

Becoming an Orientation Leader: A Catalyst for Self-Authorship Development

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Orientation Leaders (OLs) are a part of most orientation programs. Because research has focused predominantly on staff selection and training, little is known about the impact that becoming an OL has on the OLs themselves. Using self-authorship as a framework, this study explored how various aspects of becoming an OL served as catalysts for self-authorship development. OLs participated in semi-structured interviews. Five characteristics of the OL experience emerged as catalysts for self-authorship development.

Regardless of the type of orientation program offered, most institutions utilize Orientation Leaders (OLs) in some fashion. Because the role of the OL varies based on the type of orientation program offered (Pretty, 2004), institutions have developed a variety of approaches to training. Training formats include “a semester-long course for credit, a semester-long program without credit, training immediately preceding the summer, training during the summer for Orientation programs that begin right before courses, or any combination of these” (Pierson & Timmerman, 2004, p. 18).

Recruiting an OL staff should begin first by determining the characteristics required for a student to carry out the role successfully. Once those criteria have been developed, building a staff that is a true reflection of the campus and the students they will be asked to work with is equally important. “The orientation leaders should be a reflection of the institution in terms of majors, gender, age, involvement experiences, course standing, ethnicity, hometowns, transfer status, and so forth” (Pretty, 2004, p. 11). A balance of personality styles on the OL team is important because balance allows new students to have leaders who help them “gravitate toward styles that are comfortable for them” (Pretty, 2004, p. 11).

Once the OLs have been selected, they must be trained. Though the type of OL training program may vary greatly from campus to campus, several training components should be consistent. These components include reviewing expectations, self-reflection and assessment, developing leadership skills, learning about the campus, and general program information (Pretty, 2004).

Regardless of the training approach, it is critical that the OLs understand and are prepared to handle the variety of responsibilities and tasks they will be charged

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with carrying out. Typically, OLs are hired because they displayed some or all of the most desired skills of an OL, such as dependability, flexibility, reliability, a willingness to help, and good communication skills (Pretty, 2004). The challenge for the orientation director is to capitalize on these skills and guide the OLs to develop their capacity to apply those skills in unpredictable and challenging situations. This requires a level of cognitive complexity, identity development, and interpersonal skills, which the OLs may have only begun to develop when training begins.

Self-Authorship as a Framework for Examining the Orientation Leader Experience

Although the basic structure of an orientation program may be similar from day to day, the OLs work with different student and family participants each day. As a result, each day presents opportunities to integrate multiple sources of information to make judgments and take action, while keeping the needs and perspectives of the specific participants in mind. Because becoming an OL requires the development of epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills, the theoretical construct of self-authorship provides a useful lens through which to both design training and analyze the experience.

The journey toward self-authorship involves a shift from an external to an internal way of knowing. The concept of self-authorship “or the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269) was first introduced by Robert Kegan (1994), who described self-authorship as a necessary foundation for adults to meet the typical expectations they face at work, home, and school. Self-authorship incorporates epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development, while offering a theoretical lens to understand the meaning-making processes that individuals use to make a wide range of decisions (Laughlin & Creamer, 2007).

Baxter Magolda (2001) outlined four stages of self-authorship development: following formulas, the crossroads, becoming the author of one’s life, and internal foundations. Most traditional-age students enter college with preconceived notions, or formulas, about how to learn, interact with others, and develop their sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2008). These formulas are gleaned from authority figures such as parents and educators. When students encounter situations that do not fit neatly into these formulas, they face a “crossroads,” or challenge, to develop a more complex way to approach the world. While the development of some ability to self-author is a part of the natural maturity process, educational situations can also serve as catalysts for encouraging students toward internal foundations (Pizzolato, 2005). As students transition from using external formulas to tapping into internal beliefs to solve problems, they become authors of their own lives and consistently rely on the internal foundations they have developed.

