

## **Transformative Pathways: Fostering Leadership Development Through Reflective Undergraduate Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Undergraduate education can play a transformative role in developing students' leadership capacities, the practice of which can be examined through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This study examines how educational experiences in a senior undergraduate-level leadership development course at a western Canadian university contributed to shaping students' self-awareness, personal philosophies, and leadership skills.

Using thematic analysis of reflective writing from 17 students, the research revealed a significant shift among students from perceiving leadership as a positional role to understanding it as a lifelong personal journey of growth and societal responsibility. The findings suggest that, in addition to developing leadership competencies, the course facilitated personal transformations by exploring the alignment of personal values, individual leadership styles, and social awareness. A major contribution of this paper is a model that maps a path for students' leadership growth, beginning with self-awareness, moving to the development of personal philosophy on leadership, and, finally, building practical skills.

The findings of this study have broad interdisciplinary applications, highlighting the importance of fostering self-awareness and developing leadership philosophies to prepare students for navigating complex challenges and leading effectively in diverse fields. Universities and educators may consider integrating reflective teaching methods that encourage transformative learning. Such pedagogical approaches can support students in leading authentically, adapting their leadership to various contexts, and maintaining a strong commitment to ethical practices and positive societal impact.

*Keywords:* leadership development, leadership education, undergraduate education, transformative learning

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## INTRODUCTION

*Education is the mother of leadership.* —Wendell L. Willkie,

*Freedom and the Liberal Arts, 1943*

University education is widely recognized as a transformative experience that shapes individuals intellectually, socially, and personally, thus leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and the world (Kegan, 2018; Mezirow, 2000). Moreover, in addition to fostering new knowledge, undergraduate education aims to create an environment where students can develop critical thinking skills, establish meaningful connections, and understand their impact on the world.

Education's transformative power is particularly relevant to leadership development, where the learning journey entails re-examining one's identity, values, and beliefs as a foundation for an authentic leadership practice. Leadership is one of the essential determinants of personal and organizational success. However, because of its transdisciplinary nature, there is no unanimous agreement as to how, exactly, to define it (Northouse, 2024). Leadership has been conceptualized in various ways, with scholars emphasizing particular characteristics to define it as a process, communication, service, relationship, or the capacity to instigate change (Dinh et al., 2014; Drucker, 2020; Ford & Harding, 2018; Kotter, 2007; Northouse, 2024; Ronald, 2014; Uhl-Bien, 2021). For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as the purposeful influence one has on others, which is relationally enacted through everyday actions within one's context. This perspective is particularly appropriate for undergraduate students as it democratizes the leadership practice, making it accessible and relevant to all people, independent of professional positions or titles (Carey, 2020; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Erhard et al., 2013). The study offers a baseline step to establish a foundation for future longitudinal investigations exploring the transformative effects of leadership education.

Business schools play an essential role in developing future leaders although, traditionally, their focus has been on teaching technical skills for resource planning, organizing, and control (Leroy et al., 2022; Winstead et al., 2009). However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of addressing the gap between this technical expertise and leadership ability by developing emotional intelligence for effective and ethical self-management as well as influencing others (Avolio, 2010; Felten et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2022; Goleman, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Leroy et al., 2022; Gimmarco et al., 2020). Emotionally intelligent leaders possess empathy, self-awareness, and social skills that allow them to create positive work environments, foster collaboration, and navigate complex social dynamics, ultimately driving organizational performance (Goleman, 2019; Northouse, 2024).

Leadership curricula vary considerably at the undergraduate level (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Leroy et al., 2022). Courses tend to focus on the extraordinary achievements and characteristics of world-renowned leaders, which

can obscure the critical, everyday impact of leadership practice. Additionally, leader development requires practical and authentic application within one's context, informed by theoretical models. Thus, educators must blend their own personal leadership philosophy—shaped by knowledge and experience—with the ability to model leadership skills and behaviours in the classroom. This approach, paired with offering students opportunities to practice relevant skills in a supportive environment, is essential for their development (Carey, 2020; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Morrison et al., 2003). Gauging the efficacy of undergraduate leadership courses is a complex task because although observable progress may be noted within an academic term, meaningful growth unfolds over a longer period of time. Profound changes, indicative of transformative learning, tend to manifest several months or even years after course completion (Abrell, 2011; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Newstead, et al., 2024; Njah et al., 2021; Mayhew et al., 2021).

