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ABSTRACT
Cultivating leadership identity early in a child’s development is crucial. This article examines the development of an intentional leadership identity development program for young girls. Using participatory action research (PAR), faculty and students from a college school of social work and administrators and teachers from a suburban prekindergarten-12 all girls’ school collaborated to create a program for leadership development for the school’s youngest students, age 4 to 9 years. PAR is a research methodology wherein all members’ voices and ideas, including those typically identified as “researchers” and “subjects,” are valued and included. Researchers were interested in how to develop a leadership program at the elementary level, how girls’ understandings of leadership would change through participation in a program, and how teachers would describe leadership identity development and leadership behavior in young girls. Results indicate that PAR was an important tool for creating a program that resonated with the school’s existing culture, and that the program itself helped to redefine leadership for the girls and led them to identify themselves as leaders in more complex and nuanced ways. Furthermore, teachers were able to outline the process through which the girls learned, gained confidence, and developed self-efficacy in leadership skills.

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Girls; leadership; participatory action research; self-efficacy

Leadership is a term that can be defined in innumerable ways, depending on the context and the person tasked with writing such a definition. One person might imagine a high-power corporate executive in a leather chair sitting behind a grand expanse of desk. Another might imagine a political leader, such as the president, prime minister, or monarch of a country. Others may think of school leaders, like principals, deans, or superintendents. Still another might picture a member of an organization who has no formal leadership role but tends to take on challenging situations. Despite the lack of uniformity in these images of a “leader,” a consensus about leadership at present provides the context for this study: women are under-represented in top formal leadership roles in businesses and organizations (Baker, 2014; Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2011).

A substantial body of academic research and popular media documents the underrepresentation of women in formal leadership roles. In 1991, the George H. Bush Administration created the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission to examine the artificial barriers that prevented women from advancing to upper level management positions. The final report by the commission explained, “Over half of all Master’s degrees are now awarded to women, yet 95% of senior-level managers of the top Fortune 1000 industrial and 500 service companies are men” (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 6).

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More recent studies continue to highlight the persistence of the gap between men and women in leadership roles. Hoobler et al. (2011), for example, explained that in 2008:

women comprised 46.5% of the U.S. labor force, and occupied nearly 51% of all managerial and professional jobs, yet women holding the titles of chairman, chief executive officer (CEO), chief operating officer (COO), and executive vice-president (EVP) remained at about 7% of the population of U.S. executives. (p. 151)

Furthermore, though women held five of the eight top leadership roles at Ivy League institutions in 2012, they only constitute 22% of college or university presidents throughout the United States (Lennon, Spotts, & Mitchell, 2013).

One potential reason for the disparity between men and women in leadership roles is that, from a young age, girls’ leadership behaviors are not labeled as leadership. According to the “Ban Bossy” campaign, girls who display traditional leadership behaviors during childhood are labeled as “bossy” rather than “leader,” which can cause their self-esteem to drop during childhood (McFadden & Whitman, 2014). Furthermore, a girl who displays relational leadership traits may not be labeled as a leader, but rather as a “good friend” or a “team player.” Because early leadership is either discouraged or goes unnoticed, girls are less likely to define themselves as leaders early on and will also be less likely to take on leadership roles later in life (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Like “Ban Bossy,” popular media sources have begun to point to the value of early experiences in encouraging or discouraging girls from becoming leaders in adolescence and adulthood, and academic research supports the idea that early development of leadership identity and leadership skills is crucial (Murphy, 2011; Strahle, 2013). However, such research has yet to document effective means for intentionally cultivating leadership identities in young girls who have the potential to shape the future. This article advances the existing leadership literature by examining one intentional leadership identity development program for young girls. The program, titled Living Leadership in the Lower School or L3, focuses on helping students recognize the many different traits of a leader, and further encourages them to embrace these traits.

**Research questions**

To frame our research, this article addresses the following questions:

1. How can a school and its curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular structures and supports facilitate the development of an intentional leadership program at the elementary level?
2. How did understandings of leadership change in young girls participating in an intentional leadership identity development program?
3. How do teachers participating in an intentional leadership identity development program describe leadership identity development and leadership behaviors in young girls?

**Review of the literature**

Identity development is a complex process that takes place over the course of a lifetime (Oyserman, 2001). It has several different dimensions that not only define who we are and where we belong but also influence our actions and motivations (Oyserman, 2001; Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Leadership identity, one dimension of identity and the focus of this article, can be described as a personal definition of leadership and a self-assessment of the capacities needed to meet that personal definition (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Although only one aspect of individual identity development, leadership identity development is an important process as it creates leadership skills and motivation to lead (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Lord & Hall, 2005; Lord, Hall, & Halpin, 2011). However, the topic of intentional early leadership identity development remains under-researched (Murphy & Johnson, 2011).
Leadership identity development

The research base covering early leadership identity development consists of theoretical research that looks to explain the psychological process involved in developing a leadership identity and predictive studies seeking to identify likely traits of leaders. Within the theoretical literature and predictive studies, an important distinction is found in the description of leadership identity and skill development as either transactional and task oriented or transformational and relational (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). Building on the work of Bass (1991), transactional and transformational perspectives focus on moving from follower to leader, with the latter perspective focusing more broadly on becoming a leader, reaching beyond the simple exchange between “leader and led” as portrayed in the transactional literature (Hardy, Hunt, & Lehr, 1978; Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). The more nuanced transformational and relational theories are far more common in recent research because of our deeper understanding of what is mutually beneficial and most effective in the workplace, influenced by the changing nature of the economy. Specifically, 21st-century leadership is based on the development of relationships rather than the managerial leadership style of the industrial era, which required a more transactional model of administration (Pearce & Conger, 2002). Present leadership theory emphasizes that good leaders build resonant relationships with those around them and that emotional intelligence is essential to producing those relationships (Boyatzis & McKee, 2013).

One of the most common theoretical models cited in research on the process of leadership identity development is social learning theory or social cognitive theory (SCT) (Avolio & Vogelgesang, 2011; Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; Hogg, 2001; Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2000). SCT posits that individuals learn through observations and experiences that are filtered through an individual’s perceptions (Bandura, 1977, 1997). From this perspective, identity development and consequently leadership identity development are directly tied to the development of leadership self-efficacy or one’s “level of confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leading others” (Hannah et al., 2008, p. 1; Hannah, Woolfolk, & Lord, 2009). In other words, leadership identity development is based on a person’s evaluation of her or his ability to be a leader, which is filtered through her or his experiences.