Pizzolato (2005; 2006) found that students needed to experience discomfort or provocation in order to move from recognition that current formulas do not

meet the needs of the situation to a commitment to seeking out and developing an internal foundation. Pizzolato (2006) defined provocation as “a state of disequilibrium that compels students to revisit their own goals and conceptions of self as well as consider multiple perspectives” (p. 38). She conceptualized the provocative moment as one of many experiences that might comprise the crossroads, a provocative moment which acts as a catalyst.

Because of the complexity of the OL job and the variety of situations an OL could encounter throughout a program, we sought to explore the ways in which becoming an OL might serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development. The following questions guided our research: Which aspects of the OL experience, if any, act as a catalyst for self-authorship? What processes do OLs use as they react to these catalysts and either move through crossroads toward self-authorship or continue to follow formulas?

Method

Because we wanted to explore the process through which students encountered catalysts for self-authorship development through the OL training and job duties, we chose qualitative methods for data collection and a constant comparative approach to data analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As research on the impact of becoming and serving as an OL is sparse, we felt an exploratory approach was warranted.

Institutional Context

This study took place at a public, mid-western, open-admission, research university of nearly 30,000 students. The undergraduate student body is composed of a culturally diverse group of students from a broad economic spectrum with varying degrees of academic preparation. Of the entire student body, 84% live off-campus. Close to 25% of all undergraduates are 25 years of age or older.

The institution approaches orientation in a manner fairly typical of institutions of its size. One-day programs are held primarily during the summer. In addition, programs are held in March for early-decision freshmen and between November and January for students beginning during the spring semester. Unlike some institutions, orientation at our institution is required for all students. Though the programs vary slightly by population, each program includes information about academic policies, advising, and registration. Sessions covering various campus services and both campus and residence hall tours are also offered.

Structure of the Orientation Leader Training Course

After students go through an extensive selection process and are selected to join the OL team, they must secure their positions by earning at least a B- or better in the OL training course. The course consists of various topic areas designed to

ensure that the OLs are prepared to handle the demands of their positions. Topics include presentation development, FYE programs, customer service, conflict resolution, program logistics, advising, registration, and student engagement opportunities.

One of the first ideas discussed in the course is that the OLs already possess a great deal of knowledge about the institution. We stress that they are capable of learning more information and making their own knowledge claims, both within the course as well as when they are working as OLs. During one of the early course sessions, we ask each OL to come to the front of the class and relate everything he or she can about the various ways he or she has become involved on campus and the ways that new students can get involved. Once each of the OLs has completed this activity, the class participants discuss what they saw and heard and share a few new ideas or activities each learned.

This activity helps the OLs realize that they and their peers already have a great deal of knowledge. This activity also helps them better understand the types of questions they will be getting from students and parents and how best to deal with the sort of rapid-fire questioning that will be typical on the job. Though the spring break orientation programs tend to serve as a week of trial-by-fire moments, having the OLs work through this activity during the course allows them to have some experience with working under pressure and sharing their knowledge.

Another major component of the course is the time we spend learning about each other. This includes learning about how each of the OLs functions in a work environment, as well as learning about each of the OL's experience transitioning to college. Because orientation is mandatory, all students who become an OL once experienced orientation as a participant. This firsthand knowledge provides a jumping off point for many discussions about how to approach the OL job duties. Grounding each week's topics in the OLs' own experiences provides the OLs a better understanding of the relevance of the topic of their work.

As noted, many of the components of the course involve sharing experiences and working collaboratively with fellow OLs. It is critical to the success of the program that the OLs are comfortable working with and trusting each other. The course provides the OLs experiences to facilitate the development of this trust by illustrating that the OLs are learning from each other and constructing solutions to challenges as a group.

Within the course, the culminating experience is the service-learning project. The purpose of this experience is to allow the OLs to collaboratively plan their day to accomplish the tasks given to them. This past year, the OLs worked with a local non-profit organization that runs a Canal Museum. Because the museum had just moved to the new site, they were in need of landscaping. When the OLs arrived on site, the only direction they received was that three projects needed to be completed and they had three hours to do so. With these minimal instructions, the OLs set about determining a plan to accomplish the tasks. It was fascinating to see them break into groups based on their mutually decided upon ability levels, then break into even smaller groups to accomplish the sub-tasks.