Leadership educators do not yet fully understand which pedagogical approaches lead to transformative learning. While the collective and relational aspects of leadership have been extensively studied, the more personal area of leader development, focused on individual growth and self-awareness, remains relatively unexplored (Abrell, 2011; Avolio, 2010; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Esen et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2012; Leroy et al., 2022; Van Velsor et al., 2010). Emerging literature has explored phenomenological pedagogies that move beyond theoretical knowledge of leadership to emphasize self-awareness and the embodiment of leadership practices (Carey, 2020; Erhard et al., 2013; Jenkins, 2012). However, further investigation is needed to determine whether these pedagogies foster profound leader development, where leadership is both conceptually understood and lived as an embodied practice.

This study aims to contribute to the leadership development literature by providing detailed insights into the transformative educational experiences of students following their participation in a senior undergraduate-level university leadership course by asking the research question: Does completing a senior undergraduate leadership development course lead to transformative learning among students?

## POSITIONALITY

My experiences as a leadership learner, practitioner, and educator in the private, public, and non-profit sectors enrich this investigation. My lifelong learning journey includes a Doctor of Philosophy degree in educational leadership and a Master of Education degree in interdisciplinary studies, specializing in leadership. I have also taught hundreds of leadership students at three post-secondary institutions in the disciplines of business, health care, social work, and engineering. These diverse experiences have been instrumental in helping me to shape the study's research questions, select the appropriate research methods, and interpret the data. Moreover, I have consciously adopted a reflexive stance to balance my educator and investigator roles, aiming to uphold an impartial analytical approach by critically examining how my positionality might influence my perspective. This

methodical approach ensures that the study's conclusions are substantiated by robust empirical evidence.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

This study uses transformative learning theory as a lens for the investigation. The rationale for applying a transformative learning lens is grounded in its extensive study and discussion in the literature and its recognized effectiveness in examining leadership development programs (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020; Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning theory, introduced by Jack Mezirow in the 1970s, is an adult education framework emphasizing critical reflection for perspective change (Mezirow, 1978). Importantly, this theory underscores the role of self-reflection, dialogue, and critical thinking that fundamentally change how individuals understand themselves and the world around them. It proposes that through examining and questioning previously held beliefs, assumptions, and values as part of the learning experience, students undergo a transformation in perspective that can help them adopt a more inclusive, discerning, integrative, and ultimately sustainable worldview (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Odom et al., 2017). Conversely, non-transformative types of learning involve passive acceptance of knowledge within existing frames of reference, such as when memorizing a theory.

## **METHODS**

This qualitative study was guided methodologically by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Yeo et al.'s (2023) insights into adult education and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Their emphasis on applied research informed the study's design, including data collection, analysis, and reporting. Specifically, the study utilized thematic analysis, an inductive research technique favoured for its ability to observe participants in their natural settings to generate broad explanations and facilitate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The constant comparative method was employed in data coding and analysis, allowing for the simultaneous comparison of different data segments (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The comparison revealed repeated patterns of experiences, both similar and different among participants, which were deductively organized into clustered codes. These codes formed the broad themes of self-awareness, personal philosophy, and skill development, all organized under the overarching umbrella of leadership development. Through this constructivist lens, I dissected and interpreted the students' narratives, emphasizing the strategic role of self-reflection.

### ***Context***

The research was conducted at Mount Royal University, a publicly funded undergraduate university in Western Canada that offers 36 degree options to over 15,000 students annually. According to the university's stated values, apart from

the requirements of employment, its programs “strive to enrich students’ lives and benefit society by promoting a strong reflective capacity with respect to social, cultural, and scientific matters” (Mount Royal University, 2025). The leadership development course under examination is offered by the university’s business school. The course is open to students who have completed organizational behaviour or social psychology prerequisites as part of their general education requirements. Learning outcomes for the section of the course involved in this research were assessed through the completion of group work involving research and class facilitation components, as well as individual exams testing the students’ understanding of theory through case-based scenario questions with practical setting applications. Learning outcomes were also assessed through individual and group reflective activities, including two reflective assignments focused on self-awareness.