As research has focused more on relational theories of leadership, several theorists have argued for a detailed developmental perspective on the evolution of a leadership identity. Researchers have documented the importance of influences across the lifespan, thus creating a more nuanced version of SCT. In a grounded theory study focused on college students, Komives et al. (2005) described six stages of leadership development that occur in a cyclical fashion across the developmental continuum: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. In line with SCT, integral to an individual’s movement through these stages is whether educators create an environment that facilitates learning and supports students as they struggle through that learning (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999).

Based on research by Bornstein (1989), which described early points in life as “sensitive” (p. 179) periods wherein skills or qualities are more likely or more easily developed, Murphy and Johnson (2011) created a “long-lens approach to leader development” (p. 459). The authors proposed a model of leadership development that accounts for dynamic and iterative processes, including the many contextual factors that may influence leadership identity development. They feel it is important to include these processes and factors because researchers often limit their definition of leadership to include only specific tasks or behaviors.

In discussing leadership development, it is important to acknowledge the role of early developmental and contextual factors. Genetics (Arvey & Chaturvedi, 2011; Avolio & Vogelgesang, 2011; Chaturvedi, Zyphur, Arvey, Avolio, & Larson, 2012), age (Walter & Scheibe, 2013), and the environment (Avolio, Rotundo, & Walumbwa, 2009; Avolio & Vogelgesang, 2011; Day, 2001; Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006) are largely outside of the control of the individual, yet they “set the stage” for future leadership development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). For example, twin studies have suggested an element of leadership is traceable to genetic factors (Arvey
However, it should be noted that, though genetics have been found to play a role, a significant amount of variability in these outcomes may be explained by other factors (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, “certain contextual factors (the developmental stage of the leader, societal expectations for leaders, and generational differences) impact the extent to which early experiences influence the development of a leadership identity and self-regulatory capabilities” (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 465). In addition to having a direct impact, contextual factors may moderate the relationship between leadership identity and self-regulatory capabilities and future leadership development and effectiveness. These authors explained that this is particularly true for girls. Although boys are expected to display typical “leadership behaviors” and are praised as leaders, girls, on the other hand, are commended for skills in building and maintaining communities but are not labeled as leaders.

It appears that several contextual influences throughout early development have an important impact on leadership identity in adulthood and are filtered through individual experience. Therefore, it is essential to consider the ways in which leadership development continues to occur as individuals learn new skills and behaviors (Bornstein, 1989). Understanding leadership identity development requires an examination of leadership identity in children, but these developmental processes are also currently under-researched and need constant updating as definitions of leadership continue to evolve.

Leadership skills

The definition of a leader is a highly debated topic (Bisland, 2004), and the research base contains several different descriptions of leadership characteristics in adults and children. To understand how children develop a leadership identity, it is important to examine what leadership looks like in young children. Chaturvedi et al. (2012) described “emergent leaders as group members who exert significant influence over other members of the group, even though no formal authority has been vested in them” (p. 219). With this definition in mind, this section explores (1) the development of leadership skills that children exhibit spontaneously (often during play) and (2) the connection between leadership skills in childhood and their impact on motivation to lead in adulthood.

There is a substantive pool of research that examines how children exhibit relational leadership skills and styles during play. Hensel (1991) explained that leaders are not only those who exhibit strength in problem solving and tend to choose themselves as a “helper,” but also are those who tend to organize and set patterns of play. Similarly, Mawson (2011) characterized childhood leaders as those who initiate, assign the roles for, and generally control the direction of play. Shin, Recchia, Lee, Lee, and Mullarkey (2004) and Lee, Recchia, and Shin (2005) took their descriptions a bit further and explained that young leaders exhibit “dynamic and powerful personalities and a high level of awareness” (Shin et al., 2004, p. 306), but those characteristics are displayed differently in children depending on their unique personalities. Nonetheless, Lee et al. (2005) cited creativity, maturity, confidence, organization, and humor as characteristics of children who all became leaders in a classroom.

Some research has focused specifically on how leadership is enacted by very young children (e.g., infants, toddlers, preschoolers). For example, Shin et al. (2004) found that young leaders are playful, creative, and socially sensitive and seem to be “socially powerful,” demonstrating strong verbal and cognitive abilities and assertiveness. Furthermore, they observed that peer and teacher relationships were important factors in early childhood leadership. While advancing our understanding of leadership characteristics in these age groups, studies like this and others illuminate some characteristics of early childhood leadership only from the perspective of teachers. They do not, however, include definitions of leadership in the eyes of the children themselves. In the present study, we use the voices of students to help define what a leader is and what a leader does.

Researchers have also used play to divide childhood leadership skills into a variety of leadership styles. Shin et al. (2004) explained that leadership is “a dynamic process that evolves within a group” (p. 309). Thus, a good deal of this research sorts children into categories based on his or her role during play. In very early research, Parten (1932) discussed two types of classroom leaders: bullies...
and diplomats. Similarly, Fukada, Fukada, and Hicks (1997) described such leaders as either facilitating play (initiating and monitoring the pace of play and admitting players) or as focused on considering and evaluating playmates (giving directions or criticism and helping or protecting others). More recently, Lee et al. (2005) described four individual types of leaders: director, free spirit, manager, and power man. Although the nuances of each of these leadership styles are important, it is crucial to point out that this research demonstrates there is neither one definition of leadership nor one common set of leadership characteristics in children. Researchers, therefore, need to pay special attention to the ways that these different childhood leadership styles impact future leadership behaviors. With the exception of Hensel (1991), all of these studies relied heavily on researchers to define the concept of a “leader” and, again, do not capture the perspective of children themselves or of their teachers. The present study not only builds on previous research but also relies on both young children (i.e., age 4 to 10 years) and teachers to define what a leader is and what a leader does in the 21st century.

**Intentional leadership development in children**

As discussed, leadership characteristics can emerge early in a child’s development and can positively affect her or his leadership identity and trajectory. Therefore, it is important to consider the ways in which leadership development can be targeted and cultivated in children. Interestingly, though, research has focused on adolescent and young adult (i.e., college level) leadership development and little attention has been devoted to the topic of early childhood leadership development. Nevertheless, to begin to understand intentional leadership development in children, it is essential to examine the leadership development literature as it pertains to both adolescents and younger children.