This culminating group experience was designed to model the challenges and

decision-making opportunities that would come up over the summer months during the orientation programs. By not simply telling the OLs what to do or how to solve their problems, we empowered them to construct their own meaning of the situations and to learn that they had both the authority and ability to make decisions and work together to solve a problem without having to follow a pre-determined formula. We could then acknowledge them as capable of constructing knowledge and making meaning with other knowledgeable peers.

Sample

During the second session of the course, the lead researcher invited all 27 students to participate in this study. She explained that participation in the study would have no impact on their grade and asked the students to review the consent form. The co-author of this study is the Director of New Student Orientation and co-instructor of the course. He was not permitted to view the list of participants or data collected until after course grades were posted. Initially, 22 OLs expressed interest in participating. Thirteen OLs participated in the first round of interviews and six participated in the second round.

The OL team was diverse in many ways. Their ages ranged from 18 to 39 with 37% aged 18 and 11% over 24. Sixteen (59%) identified as Caucasian, nine (33%) as African American, one as Middle-Eastern, and one as Other. One student was born outside of the United States. Sixteen (59%) were male and 11 (41%) were female. Eighteen different majors were represented in the group. The characteristics of the study participants mirrored those of the full group: ages ranged from 19 to 39; 58% Caucasian, 25% African American, one Middle-Eastern, and one Other; 50% were male and 50% were female; and 10 majors were represented. Pseudonyms and demographic descriptors are used throughout this article to refer to specific participants.

TABLE 1

Orientation Leaders: Sample vs. Non-Sample Group

Characteristic	Orientation Leaders	Study Participants
Age	18-39	19-39
Race/Ethnicity	33% African-American 59% Caucasian 1 Middle-Eastern Student 1 "Other" Student	25% African-America 58% Caucasian 1 Middle-Eastern Student 1 "Other" Student
Gender	41% Female 59% Male	50% Female 50% Male
Majors Represented	18	10

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

OLs were invited to participate in two 45-60 minute, semi-structured interviews facilitated by the lead researcher. Semi-structured interviews were used so that the interviews had a consistent framework but also allowed for the investigation of each individual's perceptions and experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first round of interviews took place during the two weeks after the spring break programs because the spring break programs were the first time the OLs had the opportunity to apply what they had learned. The first round of interviews was timed to explore how this initial opportunity might present provocative situations that move the participants toward self-authorship. The interview protocol prompted students to describe the situations they encountered during the spring break programs that required them to make decisions. Pizzolato (2007) noted that decision-making is a useful activity in which to assess self-authorship because it requires both the consideration of options as well as taking action.

The second round of interviews took place in the beginning of the fall semester after the summer programs had concluded. Participants were asked to reflect on the entirety of their OL experience and their personal change throughout the process. In addition to prompts focused on decision-making, we asked questions regarding their interactions with the other OLs, the orientation participants, and their bosses and how those relationships changed over the course of the orientation training and the subsequent summer programs. We added this dimension to the protocol to explore the OLs' identity development (intrapersonal dimension of self-authorship) as well as their development of relationships (interpersonal dimension of self-authorship).

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The interview data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, starting with open coding, then moving to axial and selective coding to develop themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through a constant comparative approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), units of data were compared with existing categories and either added to a category or used to create a new category. We initially coded the data independently, providing a measure of analytic trustworthiness. We then compared codes and themes for both congruence and difference of opinion, watchful for underlying biases.

Trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was additionally established through prolonged time in the field and the use of peer debriefing. One of the researchers conducting this study has "in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study" (pg. 196). The other researcher is familiar with the program, but did not interact with the OLs regularly. She was also not involved with the teaching of the course. The co-instructor of the course, who is also the Assistant Director of New Student Orientation, and the Orientation Graduate Assistant were asked to code four interviews each. Their coding of the interviews largely agreed with the researchers'. There was only one theme that the researchers identified which the peer debriefers did not. After reviewing additional transcripts, we decided that the theme in question was not as prevalent in the four interviews reviewed, but was of

distinct importance to the other participants.

Findings

The focus of this study was how the process of becoming an OL might provide catalysts for self-authorship development. As we analyzed the interview transcripts, we identified five characteristics of the OL experience that provoked disequilibrium in the OLs and spurred the movement through the crossroads. We labeled these characteristics as scheduled but not by the schedule, the diversity of the OL group, levels of trust, training becomes real, and group authorship.

Scheduled but not by the Schedule

Each NSO participant is assigned to a group for his or her program. The group has a specific schedule for the day and an OL is assigned to each group. This structured schedule would seem to reinforce formula following rather than encourage self-authorship, but it is rare that any OL experiences a day that adheres to the schedule. This ambiguity caused the participants to experience disequilibrium and was, consequently, a catalyst. The OLs must use what they know from training, from experience, from what they have learned about their group, from authorities, and from each other to determine the best course of action each hour of each day.

Angie, a 19 year old Caucasian female majoring in Nursing, described how the schedule did not necessarily provide the formula for organizing the day:

I didn't understand this before, but you completely have to figure out your day in where you need to go that isn't in that schedule. Because they'll just give you the schedule where the kids need to be, but that's not necessarily where you have to be.

One of the outward signs that the OLs were becoming more comfortable with their ability to self-author when faced with a situation that did not fit neatly into the pre-determined schedule was the number of questions they asked the team leaders. James, a 20 year old African American male biology/pre-med major, described the evolution in this way:

We start calling our team leaders less and less, we start asking—stop asking for help less and less. Like if it was a kid that had to go to testing and I didn't know 'til the last minute, I wouldn't call them [the team leaders] to figure out what to do. I would call one of my coworkers [the other OLs] versus calling them [the team leaders] and have him go with one of them or I would drop him off after I did something else. It was easier to figure out problems, more or less.

As the OLs progressed through spring break and into the summer, they became progressively more confident in their ability to structure the day, as opposed to being bound by the prescribed schedule. They also became less dependent on the team leaders and the NSO leadership and formed interdependent relationships with their fellow OLs.

Diversity of the OL Group

This was the most diverse group of OLs ever hired for our campus, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the OLs themselves. Interacting with peers who had diverse life circumstances such as serving in the military, being a parent, coming from another country to the U.S. for college, and entering college after a break from high school provided the OLs with many opportunities to question their assumptions about who comes to college and the potential composition of the orientation participants whom they would be serving. Several of the OLs mentioned that the diversity of the OL staff helped to shape how they performed their duties.

For many of the OLs, this was the first job where they worked in such a diverse environment. The impact of diversity experiences on student development is well established. For the participants in this study, it was not only the interaction with diverse others but the sustained nature of the interaction that provoked an examination of assumptions and actions. When comparing being an OL with a previous leadership experience, Bobby, a 19 year old Caucasian male majoring in Mechanical Engineering, explained,

That was like a week... I interacted with them but I didn't really get to know them... that bond that we've had like that whole spring break of interacting with them [the other OLs] and then as well as each course day interacting with them and just—it's just a whole like big fun loving group of people.

The diversity of the OL group provided the OLs an opportunity to challenge their own assumptions about others and about difference. This, in turn, allowed them to approach their interaction with the orientation participants in a more self-authored manner. Lisa, a 20 year old Caucasian female majoring in Accounting, noted,

It was a great eye opener for me because a lot of those people I would've never ever met because we're from way different backgrounds socially, economically. That was really good for me to diversify my views and it opened my mind to people; made it easier. Getting to know the staff I worked with definitely made it easier to talk to other people in my group who were different from me, if that makes sense.