To facilitate development, students were prompted to examine the leadership and followership dynamics they observed within their immediate context in schools, workplaces, and families. The course design encouraged students to actively engage in bridging the gap between their personal experiences and the classroom material. This integration was achieved by incorporating group discussions where students collaboratively deconstructed and critically analyzed leadership as a social construct. Furthermore, the course promoted active engagement by involving students in teaching and facilitation roles, which not only helped them understand the content in more depth, but also supported their development of communication skills. Such a pedagogical approach was in line with the university’s stated commitment to foster adaptability, inclusivity, and relationship building. The teaching method was reinforced by the instructor’s subject matter expertise and the anecdotal evidence from prior course participants, suggesting that the approach can lead to meaningful and long-lasting transformative learning experiences.

### ***Data Collection***

Once approval was obtained from the research ethics board at the end of Fall 2023, signed informed consent forms were collected from the leadership development students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The ethics review addressed issues of undue influence, conflict of interest, informed consent, and privacy, given that the research involved my students. To mitigate the risks associated with my dual role as a researcher and teacher, a fellow faculty member from the university handled the administration and collection of the consent forms. Further, a graduate student from a different institution was employed as a research assistant to gather and organize the study’s data, removing all personally identifiable information for analysis. I gained access to the consent forms and research data only after the student appeal period for final grades had passed.

Data consisted of two graded reflections prepared by the student participants as a regular part of the course activities. The reflections encouraged students to be introspective while bringing awareness as to what they were learning. Considering

the questions “What did I learn?,” “How did I learn it?,” “Why does it matter?,” and “What will I do in light of it?,” students were also asked to provide personal examples to illustrate their thoughts. The first reflection, due one week after the start of the course, was designed to uncover students’ foundational thoughts about leadership and leader development. It prompted them to examine their personal definition of leadership and the skills they aspired to develop or strengthen. The second reflection, due approximately 13 weeks later on the last day of class, aimed to gain insights into the nature of the students’ learning experiences over the semester, capturing actualized outcomes and implications of the real-world impact of the leadership skills they developed or refined.

In the section below, excerpts from participant reflections are provided wherever possible to vividly and accurately communicate their experiences.

## RESULTS

Thirty-five undergraduate students were enrolled in the course under examination. Upon enrolling, 70% of the students had already completed a minimum of 30 courses towards their degree. Another 20% had completed between 10 and 29 courses, while the remaining 10% had completed fewer than 10 courses. The course was a program requirement for 25% of the students. Of the total 35 students, 17 participated in the study.

### *Self-Awareness as a Leadership Foundation*

At the outset of the course, students viewed leadership primarily as influencing others within the political or organizational spheres. Students highlighted the importance of leading by example and the necessity of sound decision-making. They saw leadership as an external skillset to be acquired, akin to managing teams. As the course unfolded, students began to internalize leadership as a component of personal growth. They embarked on journeys of self-awareness, acknowledging the impact that their actions had on their immediate context. Initially, students had difficulties identifying themselves as leaders. They underestimated their capabilities and confused leadership with management. Their perspectives shifted dramatically over the course of the semester as they began to self-identify as leaders or as possessing leadership qualities and to accept accountability for their influence in the community:

I never considered myself a leader. My self-awareness was at a different capacity before taking the class than where I am now. ... I learned that many of the characteristics of a leader I already have. I realized that I have what it takes to be a leader, and the world needs more leaders, especially ethical leaders. ... It is my obligation to apply the concepts and ideas I learned in class to influence others to become leaders themselves. (Student 17, Reflection 2)

Throughout the semester, students’ understanding of leadership evolved from viewing it as a predominantly professional role to recognizing it as a continuous, value-driven process crucial to personal, organizational, and societal advancement.



The students' learning journey was underscored by a growing appreciation for leadership's contextual, distributed, and relational nature, moving beyond the traditional top-down approach.

The course encouraged students to engage in deep self-reflection, helping them to identify how their unique attributes could enhance their leadership practice. This introspective process was enriched by discussions on emotional intelligence, which played a pivotal role in increasing their self-awareness. Students reported a greater ability to regulate their emotions, tailor their communication styles to various personalities and contexts, and appreciate diverse perspectives—skills that proved essential in forming meaningful relationships and functioning effectively within their teams. Moreover, the insights gained about emotional intelligence extended to their ethical leadership practices, enhancing their understanding of the broader impacts of their decisions on both people and the environment. Through this comprehensive learning experience, students not only recognized the importance of adapting to challenging situations but also learned to manage personal responses and maintain effectiveness under stress. By the end of the semester, students were not only better prepared to lead in various contexts but also more committed to applying ethical principles.