Leadership development opportunities can occur during school or athletic activities. According to Karnes and Stephens (1999), “youth needs to have opportunities available within the school, community, or religious affiliations to participate actively and assume leadership roles and responsibilities” (p. 62). For example, experiences with sports can facilitate the acquisition of sports-related skills that are transferrable to leadership situations. Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) found that children who participated in sports showed significantly higher rates of teamwork experience, initiative, and emotional regulation. Furthermore, out-of-school activities, such as athletics, Girl and Boy Scouts, and community service, in general, provide many opportunities for skill development that is integral to leadership.

Our first research question is intended to illuminate the link between leadership development and programmatic structures and supports, as some earlier research has considered the impact of leadership programming. In their longitudinal case study of two girls’ experiences in a youth leadership organization, Conner and Strobel (2007) found that, after participating in the same youth leadership organization for 3 years, the two girls had developed different styles of leadership. This suggests that engagement and outcome will look different for each individual. These researchers also illustrated the importance of “grounded flexibility” in leadership programs, proposing that programming integrate the development of three key dimensions of youth leadership: positive community involvement, communication and interpersonal skills, and analytic and critical reflection. In their study, Conner and Strobel found that the two girls experienced growth in each of the aforementioned areas, in addition to developing their own unique leadership styles. Thus, they suggested that strong leadership programming not only “validates and celebrates different styles of leadership” (p. 295), but also includes activities and structures that facilitate competency in each of the three dimensions.

Formal school education can also affect leadership development throughout childhood and adolescence, especially as children age and spend more time at school than they do in the home (Clark & Clark, 1994). Murphy and Johnson (2011) state that, in general, “schools provide students with countless opportunities to practice their leadership” (p. 464). Students are not only able to assume leadership roles in extracurricular activities, such as clubs and sports, but also “practice"
leadership within the classroom itself. Students can do so by giving presentations, taking the lead on projects and class discussions, working collaboratively in small groups, and working on cocurricular projects. These activities have the potential to facilitate leadership skill development and affect future leadership outcomes (Brungardt, 1997; Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

Unfortunately, literature on leadership programming in the context of a school is sparse (Karnes & Stephens, 1999). Studies instead focus on exploring, for example, the ways in which leadership styles and behaviors manifest in the classroom, rather than examining specific and intentional programming (e.g., Lee et al., 2005; Shin et al., 2004). Furthermore, studies that do examine intentional (i.e., programmatic) efforts to develop leadership skills do not focus on leadership identity or skill development in children. Rather, a majority of the research on leadership programming has focused on college students (Gregory & Britt, 1987). For example, Sternberg (2011) described the “leadership minor initiative,” Komives (2011) referenced a specific course on leadership, and Eich (2008) evaluated a series of intentional programs to focus most closely on the attributes necessary for successful leadership programs at the college level (e.g., student-centered and experiential).

Although primary focus on programming in the literature is at the college level, some research on younger groups of children does exist. Thompson (1944) found that preschool children showed greater growth in “leadership” when teachers were more actively involved in student social interaction than when teachers adopted an “impersonal policy” and intervened only when asked. Boyd, Herring, and Briers (1992) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of 4-H programs in developing leadership life skills in students Grades 7 through 12. They found that participation in 4-H programs was related to the development of leadership life skills, skills such as “working with groups,” “communicating,” “making decisions,” and “leadership.” However, almost all studies of elementary school students are observational, with minimal structured intervention and focus on leadership skills over leadership identity. While these studies, published from 1944 to 1992, all offer meaningful information on leadership skills, they further demonstrate a need to update the literature base.

It is evident by now that intentional leadership development is a complex topic worthy of greater attention. As mentioned earlier, the development of young children’s leadership identity remains an underexplored topic; however, the studies available do facilitate a stronger conceptualization of what leadership is, how it develops, and how it can be supported to develop across the life span. More research is needed on how schools can work to intentionally develop leadership identities in very young children.

**Leadership development in girls**

As we noted earlier, supporting and building girls’ leadership capacities from an early age is important because of the disparity between men and women in top formal leadership roles. However, like young children’s leadership development, the topic of leadership development in girls has gained little attention in the research literature and is not well understood. In general, studies of male leadership are more prominent in the literature on leadership and leadership development (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). Gaining an understanding of young girls’ leadership identities helps researchers and practitioners to make informed recommendations for programming and young girls to reach their leadership potential.

A good deal of research on women and girls in leadership has focused on explaining why there are more men in top leadership roles. Hoyt and Johnson (2011), for example, examined the ways that specific gender biases and socialization play into the development of leadership identities in women and may lead to what Sandberg (2013) referred to as the “leadership ambition gap” (p. 12). According to Sandberg, women claim not to pursue top leadership roles out of choice, which she argues is a choice based on socialization into specific gender roles. In other words, from a young age, girls are socialized in schools and at home to not take on leadership roles. Therefore, special attention needs to be paid to intentionally developing young girls as leaders at an early age to encourage them to take on leadership roles in adulthood (Sandberg, 2013).
Although research specific to leadership development in girls is sparse, studies focusing on leadership styles and characteristics in young children facilitate understanding of the similarities and differences between boys and girls in terms of leadership development and leadership styles. Mawson (2011) studied leadership styles in children’s spontaneous collaborative play in two early childhood settings (3- and 4-year-old children). Findings indicated gender differences regarding leadership and control in collaborative play. The boys, when playing with other boys, were more “dictatorial” in style and created hierarchies within the group. They also, at times, excluded other children from their play or did not allow other children to engage in particular ways. In contrast, the girls, when playing with other girls, were more “directorial” in their play. Consensus, compromise, and shared leadership seemed valued and evident throughout. Furthermore, in contrast to the boys’ play, there was more talk within the girls’ play. The gender differences evident in these findings begin to provide insight into what leadership might look like for young girls, but whether these girls identify these behaviors as leadership characteristics is unclear.

Although limited, some researchers have studied leadership in girls when involved in leadership-oriented programming (e.g., Conner & Strobel, 2007; Edwards, 1994; Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). Edwards (1994), for example, surveyed several 4th-, 5th- and 6th-grade Girl Scout troops and found a positive relationship between being identified as a leader and displaying traditional managerial styles. Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) investigated the experiences of adolescent girls participating in a feminist-based leadership program, a program designed to challenge accepted ideas about leadership, provide models of women leaders, and empower adolescent girls to view themselves as capable of influencing social and political change. According to this study, “[they] heard within these girls’ voices that before being exposed to a feminist, cooperative leadership, their vision of leadership was somewhat narrow and traditional in nature, and because of this they were hesitant to see themselves as leaders” (p. 216). However, through their experiences in the program, they came to feel empowered to lead in diverse ways and developed stronger leadership identities.

