an increasing understanding of how leadership identity develops among team members who work collaboratively may yield new and interesting insights into team practices that shape both individual and collective identities.

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Appendix

Theme	Content	Mode of engagement
Invitation to the programme	Pre-task: a short write-up on the expectations from the Collaboratories lab	Email
Team games	Theatre games	Team games
Collaborative games	The marshmallow challenge	Group games and dialogue
	Literature on collaboration and the marshmallow challenge	Online discussion forums
	Reflection questions on their group experiences	
Leading and being led	Mirroring – drama game	Group games
	Story mapping	Story landscapes
	Reflection questions	Online discussion forum
Experiencing and understanding working in groups; being part of a team	Warm-up (theme based on a recent event at the university)	Collaborative poetry writing
	Storytelling – Beeble Bee and Beeble Boo	Active listening
Exploring diversity through experiential stories	Question prompts for reflection	Dialogue
	Herman's grid activity	Small group discussion
		Online discussion forum
Introduction to the AI model	Introduction to appreciative inquiry (AI)	Teacher-led session with an introduction to AI
	Exploring literature on AI	Suggested resources
		Reading circles (literature)
		Sharing in small groups
AI model – Session 1	Exploring the AI question together: designing a powerful question	Working as a team through the discovery phase
	Reflection questions	Online discussion
AI model – Session 2	Exploring the AI question further	Working in groups
	Working as a team through the dream phase	
	Reflections questions	Online discussion
AI model – Session 3 (design phase)	Group work – design phase	Working as a team
	Reflection questions	Online discussion
Sharing and presenting the school change models designed by the teams	Teams share their models, a visual representation experiences of being through AI	Presentation Collective brainstorming Mind mapping
Divergence; convergence; emergence	All that we share video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc	Video-based discussion and reflection
	Divergence, emergence and convergence model	A brief explanation of the model followed by question prompts
	Art session with instructions	Art session: individual work time
	Reflection questions	Group discussion on the art works

Table A1. Collaboratories programme

Source: Authors' own work

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III

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP FORMATION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

Bhavani Ramamoorthi

Manuscript in review

Request a copy from the author.