### ***From Self-Awareness to Leadership Philosophy***

The students' evolution in understanding leadership began with the realization of its distinct nature, different from management. At the onset of the semester, many students equated leadership with formal authority and professional titles. However, as the semester progressed, they began to extend this understanding by examining various life experiences that ranged from family dynamics to team sports and workplace roles. The awareness that leadership occurs within their context supported a more sophisticated appreciation of it as both a skill and an art form that entails inspiring others through a number of behaviours and strategies. A student's reflection credits their learning with catalyzing a significant shift in their personal leadership philosophy:

I had always believed that a leader is someone who can command at will. This course has made me realize, and become self-aware, that I am capable of being a leader. I realized that I do not have to be assertive or militaristic in order to consider myself as a leader; and there are other ways one can demonstrate leadership. This newfound self-awareness will allow me to be more authentic and make sound decisions that are aligned with my strengths. (Student 1, Reflection 2)

This reflection demonstrates a fundamental shift in the student's leadership perspective from equating leadership with authority to recognizing it as an individualized, values-driven practice. As students progressed in their understanding, they began to redefine leadership as an ongoing process of self-discovery and relational influence. This maturation was evident as students started to see leadership not just as a role but as a series of relationships built on trust and integrity that require leaders to continually learn and adapt to their changing

contexts. Additionally, students recognized the value of identifying and understanding the impact they had on others, accepting personal accountability for this impact, and striving to have a positive and ethical influence. Conceptions of leadership transitioned from having power and authority to entering a journey of self-discovery influenced by ethical considerations and societal well-being.

Importantly, students appreciated the value of creating supportive and inclusive environments and developed a more sensitive sense of ethical accountability. The end-of-semester reflections showed that students understood their responsibility to foster positive change in the community by embracing leadership as a contextual and adaptive practice. Through self-discovery and skill development, the students' personal philosophies evolved to include the recognition that effective leadership is characterized by the consistent and authentic expression of one's ethical values and by a commitment to their own growth as well as that of others.

By the end of the course, students articulated a more comprehensive personal philosophy of leadership, encompassing self-discovery, skill acquisition, ethical considerations, and a commitment to social responsibility. Their reflections revealed an awareness that leadership is a dynamic, participatory practice that extends beyond personal achievement.

### ***From Leadership Philosophy to Authentic Practice***

At the beginning of the semester, the students' learning expectations reflected prototypical management and leadership traits, such as effective communication and conflict management. Many of them indicated that enhancing communication skills was their most critical area of interest as they aspired to be more assertive and to communicate better in group settings. However, as they progressed through the course, their focus shifted to incorporating skills for self-awareness, authenticity, and emotional intelligence, as captured in the words of this student:

I appreciate that more emphasis was placed on self-realization and how leaders develop their skills in their own style rather than sticking to an absolute, concrete formula.... Some leaders excel in areas that others might not, and vice versa. ... Although the class is primarily focused on leadership development, I feel like you develop as more than just a leader. You can develop as an individual, as a whole. (Student 2, Reflection 2)

This reflection demonstrates a shift in perspective, as students moved away from rigid, one-size-fits-all definitions of leadership and began to embrace a more individualized and developmental view. Rather than seeking to conform to an established leadership archetype, they started to recognize their own strengths and how leadership can be expressed in different ways. This broader, more nuanced understanding of leadership effectiveness, emphasized the importance of self-awareness, adaptability, and authenticity. Subsequently, many began identifying reflection and self-awareness as tangible leadership skills to be developed and practiced while also appreciating the diversity in leadership styles and the importance of aligning one's values with actions. Ultimately, students started to



view leadership as integral to their personal identity and not just as a function of an official capacity. The reflections revealed that students no longer aimed merely to refine role-specific skills, but to embrace a personalized approach tailored to their unique personalities, strengths, and values.

The impact of the leadership course extended beyond mere skill acquisition; it led to a personal transformation where students learned to value self-awareness and growth in all aspects of life. By the end of the course, leadership skills were not only viewed as vital for professional roles, but were seen as part of a holistic, lifelong growth process. Students recognized the transformative nature of the course on their journey to becoming self-aware, ethical, and impactful leaders prepared to positively influence their communities and workplaces. This holistic development signalled a shift from fitting a specific leadership mould to recognizing each student's unique strengths and qualities and ability to exert positive influence within their context.