It is evident that research on best practices in developing leadership programming for young children, and, more specifically, for young girls, if needed. Leadership programming has the potential to strongly affect girls’ leadership identities and help them realize their leadership potential. This article examines the development and impact of one intentional leadership identity development program for young girls.

Method

The participatory action research process

In the mid-1940s, grounded in the work of sociologist Talcott Parsons, German immigrant and social scientist Kurt Lewin (1948; 1997) challenged what he saw as a gap in research between theory and practice. Lewin’s work challenged the prevailing belief that to retain “objectivity” the process of research of a particular phenomenon or place must be distinct and separate from the understanding of those who live in that place. Lewin is credited for coining the term “action research,” believing that an individual’s motivation to change was directly tied to action. This reflective and cyclical process to address social problems became the bedrock of practice for organizational researchers and practitioners.

In the early 1970s, community organizers and developers joined these colleagues. Shortly thereafter, other social scientists and adult educators in academia also began to question the customary practice and process of research and its desired impact on the phenomenon being studied. The writings of exiled Brazilian social activist and educator Freire (1970, 1982) greatly influenced this questioning, as it, too, called for a radical shift in the understanding and practice of the relationship between the “researcher” and the “object” or “subject” of study. Freire contended that it was essential
for reality and the facts that were to be discovered through research to “include the ways in which the people involved with facts perceive them…[that]…. Reality is the connection between subjectivity and objectivity, never objectivity isolated from subjectivity.” In so doing, Freire (1982) gave birth to what has become known as participatory action research-PAR (p. 29). Akin to action research practitioners, PAR advocates understood that they as researchers were not to be at the forefront of social change in an organization or community. Rather PAR practitioners would be catalysts and supporters of this research for educating and transforming all involved.

Over the past decades, many different terms have emerged to describe the need for research that authentically unites the resources of those within a place/connected to a phenomenon to be studied with those from outside who enter/become connected—a collaborative social inquiry designed to produce practice as a form for transformative social change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Trickett & Espino, 2004). Not surprisingly, issues of transparency, power and privilege, inclusion, and even ethics and ownership have surfaced as tensions to be recognized and reconciled. Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) and others remind us to realize that we are outside researchers who must be explicit about our own identity and engage in a dialogue with those in the community with whom we are working.

The study described in this article endorsed these cautions and invoked the full power of PAR, which required a system-wide change that was identifiable and able to be documented in addition to change in the phenomenon being studied. PAR was used to forge a relationship between members of a school of social work and an external community through which all participants’ voices and ideas, including those typically identified as “researchers” and “subjects,” were recognized and included.

Bailey and colleagues state that PAR “involves the translation of new knowledge from research into practice (action) that is aligned with the values and goals of those affected by it” (Bailey et al., 2009, p. 33). They contend that PAR can be understood as a process in which research, participation, and action are grounded in and implemented through the values of: co-inquiry as the act of mutual discovery; equitable engagement, therein addressing issues of equal access, transparency, and shared power and privilege; and positive change as being mutually beneficial and system-wide. In this model, as “coinquirers,” everyone is actively involved throughout the research process-its definition, design, and the delivery of its results (Wolfe, 1980). Accordingly, Bailey and colleagues argue that everyone who subscribes to the core values of PAR can take part in this method of research. Adhering to these central tenets of PAR, therefore, has the potential to strengthen connections and empower all individuals, as well as their organizations and communities.

Reflecting these beliefs, this study encourages and supports a shift in the power dynamics characteristic of traditional research by employing the characterization of PAR as having five phases: dialogue, discovery, data review and dissemination, developing plans and taking action, and delivering results (Bailey et al., 2009). These phases, however, are not linear; rather, they are iterative and often overlap.

Dialogue, for example, occurs multiple times throughout this PAR process to ensure the common understanding of the process, generate new ideas, and address challenges as they emerge. Initial dialogue involves discussing what each partner brings to the process (including limitations and histories), which in turn facilitates understanding and contributes to a strong foundation on which to further build. In addition to being important at the outset of a partnership, dialogue continues to occur throughout the PAR process. Continuing to establish and strengthen the relationships among all involved and discuss ideas, opportunities, and barriers that emerge, for example, are important to PAR.

In short, even though these five phases are inherent to PAR because dialogue is essential throughout, Bailey and colleagues (2009) contend that every PAR project is unique. The process that emerges is ultimately dependent on the collaborative efforts of the research team.

**Site and coinquirers**

This article examines the development and implementation of one intentional leadership identity development program for elementary students in an all girls’ independent school in the mid-Atlantic...
region of the United States. The site for this project is a prekindergarten (preK) through 12th-grade college preparatory day school for girls. The specific focus of this article is the elementary program, referred to as the “Lower School” for the remainder of the article. In the 2013 to 2014 school year, the first year of implementation, the Lower School consisted of 214 girls in preK through 4th grade and 31 classroom and special area teachers. The participants (and coinquirers) in this study include a group of seven teachers in the Lower School, the school controller, the head of the Lower School, the director of the School’s 21st Century Girls’ Center (a research and programming center, pseudonym used), and a team of faculty and graduate students from a nearby college who served as facilitators and coinquirers throughout the PAR process. Although the girls in the school are not considered coinquirers in this project because of Institutional Review Board (IRB) restrictions, the voices of the students as reported by the teachers were integral to and integrated throughout the research process. The methods for each research question are outlined in the following section and the data sources are outlined in Table 1.

Research question 1: How can a school and its curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular structures and supports facilitate the development of an intentional leadership program at the elementary level?

Research question 1 outlines the process in which the entire research team engaged to develop the program from the ground up. Beginning in the 2011 to 2012 school year, the Lower School head and the center director began a series of conversations focused on whether an intentional leadership development program would be appropriate for the girls in the Lower School, who range in age from 4 to 10 years. In the fall of 2012, the college members gathered with those at the school to formally establish a team of coinquirers and began discussions focused on the development of an intentional leadership identity development program for Lower School girls. All Lower School teachers were invited to be a part of this research project; however, participation was voluntary and based on interest resulting from the initial meeting. Seven teachers and an additional administrator elected to become coinquirers in the PAR process. This coinquiry team convened monthly for the duration of the school year.