For most of the OLs, their typical student lives had not provided them with opportunities to interact with diverse others over a sustained time period.

Although they might have been in a classroom with diverse others, they were not required to interact with their fellow students, nor were they focused on the needs of those other students. These aspects of the OL experience moved students from simply recognizing that they were surrounded by diversity to examining how that reality affected their work and their sense of self.

Levels of Trust

It is impossible for any one OL to do the job alone. As can be seen above in the quotes illustrating how the OLs dealt with the challenge of navigating through each day's schedule, the OLs often turned to each other when plotting a course through the day. Some OLs were comfortable with this reality on their first day, while others had to learn by trying to be independent and then discovering that this does not work. The process of developing this trust created dissonance for several of the OLs.

NSO trusts me. Some of the OLs were struck by the level of responsibility within the job and the lack of direct supervision provided by the director and assistant director of New Student Orientation. James noted,

I also was surprised how much [they] weren't around, like, I expected them to be... We were able to figure out problems on our own which is part of our growing process. I would rather try to figure it out on my own versus having them always there.

I trust others. In addition to the realization that Orientation trusted them, several OLs came to realize that they could depend on each other. The process of developing a trust in each other served as a catalyst. Katie, a 28 year old sophomore, Caucasian female majoring in Nursing, commented,

It was just great because overall, I think everybody knew what they had to do. People weren't coming in kind of like, "Oh, what am I doing today?" I think as a group, we all worked really well together. You knew what needed to be done, and you felt comfortable asking, "Hey, can you do this for me," and I think we really worked well together.

I trust me. As the OLs became more comfortable with and confident in the leadership role for which they had been hired, many started to recognize that they were growing and maturing. This realization allowed them to act on their newfound self-reflection. Monica, a 19 year old African American female majoring in Exercise Science, noted,

So my light-bulb moments came when I was just like, Ding, ding, ding. {Name}, do this! Do that! Oh really? Things just popped into my head that I didn't think of. I didn't think I would come up with a solution like that and I was like, Hmm. Learning new things every day.

Nevra, a 19 year old, Middle-Eastern female majoring in Respiratory Therapy commented,

I was talking in the mic, and after—I didn't get scared of it. I just said what I had. And after I finished, I'm like, "I talked in the mic." Like, everyone could hear me if I did a mistake, and I didn't think about it. I didn't think about making a mistake. That was good.

Throughout the course of becoming an OL, the participants gained an understanding of and confidence in the fact that they could effectively construct a successful orientation day. Realizing that Orientation trusted them and that they could trust each other supported their ability to develop a trust in themselves. This feeling of competence facilitated self-authored actions.

Training Becomes Real

One of the unique features of the orientation program at this institution is that new students are given the opportunity to attend in mid-March. The challenge in providing this opportunity, however, is that these orientation programs take place about halfway through the training course, giving us little time to train and prepare the OLs to work with groups of new students. The spring break programs do, however, provide a mechanism for the OLs to begin to realize what we were trying to teach them in the course; the training becomes real to them. Samuel, a 20 year old Mixed Race male majoring in Business, had the following to say related to his experience with the spring break programs:

I don't feel like the course prepared us, or it didn't seem like it was as knowledgeable, but when we got out there, it almost felt like we were classically conditioned to know. We got in a situation and we thought about like, we weren't gonna be able to handle this, but then all of a sudden the answer came to us, and like just out of reaction we knew what to do. But it didn't seem that way in course. It just felt like we were talking with our co-workers, and having a good time.

In a sense, spring break serves as a week-long experiential learning opportunity, requiring the OLs to apply what they have learned thus far in the course. In fact, many OLs articulated their surprise at realizing that they knew more than they thought they did coming into spring break. After spring break, the OLs came to understand how it all made sense, increasing the value they placed on the training and shaping how they approached the remaining weeks of the course. Monica explained,

During the course, I was like, "This is a course and yeah, it's for a job that I'm interested in, but it's a course." So, I came to it, just sitting through it. And so, I think the spring break week just kinda showed us the importance of the

training course more. Like, I knew it was important to learn everything. You always know it, but it really reflects it when you go through it...It makes me kind of appreciate all the information they're giving us in course.

