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FEATURE

**Developing Students' Leadership Skills Through
Cooperative Learning: An Action Research
Case Study**

Gianina-Estera Petre

Abstract. *Traditional teaching styles are not adequate to help students develop 21st-century skills. The purpose of this action research case study was to explore the teaching practices in a Romanian university and to propose a process model to improve students' leadership skills through cooperative learning. The study is built upon Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2008), Structure-process-outcome Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2018), and the Empowerment Education Framework (Freire, 1993). Data was collected through observations, focus-group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The data have been transcribed, coded, and organized by themes. The results of this action research showed a need to make traditional teaching more interactive. After implementing cooperative learning, results revealed positive effects in developing students' leadership skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, decision making, and teamwork. The Process Model developed from this action research consists of four core components supporting cooperative learning implementation in higher education: training model, flipped classroom, interactive lecturing, and classroom management.*

Keywords: action research, case study, cooperative learning, leadership skills, university students, Romania.

Introduction

In a global society that faces rapid developments in many areas, education is a field that also needs changes to prepare students for professional service and contributions to their societies (Risinger, 2009). Through academic programs,

schools must intentionally develop in their students 21st-century skills such as “communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, work ethic, collaboration, applying technology, and leadership” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 7); as these skills are necessary and required in many corporations (Rappaport et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a preoccupation in helping students to develop these skills, preparing them to be engaged citizens in society (Crosby, 2017) and well-trained professionals.

Review of the Literature

A leader is a person who can develop an environment in which people feel accepted and part of that setting (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Some definitions present leadership as service; thus, “a leader should be willing to meet the needs of the individuals in the team” (Adair, 2011, p. 64). Leaders inspire people around them through their “way of thinking, acting, and communicating” (Sinek, 2009, p. 1). Although it is debated how individuals become leaders, it seems that this gift is not only for some special people. Leadership qualities can also be taught and learned (Adair, 2009; Sinek, 2009; Wilson, 2010).

It is accepted that teaching a classroom, coaching a team, or leading a project (Northouse, 2018) are considered leadership roles. Leadership is any activity in which someone is daily involved and has an influence on other people’s behavior (Daniels & Daniels, 2007). Over the years, several concepts have been accepted as characteristics of leadership. Northouse (2018) states leadership as a trait, ability, skill, behavior, relationship, and influence process. Leadership is a trait when a person has native qualities that can be used in a particular situation (Adair, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Northouse, 2018). In some cases, these traits can be modified or changed. It is a process of influence when leaders transfer individual influences on the other group members for achieving a shared goal (Northouse, 2018).

Leaders have core leadership skills, such as administrative, interpersonal, and conceptual skills (Northouse, 2018). Leaders are team builders and decision-makers, manifesting qualities such as determination, loyalty, excellence, sense of duty, calmness in crisis, confidence, ability to accept responsibility, enthusiasm, integrity, good communication, focusing on goal achievement, motivating others, welcoming change, and loving their work (Adair, 2009; Krames, 2005; Northouse, 2018).

Leaders create a positive climate around them by providing clear requirements, assuring individual responsibilities, clarifying norms and rules, building cohesiveness through open communication, reciprocal feedback, and accepting different opinions (Northouse, 2018). When group participation and interaction are present, people develop positive attitudes working together for goal achievement and behavior change (Corey Schneider et al., 2014; Daniels & Daniels, 2007).

As leadership qualities can be both taught and learned (Sinek, 2009; Wilson, 2010), the challenge is to find ways for teaching students to develop leadership

skills. Educators may decide on the list of leadership skills they want to help students develop (Crosby, 2017), and on the strategies, they may apply for developing those skills. It is a challenge; teachers and universities should make a goal from it. In this process, teachers must give support and feedback, helping students learn what and how to apply knowledge in certain situations (Iordanoglou, 2018). They should coach and provide support for the achievement of goals and mentoring for professional development (Crosby, 2017). In such an environment, students and teachers have benefits.

Leadership skills manifest in interactions, relationships, and roles, no matter what formal or informal position leaders have (Crosby, 2017). Students can also develop leadership skills when they are actively involved in academic activities, practicing these skills in different learning contexts (Siewiorek, Saarinen, Lainema, & Lehtinen, 2012). The lecture has a decreasing role in developing students' leadership skills as its perspective focuses more on individual development rather than the collective view of leadership (Crosby, 2017). It is considered not an effective teaching method (Hafeez et al., 2014; Noh & Yusuf, 2018). As such, teachers must structure and organize an interactive learning environment for positive outcomes.

Several studies show that Cooperative Learning (CL) has a positive influence in developing different skills of students mentioning: communication (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Kirbaş, 2017; Sumarmi, 2017), critical thinking (ten Dam & Volman, 2004; Johnson et al., 2013), decision-making (Istrate & Velea, 2011; Johnson et al., 2013), group collaboration (Johnson & Johnson, 2014, 2018; Herrmann, 2013), responsibility (Slavin, 2014), active participation (Karacop & Diken, 2017; Neumann, Neumann, & Hood, 2011; Nilson, 2010), trust-building, and conflict management (Johnson et al., 2013).

When CL is used in the classroom, students develop different skills (Johnson et al., 2013). However, empirical evidence of how CL impacts university students is still limited (Herrmann, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore the teaching practices in a Romanian university and to propose a process model to develop students' leadership skills through CL.

This study is built upon Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2008), Structure-process-outcome Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2018), and Empowerment Education Framework (Freire, 1993). Four research questions (Table 1) guided this study. The study aims to present how the CL developed the leadership skills of the university students and to fill a contextual gap in a traditional higher education environment. A process model for improving students' leadership skills was developed.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research methodology. It took place in March-June 2018, and it had two phases. The initial phase was organized to identify the teaching style used in the university and to propose a model to improve students' leadership skills through CL. The final phase aimed to present students' experiences regarding the development of their leadership skills due to the implementation of CL.