The initial meeting focused on making certain all members of the research team understood PAR. Subsequent meetings entailed dialogue around the definition of leadership as it was understood by the teachers and discussing leadership in the eyes of the students. At the beginning of this process, the team began to think about what was meant by leadership at the school and, specifically, in the

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<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
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<td>1. How can a school and its curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular structures and supports facilitate the development of an intentional leadership program at the elementary level?</td>
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<td>Individual student responses to the question, “What is a leader?”</td>
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<td>2. How did understandings of leadership change in young girls participating in an intentional leadership identity development program?</td>
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<td>Individual student responses to the question, “What is a leader?” collected before the program was implemented</td>
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<td>3. How do teachers participating in an intentional leadership identity development program describe leadership identity development and leadership behaviors in young girls?</td>
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<td>Teacher observations of individual leadership traits collected over the course of the year</td>
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Lower School. To guide these conversations and expand on what is meant by leadership at the Lower School, the coinquiry team explored a number of questions between meetings by answering “homework questions” such as:

1. Given what we know right now, what are some of the knowledge, values, and skills that surface when we think about leadership at the Lower School?
   a. How does it show up?
   b. What do we mean by leadership at the Lower School?
   c. What do we want the students to know and do, and what values do we want them to have?

2. How might we know when they have this knowledge, these values, these skills? What can we do to enhance/develop knowledge, values, and skills at [the school]?

Lastly, to develop a program that was most meaningful to the students, the team ascertained the girls’ definitions of leadership in two ways: through conversations with the girls and through teacher observation. One special area teacher, who met with all Lower School classes at least once a week, asked the young girls to explain what a leader is. Although IRB restrictions limited the number of ways that student voices could be included in the research, they were intimately involved as teachers were able to consult the students throughout the process.

A number of other ideas were generated and considered in depth as a result of this inquiry and team dialogue process. At various times, the team divided into small groups to focus on different aspects of program development. For example, some team members chose to look at the school’s existing projects and programming and consider the ways in which leadership is already embedded in the school’s curriculum. Others decided to elaborate on ideas that would eventually become an integral part of L3; for example, a leadership glossary, a leadership “toolkit,” assemblies, and “recognition boards.”

Data collected to answer research question 1 include detailed meeting minutes, the text of the “homework questions” and transcriptions of student responses to the question, “What is a leader?” The process of development and the program itself are outlined in the results section. Information about how the program was implemented came from electronic surveys completed by teachers twice during the year that asked them to describe how they were using it in their own classroom.

Research question 2: How did understandings of leadership change in young girls participating in an intentional leadership identity development program?

To understand how the girls’ understandings of leadership changed over the course of the year, students were asked to explain what a leader was at two points in time. While the inquiry team was designing a leadership toolkit, a central element of the program, one teacher asked each class of students individually to explain to her what a leader is. At the end of the first year of implementation, students were asked again to explain what makes a leader. The Lower School director, notably, asked this follow-up question in assembly. She heard responses from several student volunteers and made sure to select at least two students from each grade. The answer from this question, then, came from comparing student responses from before and after the program was implemented. To corroborate our findings, we also asked teachers via electronic surveys to report on their observations of how student understandings of leadership changed throughout the year. This was a simple open-ended question. Teachers’ responses were analyzed for common themes that are reported in the results section.

Research question 3: How do teachers participating in an intentional leadership identity development program describe leadership identity development and leadership behaviors in young girls?
Although it is important to understand how the girls defined leadership at the end of the first year of implementation, it is also important to know if their behaviors changed. Throughout the course of the year, as the leadership traits were introduced to the students, teachers recorded examples and anecdotes of students displaying those traits in their day-to-day activities on yellow “recognition slips.” To address this research question, we examined and reexamined the data on the recognition slips to identify key themes and broad categories. The data to address this research question, therefore, came directly from teacher observations “in the moment.” The themes are outlined in the Results section.

Results

Research question 1: How can a school and its curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular structures and supports facilitate the development of an intentional leadership program at the elementary level?

Program development

To develop an effective and meaningful program, the coinquiry team engaged in structured discussions about what would make the program most successful. In one meeting, a coinquiry member alluded to the idea of having leadership be embedded in the culture of the school as opposed to occurring only in specific instances—that is, “being a leader when nobody is looking.” Continued dialogue led to the idea of having a “glossary” of “leadership words,” an idea that would be revisited throughout the process. This glossary would help the girls to understand the many ways that they could become leaders. During discussions, the team also began to consider how this initiative might be described. Specifically, they wondered about the implications of describing the product as a “curriculum” and thought deeply about giving “it” a name that resonated with the ideas and visions of the team. Critical consideration of these questions led the team to revisit their earlier conversation about finding a name for the initiative that would resonate with the thoughts and ideas that emerged throughout this process. Together, the team decided on a name for the initiative: Living Leadership in the Lower School, or L3.

Integral to the development of the program was a discussion of an anecdote told by a preK teacher about a student, usually seen as a quiet “follower,” who spontaneously acted as a classroom leader one day. During free time, Lilly (pseudonym) was asked by her teacher to read and then write a simple word written on her shirt. Lilly subsequently asked each student in the class to do the same thing, mimicking her teacher in manner and form the whole time. Through Lilly, the team realized that the school already provided a safe space for girls to naturally grow into leadership; the question became how to effectively nurture their budding leadership identities in an intentional manner. Coinquirers examined the actions of this “quiet follower” and began to question the dichotomous nature of leaders and followers and ask, “What was it that allowed this student to expose herself as a leader?” In other words, they began to investigate what it was about the environment that allowed that leadership to emerge.

To develop the glossary of leadership terms, the research team directly asked the students, “What is a leader?” The girls’ answers demonstrated the developmental aspects of leadership identity. Kindergarten and 1st-grade girls favored short, concrete, active definitions of a leader, whereas 3rd- and 4th-grade girls had more nuanced and complex definitions, capturing active and quiet leadership. The following list contains direct statements students made in response to the question, “What is a leader?”

• A leader is someone who is at the front of the line. (kindergarten)
• A leader does not yell. (kindergarten)
• A leader is in charge. (1st grade)
• A leader is strong. (1st grade)
• Leadership means being kind, not mean, and [means] including others; and if you are kind to others it will spread. (3rd grade)
• Leadership means doing the right thing when no one is looking or when it is not popular. (3rd grade)
• Leaders stand up for themselves and others. (4th grade)

The inquiry team utilized the definitions that students gave to identify the key traits of a leader. Although the program described below was not created entirely by students, they were intimately involved in defining what a leader is and what a leader does. Using their knowledge of curriculum design and child-development, the coinquiry team worked together to produce a program that would enhance, rather than interfere with, the already strong academic curriculum. Although that program is described below, it is important to note that an unintended consequence of this program was that the teachers involved themselves became leaders in the Lower School and took ownership of the program.