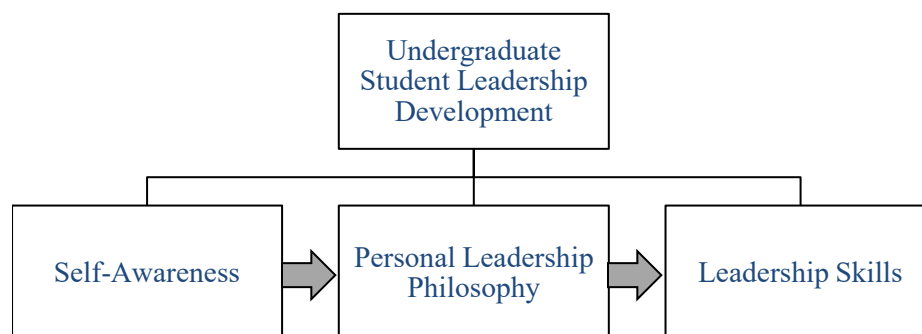
### ***Undergraduate Student Leadership Development Model***

The proposed Undergraduate Student Leadership Development Model (depicted in Figure 1) outlines a journey distinct from those typically experienced by more seasoned leaders. Whereas professional development often concentrates on refining skills directly related to specific roles, undergraduate leader development is characterized by a broader, more exploratory journey. The model emphasizes the cultivation of self-awareness, the formulation of personal leadership philosophies, and the refinement of leadership skills, highlighting the formative nature of undergraduate leadership education.

Importantly, this model can be applied across various academic disciplines. Whether in the fields of business, health care, engineering, or the arts, the development of self-awareness and leadership philosophies is crucial for preparing students to navigate complex challenges and lead in their respective fields.

**Figure 1**

*Undergraduate Student Leadership Development Model*



The model begins with self-awareness, identified as a pivotal leadership

development component. Researchers, including Collinson and Tourish (2015), Day and Dragoni (2015), Erhard et al. (2013), and Newstead et al. (2024), support this view, noting that introspective reflection is critical in helping students understand their values, beliefs, strengths, and growth areas. The reflective process, deeply intertwined with emotional intelligence, involves students recognizing and managing their own emotions and understanding the emotions of others, which is essential for an effective leadership practice. Self-awareness, often shaped by contrasting insights against those of authoritative figures in the students' lives, marked the first step in the students' leadership development. The model advocates for deep, place-based self-reflection, a pedagogical method effective in fostering leadership development (Carey, 2020; Erhard et al., 2013; Jenkins, 2012).

As self-awareness deepened, students progressed to establishing their personal leadership philosophies. This phase was dynamic and iterative, enriched by academic, peer, and extracurricular engagements, as well as by developing key components of emotional intelligence such as empathy, social skills, and self-regulation. Day and Dragoni (2015) highlight a transition in students' understanding from traditional, hierarchical views of leadership to more inclusive, participatory models—a finding consistent with this study's observations. The evolution signifies a shift from viewing leadership as a position of power to recognizing it as a process of continuous personal growth and ethical practice underpinned by emotional intelligence.

The literature often highlights the challenges in achieving substantial leadership development through conventional educational models, as noted by Collinson and Tourish (2015), who argue that leadership courses rarely meet their high expectations and often fail to effectively develop crucial leadership skills. In contrast, this study revealed that when leadership development is paired with active learning techniques, such as student class facilitation and reflective practices, it can lead to significant personal and professional growth. Odom et al. (2017) suggest that deeper, more active learning methods are crucial in fostering leadership skills, a point this study's model incorporated by emphasizing the importance of real-world application and continuous self-reflection, which are essential for developing emotional intelligence.

The model proposes that leadership development in undergraduate settings should not be viewed merely as preparation for future professional roles but as an integral part of holistic personal development. It calls for a paradigm shift in leadership education, encouraging institutions to adopt an integrated, reflective, and practical approach that leads to sustained transformations. This pedagogical approach aims to foster students' development into well-rounded individuals, equipped with emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness, and prepared to positively impact their communities and workplaces.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this research offer valuable insights for post-secondary institutions, leadership educators, and students. At the institutional level, the commitment to leadership development should manifest in prioritizing and allocating appropriate resources to offer comprehensive, cross-disciplinary leadership development programs available to all students. By fostering the development of students' leadership capacities, institutions can enhance their students' effectiveness in future careers while enriching the university environment and strengthening cultures of authenticity, agency, active collaboration, and creative problem-solving.