After the OLs had an opportunity to work with new students and really gain an understanding of what the job entailed, the training became real to them and the level of importance the OLs placed on the training increased.

Group Authorship

Through the process of navigating the daily schedule and becoming comfortable with the differing levels of trust required to make the program work, the OLs, as a group, seemed to develop self-authorship reciprocally. As individual OLs developed their own individual authorship, they actively helped others understand how to work through the complexity of the day. Monica talked about working together to figure out the schedule and noted that the group needed to explain the solution to one member several times:

You really had to talk to your orientation leaders and kind of organize and assemble and get together. Everybody had different schedules...We debated for maybe ten minutes, and I don't know why it took that long because we're all like, "Okay, we'll just go here." And then one person was like, "What? What are you talking about? I don't get it." ...So it took us a long time to kinda get everybody to understand where we had to go.

Individuals shared how the growth they saw in their fellow OLs served as a catalyst for their own growth. Consequently, *individual* self-authorship development appeared to rely on the group authorship development. Katie explained,

Seeing how people interacted differently with other people, just a different approach or how the more outgoing people—you found yourself like, "Oh, I wish I could be that way," ...You kind of looked at it like, "Oh, I want to be like that," and you just definitely saw people's strengths...I think it encouraged and challenged us to be better.

Justin, a 19 year old Caucasian male majoring in Mechanical Engineering, described both recognizing the importance of everyone being on the same page as well as the phenomenon that they were learning as a group:

So it's really finding both the skills and the personality quirks of everyone to figure out how to get the whole group working towards a better goal...you learn both the positives and negatives about people...how they approach certain situations and stuff like that, and you learn to work with that, and maybe help them along the way with that.

Although self-authorship development is typically explored as an individual phenomenon, the participants in this study appeared to make gains through assisting others to grow and also through observing the growth of their peers.

Discussion

In this study, we explored the ways in which aspects of the OL experience served as catalysts for self-authorship development. Five characteristics emerged as catalysts. As we explored how the OLs processed their own learning and development, three of the catalysts appeared interconnected: scheduled but not by the schedule, levels of trust, and group authorship. The need for constant problem solving within the structure of the day provided almost daily opportunities for the OLs to question their assumptions, seek out increasingly complex ways to approach situations, and appreciate and utilize the evolving expertise of their peers. This feature of the OL experience is both pragmatic and intentional. The number of new student and family participants who attend each program is so large that it is impossible for the Orientation leadership team to provide constant supervision of the OLs. In addition, the OL position is conceptualized as a leadership position in addition to a summer job. The Orientation leadership team is intentional about providing opportunities for the OLs to grow.

Because of the nature of orientation at this institution, the OLs must develop trust in their own abilities as well as those of their peers. Some of the OLs were comfortable with this reality on their first day, while others had to learn by attempting to function independently and then discovering that interdependence is necessary. This realization acted as a catalyst as students realized the necessity of relying on their peers and then acted on that insight.

As the OLs encountered various catalysts throughout the OL experience, they learned to navigate the challenges in the schedule by functioning interdependently. Consequently, they began to function as a self-authored team; in other words, the group authored as an entity. Part of the group authorship process involved the OLs making sure that all members of their team had a clear understanding of the situation at hand and the action steps decided upon by the group. The group authorship process also involved reciprocal development—individual OLs observing the growth of other OLs and aspiring to replicate that growth.