**The leadership toolkit**

The PAR process facilitated the development of what came to be known as the leadership toolkit. Building on the leadership glossary idea, this box contains several objects meant to represent “leadership traits,” such as a mirror to represent reflective thinking. The coinquirers continuously refined the traits, definitions, and “symbols” or items that would be used in the final product, always returning to the language that students used to identify leaders. The final “toolbox” is filled with nine leadership traits. To explain each trait, there is a “kid-friendly” definition and a tangible item. For example, *honesty* is paired with a picture of Pinocchio (famous for his growing nose) and the statement “I am truthful to myself and others.” The traits and definitions are detailed in Table 2. In reviewing the student responses and defining the leadership traits, the inquiry team ensured that the definitions of leadership did not fit into the traditional leader/follower dynamic. Changing definitions of *adult leadership* further necessitate changing definitions of leadership in children. For example, complying with rules that are clear and make sense can be seen as a leadership trait but would have traditionally been sorted into the definition of *follower*.

**Implementing the toolkit**

In year 2, the head of the Lower School introduced one trait each month to all Lower School students together in their monthly assembly meetings. In this way, each month led to the introduction of a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>“I know what to do and I do it.”</td>
<td>Fable, The Ant and the Grasshopper, and a plastic ant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>“I am truthful to myself and others.”</td>
<td>Picture of Pinocchio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/listening</td>
<td>“I listen and speak to others thoughtfully.”</td>
<td>“The Communicator” with green and red ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective thinking</td>
<td>“I think about what I’ve done and learn a lesson from it. I think about what I’m going to do and make a good choice.”</td>
<td>Mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>“When I don’t know what to do, I figure it out.”</td>
<td>Rubix cube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation/</td>
<td>“I work well with others to get something done.”</td>
<td>Velcro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>“I care about others.”</td>
<td>Glass heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent mindedness</td>
<td>“I think and act for myself. I’m not afraid to be different.”</td>
<td>Photo of school founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>“When things don’t go my way, I bounce back.”</td>
<td>Rubber ball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
new trait in the toolkit. During each assembly, the head of the Lower School would begin by revisiting the trait from the previous month and would then introduce the trait for the present month. The introduction of the trait generally involved both a verbal explanation and a demonstration. For example, the trait resilience was accompanied by a group discussion about how a ball “bounces back” to you after it hits “bottom.” In the weeks following each assembly, teachers were asked to recognize students displaying that trait and others by recording their behaviors anonymously on yellow slips of paper to be displayed on a “recognition board.” Beyond the formal introduction of the trait and the recognition board, Lower School teachers were free to continue the discussion of each trait in ways that they deemed appropriate for their students and curriculum. For example, one teacher had the students in her classroom identify personal leadership goals using the leadership toolbox, which she used when writing the “personal growth” section of their report cards. When asked via electronic survey how they implemented the Toolbox, other teachers gave the following examples:

- I had a bulletin board in my classroom dedicated to the leadership traits. (kindergarten teacher)
- Incentivizing them by reminding them of the recognition bulletin board. (1st-grade teacher)
- If the class needed a reminder about a specific trait, we would have a class meeting to talk as a group and even role-play some different ways that we could act as leaders in trying situations. (2nd-grade teacher)
- We often used ideas in our classroom conversations or closing circle. (preK teacher)
- I read books that pertained to a specific leadership trait. Our Lower School librarian has been very helpful in supplying a list of books that we can read as a discussion starter. I also have a collection of character trait books that I read and used for follow-up discussions. (kindergarten teacher)

In implementing the toolkit, the teachers each took different paths. Some deliberately constructed curriculum around the trait of the month, whereas others waited for opportunities to arise and reinforced the traits more informally. Despite the lack of uniformity, all teachers incorporated the traits into their classrooms in such a way that the language of leadership became a part of the day-to-day routine of the school. In other words, it became part of the identity of the Lower School.

**Research question 2: How did understandings of leadership change in young girls participating in an intentional leadership identity development program?**

Through this process, members of the coinquiry team realized that the Lower School already did a lot to promote leadership within the youngest students yet had never understood it as such. This program provided an official and system-wide structure and process that allowed everyone in the Lower School (teachers, students, administrators) to better recognize, appreciate, and talk about these leadership qualities in Lower School girls. When initially asked to define leadership, the girls provided varied answers. Although the answers of the older girls were more nuanced, the girls in the Lower School did not have a common language about leadership. One year after L3’s implementation, the head of the Lower School asked the students to define a leader during their 2013 to 2014 closing assembly. As she listened to the responses from the students, she came to understand that the girls’ definitions of leadership had changed. The girls, especially the younger students, were using the words from the leadership toolbox in their answers. “A leader,” one girl explained, “is kind.”

Furthermore, in a survey administered to teachers at the close of the academic year, teacher responses indicated two major changes in the girls’ understanding of leadership. First, they noted a marked difference in the vocabulary the girls used to describe leadership and changes in their understandings of leadership itself. One 4th-grade teacher supported that the girls had developed a new vernacular, “Mostly that they were able to recognize when they, and their friends and others, were practicing the leadership traits. Putting a name to an action is very important in learning how to use it.”
Second, they noticed that girls supported each other in using the traits—making leadership a communal property that the girls owned collectively. One kindergarten teacher, for example, explained that, “They no longer viewed a leader as someone in the front of the line. They began to see a leader as someone who gets others involved in a positive way and they liked being a part of that.” A 2nd-grade teacher explained:

I watched the girls use the leadership words to have conversations with peers about their actions and behaviors. I watched a student praise a peer for telling the truth in a very hard situation. Even though it felt hard in the moment, the student who demonstrated honesty had confirmation from her peer that she had made a good decision.

The girls were able to apply their new definitions directly in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and on the playground. More importantly, it created a common language and, as the coinquiry team had hoped from the beginning, embedded the language of leadership into the Lower School culture through creating a common language through the leadership traits.

**Research question 3: How do teachers participating in an intentional leadership identity development program describe leadership identity development and leadership behaviors in young girls?**

It is important to note that when reviewing the yellow anonymous recognition slips, it became apparent that certain “traits” were over-represented and others under-represented. Together, kindness and responsibility, for example, accounted for 54% of the 108 feedback forms collected over the year. Although there are many possible reasons for this imbalance, the most likely is the order in which the traits were introduced. First, traits introduced earlier in the year had a much lengthier time period for recognition, thus receiving more recognition slips from teachers. Second, due to multiple snow days and the typical pace of schools, teachers may have had less time during the second half of school year to devote to filling out recognition slips. Many of the themes that emerged focused on positive behaviors commonly praised in elementary school students, such as listening, cleaning up personal spaces, developing social skills, and following directions. Although these behaviors don’t necessarily indicate growing leadership in the students, the evidence of leadership identity development was mostly evident in the emphasis that teachers placed on the nature of those behaviors as spontaneous, consistent, without complaint, or as independent minded.