Leadership educators are encouraged to embrace principles of transformative learning and a reflexive pedagogical approach that acknowledges students' pre-existing experiences and notions to actively engage them in critical self-reflection. This can be achieved by incorporating exercises such as journals, essays, or portfolios, which track students' growth while teaching the practice of deep introspection. Such an approach would require educators to model self-awareness and critical reflexivity in their teaching practice in a way that their students can identify and observe. Additionally, introducing leadership education early in the undergraduate journey may allow for the extended gestation period necessary for transformative learning to take root and flourish throughout students' academic careers.

Undergraduate students could use this study's findings to shape their own learning experiences by adopting a proactive and self-directed reflective approach to their education. They could utilize the principles of transformative learning to seek out diverse experiences that challenge their preconceptions and foster agency and personal growth.

Additionally, this study lays a foundation for several avenues of future research. Future studies could incorporate longitudinal explorations and a multi-source feedback approach using a suite of tools, including semi-structured interviews and self-assessments, to explore observable progress in self-awareness, ethical orientations, and skill development over time. Additional research should focus on the long-term impact of undergraduate leadership development offerings by conducting post-graduation follow-ups. Such studies would capture the long-term impact of leadership education and offer valuable insights into the real-world application of the competencies acquired during tertiary education. By embracing these research strategies, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of leadership development, informing educational practices and developing the next generation of leaders.

### *Limitations*

While the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of undergraduate leadership development, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The first limitation arises from the study's participant pool, which was confined to a single

university's business school course and thus may not fully reflect other disciplines and educational contexts. Future studies would benefit from a more diverse sample that includes a variety of academic programs and institutions. A further limitation is the study's reliance on self-reported reflections that are part of graded coursework. This reliance may invite biases, as students could tailor their responses towards perceived grading criteria or positive self-presentation.

## CONCLUSIONS

University education plays a crucial role in developing future leaders. As Wendell L. Willkie (1943) stated, education is truly "the mother of leadership" (p. 140). Leadership development is a journey that requires time and extends beyond classroom learning. It involves gaining a clear understanding of who we are and what we value to apply skills that lead to positive outcomes in our communities and organizations.

The leadership course explored in this investigation is more than just another class. It may be a turning point for students, fostering an awakening of their leadership capacities and empowering them to purposely and intentionally commit to positive change within their immediate contexts.

This research highlights a developmental pathway for undergraduate students, beginning with self-awareness, progressing to the formulation of a personal philosophy on leadership, and culminating in the application of leadership skills. The research highlights that leadership development begins with self-awareness and is deepened through embodied experience and practice, where students actively engage with leadership concepts in real-world contexts.

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## **STUDENT RESPONSE TO “TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAYS: FOSTERING LEADERSHIP SKILLS THROUGH REFLECTIVE UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION”**

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After completing the Leadership Development course, we collaborated with Dr. Leda Stawnychko as research assistants under a students-as-partners model. Reflecting on our experience as students and researchers, it became clear to us that leadership education should permeate all aspects of the university curriculum. Initially, we thought of leadership in a conventional way, often associating it with those in higher positions of authority. However, in class and through this investigation, we learned a crucial insight: leadership is not confined to those in power but exists within each of us. We believe that integrating leadership education earlier in students' university experiences would help them recognize and develop their leadership potential sooner. Just as the students in the study translated their learning into actionable insights, integrating leadership education across disciplines can empower students to apply leadership in diverse contexts.

Additionally, universities could embed leadership principles throughout the entire campus experience, making it easier for students to develop and apply leadership skills in all areas of their lives. By incorporating leadership into every part of the curriculum, students could learn to thrive both academically and personally, while also contributing positively to society.

Although technical skills and formal authority are important aspects of leadership, we now believe that empathy is what sets exceptional leaders apart. Through the course and this research project, we became more self-aware of our transformative potential and recognized that true leadership begins with leading ourselves effectively before guiding others.