An interesting aspect of the OL experience is that we ask the OLs to perform their duties for spring break when they have only completed half of the training course. Although this can present a challenge for some of the OLs who are a bit less comfortable taking this step of leadership so soon, it acts as a catalyst for self-authorship development by making the training truly salient. The opportunity to test the waters helps the OLs realize that they truly are knowers. The experience forces them to mutually construct meaning because it is a necessary step to surviving the week. This hands-on experience also creates a common experience in which the course instructors can situate future learning.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

As with any study, there are important limitations that must be addressed. By design, this study included participants from only one institution, limiting the applicability of the findings. The experiences of the participants that acted as catalysts for self-authorship were embedded in a specific program and shaped by the characteristics of the institution under study. The findings would be most applicable to other institutions of similar size and student body characteristics. Similarly, the findings would be most applicable to institutions with a similar approach to orientation and that use an OL training course. Expanding the study to include institutions of varying types and examining the use of a variety of OL training methods could allow for comparison across training processes and their effect on self-authorship development.

The duration of the study is also a limitation. The study occurred over only one academic semester and one summer of working as an OL. It would be valuable to expand the study to include both a longitudinal examination of the self-authorship development of participants after their time as OLs as well as a round of interviews with future OLs to compare catalysts from year to year. Following up with study participants would allow for examination of whether self-authorship development is transferable to other situations or is embedded in the OL experience.

The established relationship between the researchers, particularly the Director of New Student Orientation who also co-instructed the course, and participants could be viewed as a limitation of the study. Though both researchers knew the participants of the study, we view this established relationship as a benefit of the study, as it allowed us to develop a level of trust and credibility prior to the data collection process that helped enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, something not possible without pre-established researcher-participant relationships.

Finally, further research could examine the ways in which other leadership development and student employment opportunities provide catalysts for self-authorship development. Focusing on other forms of leadership and employment would shed light on whether the catalysts that emerged from this research are particular to the experience of becoming an orientation leader. This research direction could also further explore how training and hands-on experience reinforce self-authorship development.

Implications for Practice

Being an orientation leader is both a form of student employment and leadership. In the program used as the context of this study, some of the situations lacking apparent formulas were introduced in training, while others were a function of the OL job duties. This may be true in any student employment opportunity that involves decision making and problem solving. Several aspects of this particular leadership and employment situation seemed to set the stage for

the OLs to encounter a catalyst. Some of these aspects could be replicated in other types of student leadership and employment.

The duration of the programs provided the OLs with multiple opportunities to confront complicated situations and solve them with increasingly complex approaches and enhanced the impact made by the diversity of the OL group. When possible, programs designed to support self-authorship development should involve an extended time period. Doing so will allow for greater understanding of the students' points of view and how they personally feel they are authoring their lives, allowing faculty members and student affairs practitioners alike to better understand the self-authorship process of their students. This increased understanding, it is hoped, will allow them to enhance their teaching and advising practice to be more responsive to their students as they work through the developmental process of moving from following external formulas to becoming the author of their own lives.

By allowing the voices of the OLs to come forward strongly in the study, those who read this study, particularly orientation professionals and others who work closely with student leaders, will be in a better position to change, update, modify, and create programs, services, and other educational opportunities that will be designed in such a way as to have the potential to further the self-authorship development process of future generations of college students. Specifically, orientation professionals could modify their training program and day-to-day OL responsibilities in such a way as to ensure OLs are provided opportunities to explore their current level of self-authorship and be encouraged to use the OL position to grow and develop their internally developed values and beliefs, instead of continuing to follow the external formulas which have been provided to them.

Conclusion

This study explored how the process of becoming an OL provided catalysts for self-authorship development. Our findings support the concept that educational experiences can be intentionally constructed to facilitate self-authorship development. By continuing to explore the conditions necessary for students to move toward self-authorship when faced with provocative situations instead of relying on formulas, we can more effectively create programs and services that accomplish growth and development.

Practically, this study provides information to orientation practitioners and others who train college student leaders to design experiences that promote self-authorship. It also illustrates the potential benefits of training OLs over a long time period and assists orientation professionals with integrating theory and practice to not only create effective orientation programs but also provide student leaders the opportunity to grow and develop while in college.

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