With few exceptions, teachers placed more value on the nature of a behavior than they did on the behavior itself. The focus on the nature of a behavior, therefore, was the most salient theme among the comments. In other words, if a teacher wrote about a student cleaning the floor, he or she was likely more impressed that students did so spontaneously or with a positive attitude than that they actually cleaned the floor. What this indicates is that these teachers do not necessarily define leadership by a set of behaviors (picking up toys, holding the door open, helping a friend). Rather, leadership involves a personal commitment to and understanding of these positive behaviors. To the teachers, the nine leadership traits identified previously provided a vehicle through which students could take ownership of their own community and their own learning. Each of the categories presented in the following section reflect a slow development of a leadership identity—progressing from “trying out” leadership traits with spontaneous displays to “standing out” by displaying leadership traits in spite of peer pressure to do otherwise or other contextual factors that might prevent the student from acting like a leader.

**Spontaneous displays of positive behavior**

In regard to the nature of behaviors, one of the most common themes that emerged from the data was the idea of doing things “without being asked.” The importance of spontaneity transcended the nine leadership traits that were initially identified and was applied to several different traits. To these teachers, spontaneity was a clear indication that the student was beginning to test out the leadership trait on her own as she incorporated it into her own understanding of leadership. There was ample evidence of doing things “without being asked” or “volunteering” within teachers’ examples of several different traits on the anonymous recognition slips. Below are examples from those recognition slips.
• On our field trip, [one young girl] noticed that another girl was sitting alone at a table at lunch. This girl picked up her lunch and moved over to sit with the girl. No one asked her, she just saw the need. (Kindness)  
• I helped my classmates clean up our room without being told by a teacher. I pushed in chairs, picked up pencils, and I even picked up a tissue that didn’t belong to me! (Responsibility)  
• Mrs. X’s class was unsure where to go after P.E. The girls made a very responsible decision to sit along the outside wall of the classroom and read a book together. I was so impressed that they knew what to do, and did it. (Responsibility)  
• This student volunteered to take a noontime job for a fellow student when we had tons of fun, playful snow on the ground. Her cooperative spirit should be admired by all! (Cooperation/Collaboration)

Spontaneity was one of the ways that teachers understood that leadership traits were becoming part of their leadership identities.

**Consistency**

Another salient theme represented in the data was consistency, or, as teachers said, “doing it every time.” This consistency, much like spontaneity, denotes a sense of ownership over the behaviors. Consistency signifies that a girl has more thoroughly incorporated that behavior into her identity beyond spontaneity. Below are examples that teachers gave on the anonymous recognition slips of the leadership behaviors that they noticed students performing consistently:

• This student picks up a classmate’s pencil every time it falls off her desk. (Kindness)  
• This student is always on the lookout for other students who make good choices. She is quick to share their good deeds with her teacher. (Kindness)  
• This student consistently completes assignments on time, follows directions, and participates constructively when working in a group. (Responsibility)  
• One of my girls picks up trash out on the playground almost every day. She cares so much about taking care of the school—it makes me happy! (Responsibility)  
• This student always shows the qualities of a leader. She stands up for her friends when they might be in sticky situations. (Kindness/Responsibility)

These examples demonstrate growing self-efficacy in the leadership characteristics that the girls were learning. Although spontaneity demonstrates an ability to take a risk with a behavior, consistency gives evidence of several successful mastery experiences and a confidence in that trait. The focus on consistency further highlighted the idea that the leader need not be the loudest voice, but could be the steady voice that sets an example for everyone else.

**Without complaint**

The proceeding categories represent two important indicators that students have incorporated leadership traits into their identities. Both of the following categories, without complaint and independent minded, reflect demonstration of leadership traits in the face of some type of adversity. In these examples from the recognition slips, the teachers directly state that girls did not complain about doing something potentially arduous, but that they certainly could have.

• This student was assigned a noontime job during a fabulous snowfall period when she would have loved to have been on the playground. Her cooperative, positive attitude set an example for all! (Cooperation/Collaboration)  
• I cleaned up the floor in the cafeteria. I even swept up food that wasn’t mine. (Responsibility)
There was a lunch order mix-up in the dining room, and this student kindly chose a different lunch without complaining! (Resiliency)

In these examples, the focus is not on the behaviors themselves or on what trait was best demonstrated by the anecdote, but rather on the agreeable attitude students displayed. As students demonstrated leadership traits in situations where teachers anticipated that they would have had trouble doing so, their behaviors reflected a growing facility in the application of those traits. Furthermore, by calling attention to the behaviors in this manner, teachers reinforced the behavior.

**Independent minded**

The final category drawn from teachers’ responses also reflected a response to adversity—standing out in the face of peer pressure. In the examples below, teachers highlighted when students displayed behaviors in response to students who were not displaying leadership traits. This highlights further growth, as they learned to enact their leadership identities and stand apart from their peers. Below are examples from the recognition slips:

- This student was the only girl on the playground who put away all of the sand toys when asked. (Responsibility/Kindness)
- When it was time to clean up our room, this student cleaned up all of her own things and then started helping her friends clean up their things. (Responsibility/Kindness)
- I spotted a student helping a friend with a broken collarbone getting supplies, when everyone else rushed out to play. (Kindness)
- As I was walking through the hallway with my grade, I noticed that a younger student’s coat and backpack were in the hallway on the ground. Everyone was just stepping over it. I picked it up and hung it in my peers’ cubby for her. (Kindness)
- This young lady heard the bell being rung in the lunchroom and she communicated by looking the teacher in the eye and raising three fingers in the air, singling her wish to be silent as soon as she heard the bell. (Communication/Listening)
- I spotted this student following directions, even when others were not. (Responsibility)
- I spotted a student moving away from a friend so that she could focus on her teacher. (Responsibility)

Unlike the students who demonstrated leadership in the face of adversity in the previous (without complaint) section, these girls specifically defied group expectation to display the leadership trait in question and overcame fears often associated with peer pressure.

Although done unintentionally, it is evident that teachers classified student demonstrations of leadership traits as falling into one of four categories: spontaneous displays, consistency, without complaint, or independent minded. Through their comments, teachers also outlined a clear process whereby students begin by testing leadership traits out spontaneously, later exhibit them with consistency, and then learn to stand behind the leadership traits in the face of adversity. Although this developmental progression, like those processes articulated by Murphy and Johnson (2011) in their long-lens view of leadership development, is not always linear—it poses a new theoretical model regarding how leadership self-efficacy and leadership identity develop.

**Discussion**

**Conclusions**

The present study utilized PAR to develop and implement an intentional leadership identity development program for young girls and to understand how intentional leadership programming...
can help young girls incorporate the concept of leadership into their individual identities. This intentional leadership program was successful for a number of reasons. First and foremost, throughout its development, it was a collaboration between a college team and multiple individuals within the Lower School. This partnership, which crossed conventional research boundaries and encouraged a shift in the power dynamics typical of research, involved members of the School as active agents and co-owners of the process and its outcomes (Bailey et al., 2009). Additionally, the voices of the students were integrated throughout the process—especially in defining what a leader is and what a leader does—an element that has been notably lacking in previous research. Researchers, administrators, teachers, and children were meaningfully involved in the coinquiry and resulting system-wide positive change. Furthermore, though many of the components of L3 were new to the Lower School, it is important to acknowledge that the program built on what already existed and resonated with the culture and values of the School. Not only does the school’s mission contain language about promoting leadership, the 21st-century girls center mentioned previously also focuses on promoting leadership throughout the school. Utilizing PAR as a methodology facilitated this outcome, as PAR emphasizes an appreciation of each person’s, organization’s, and community’s values and strengths (Bailey et al., 2009).

Extensive formal and informal feedback from teachers outlined previously revealed that, from their perspective, the program helped to redefine leadership for the young girls. Because of the program’s focus on specific leadership traits, the skills that students were already developing (collaboration, resiliency, etc.) suddenly became part of how they defined and understood leadership. Rather than focusing on changing behaviors, the program reinforced leadership behaviors and, more importantly, led students to identify themselves as leaders in more complex and nuanced ways. Through observation, teachers were able to outline the process through which students learned, gained confidence, and developed self-efficacy in these leadership skills. The process identified was consistent with Komives et al.’s (2005) six-stage leadership identity development (LID) model. The program facilitated “awareness” that leadership was occurring, “exploration/engagement” that allowed the girls to begin to develop skills and build a self-concept and self-confidence, and movement toward “leadership identified” as the girls became more independent and integrated leadership into their own identities through “meaningful involvement.” Latter stages may be reached over time. Although the progression from “spontaneously” trying out the behaviors to performing them independently is neither entirely linear nor entirely smooth, it did allow the teachers to better understand how leadership in young girls grows and develops.

The process of leadership acquisition created by the program also supports the research on how self-efficacy develops. The inquiry team developed a program that allowed students to access the four elements that build self-efficacy: mastery experiences through multiple attempts to “try on” leadership traits, vicarious experiences when other students demonstrated leadership behaviors or teachers gave examples in the classroom, social persuasion through the yellow recognition slips, and positive psychological states through the safe environment of the school community. Leadership self-efficacy, which tends to be lower in women, has been demonstrated to influence both leadership behaviors and future career decisions (McCormick, Tanguma, & Lopez-Forment, 2002; Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007). Women with high leadership self-efficacy, furthermore, are less susceptible to stereotype threat as it relates to women and leadership (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). Although the inquiry team did not set out to develop a program designed to build leadership self-efficacy per se, they ultimately created the conditions for such a program. Although student leadership self-efficacy was never measured, the confidence that teachers observed in students provides some evidence of effectiveness.

**Implications**

The creation and implementation of L3 allowed the young girls to reconceptualize what it means to be a leader and encouraged them to define themselves as leaders. This program highlights the
importance of integrating intentional leadership development in schools, where young children spend a significant amount of their waking hours. By telling, showing, and reinforcing a broader definition of leadership, these girls came to call themselves leaders and to value the importance of leadership. Girls who may have been labeled as “bossy,” “good friend,” “thoughtful,” or “strong willed” have the potential to use the term leader to describe themselves. Because leadership is now becoming a part of the girls’ identities, it is hoped that they will continue to develop their identities as leaders and maintain a high level of leadership self-efficacy into adulthood, as identity influences action and motivation (Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

This program offers a series of key lessons for similar programs. First, it is integral that programs are developed with a high level of input from all relevant constituents (Datnow, 2000). The use of PAR helped to generate buy-in and create a program that fit in with the school’s culture and existing curriculum. In this way, the program was flexible and could be adapted to fit into the classroom in many different ways. Research has also demonstrated that teachers need flexibility to make programs workable in their classrooms (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).

Second, it is helpful to define leadership broadly using student-centered language. For example, the girls were able to incorporate leadership into their own identity because the nine traits created space for individual interpretation. The power of the program, furthermore, is that it gives the girls accessible language to talk about leadership. Before the program, these girls were already learning these traits; they just didn’t define them as leadership.

Third, it is important to utilize multiple means of reinforcement at the school and classroom level in order to build self-efficacy in these young students (Bandura, 1977, 1997). The toolkit was of key importance in explaining the traits and giving language to leadership, but the classroom activities, recognition boards, and other components of L3 provided the mastery experiences and verbal persuasion that are necessary to build self-efficacy while integrating these traits into their personal leadership identities. Furthermore, teachers were reinforcing not only the trait but also the nature of the behavior (as spontaneous, consistent, without complaint, or independent minded).

**Limitations and directions for future research**

The results of this project provide a model for the creation of intentional leadership identity development programs for girls that resonate with and build on the values, strengths, and characteristics of the community. However, there are some limitations to the current study. First, as a small-scale qualitative study, the results are not generalizable to all schools. Second, it was essential that a group of dedicated teachers and administrators were willing to commit time after school to develop the program. Without such buy-in, this program would not have been as robust or meaningful to the school community.

Findings from this study also point to directions for future research. For example, in addition to the nature of the behavior, teachers also placed a good deal of emphasis on helping behaviors—from keeping the community clean to an older student taking a younger student under her wing—which may reflect not only developmentally appropriate behaviors but also the growing importance of cooperative relationships as described in the literature. The behaviors, however, may also be seen as gender-specific behaviors that are praised and reinforced only in girls. Future research should examine the kinds of behaviors that would be reinforced differently for boys and girls involved in an intentional leadership identity development program at a coeducational school. Furthermore, future research could involve following these students through middle and high school to better understand how deeply ingrained the early leadership identity is.

**References**