Research Design

The study used a mixed intra-paradigm research design of action research and case study. According to O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015), a mixed intra-paradigm qualitative methodology refers to the use of two or more qualitative research designs in the same study. The action research design offered a framework to implement CL in the selected university. Through the case study design, the experiences of the participants were explored before, during, and after the CL implementation.

Action research is "any investigation conducted by the person or the people empowered to take action concerning their own actions, for the purpose of improving their future actions" (Sagor, 2011, p. 5). Its goal is changing, improving practices, and developing solutions for practical problems (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

A case study "is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group" (Merriam, 1988, p. 9). It is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40), explored "within its real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). A case is bounded when it has limited data, participants, and time for observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I used a holistic single-case study (Gaikwad, 2017; Yin, 2014). The case is the CL process, and the bounded system is formed by the class of Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education (PPPE) and Social Work academic programs, explored for one semester, thus having limited participants, data, and time for implementation.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at a university in the southern part of Romania. As part of research ethics, the identity of the university remains anonymous. The study was designed for one particular mixed class of students from PPPE (consisting of 30 students, all women) and Social Work (consisting of 22 students, 12 women, and 10 men). The allocated time for the study was one semester, March-June 2018.

Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used since the study intended to discover, understand, and obtain data from those who can provide relevant information regarding the topic under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A criteria

sampling procedure was used, selecting the participants based on some set or specific characteristics (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). In this study, the criteria for selection and participation were: (a) students had to be enrolled as regular students, (b) had to have at least one semester in the institution, and (c) had to be willing to participate in the study. Twelve students met the criteria and were selected as participants.

Data Collection

Data was collected through focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, and took place between March-June 2018. FDG was conducted with four students. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight students; each interview lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. The participants received information about the process of the interview, privacy issues, allocated time, and the informed consent form. As a co-teacher and participant-observer, I observed the class sessions and the university open door days, based on the observation guide I developed and which focused on class interaction, relationships, teaching methods, and students' involvement in activities. Documents, another source of data, comprised students' class journals, course syllabus, and the researcher's field-notes.

For the data collection, a triangulation matrix was developed (Table 1). Corresponding to each research question, different sources of data collection were indicated. The participants from whom the data were collected are also mentioned.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process researchers use to respond to their research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It can be seen as an interplay between collecting and analyzing or coding data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Data analysis consisted of transcribing data, sending it to the participants for member-check, coding data, and grouping data into categories and themes. The data were analyzed by using the HyperResearch software, version 4.0.3, with a license provided by the institution where I was studying.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in a trustworthy manner. The researcher developed a triangulation matrix and used member checks to ensure credibility; provided a detailed description of what was done so that the study can be replicated in another educational context (Lincoln & Guba, 2013), with additional adaptation, if necessary; thus, ensuring transferability. The study was approved by the Ethical Research Board committee of the institution of higher education where the researcher was studying and by the selected participating university.

Table 1
Triangulation Matrix for Data Collection

Research Questions	Inter views	FGD	Observation	Documents	Literature
1. What are the experiences of students regarding the teaching methods used in the selected university?		✓	✓		✓
2. What recommendations can be made to improve students' leadership skills through teaching in the selected university?		✓		✓	✓
3. What are the students' experiences regarding the implementation of cooperative learning in the selected class?	✓		✓	✓	✓
4. What model is recommended to support the use of cooperative learning at the selected university, and to enhance students' leadership skills?	✓		✓	✓	✓

The participants received the consent form, and they were informed about the purpose of the study and its significance in the educational field. Further, they knew that they have the freedom to accept or not to participate in this study, even if they were students in the selected class. The participants were informed that the researcher will use pseudonyms to keep their anonymity while reporting. Additionally, participants were informed that they may withdraw without any prejudice.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this study are presented together with the discussion by the two phases of action research. The initial phase showed the situation before implementing CL. The final phase exposes the students' experiences after the implementation of CL and the developed model for improving students' leadership skills through CL.

Initial Phase

Before implementing new practices, it was essential to know what the participants were experiencing regarding the actual teaching methods used at the selected university concerning the development of their leadership skills, thus

responding to Research Question 1.

Traditional teaching. The participants considered lectures as a dominant method used in teaching. The lack of active involvement in the classroom was perceived as a disadvantage with outcomes such as distraction, monotony, lack of understanding, low level of retention, and low level of the teacher-student relationship. One of the participants pointed out that “unfortunately, some teachers are just sitting on the chair, and speak for one or two hours. In most of the cases, we do not retain much from what they present”. (FGD, Carolina, p. 2). When students are passive in classrooms, and teachers are using mainly lectures, several studies state that students feel disadvantaged (Bati, Mandiracioglu, Orgun, & Govsa, 2013; Nilson, 2010; Noh & Yusuf, 2018), losing their attention and interest; thus, the learning outcomes are on a low level (Tadesse & Gillies, 2015; Young et al., 2009).

Class relationships. The participants emphasized the importance of class relationships. Some teachers' openness in inviting guest speakers, professionals in the field, influenced them positively. Other students were negatively influenced by unsupportive teachers. For instance, Matei shared his experience: “In the first two classes he lowered our self-esteem, he highlighted our defects, and that we will not make it. That determined me to adopt the attitude of having only the required attendance” (FGD, Matei, p. 1). Several studies also support the findings that teachers' attitudes influence students positively or negatively (Herrmann, 2013; Sharan, 2010). Teachers must develop supportive and positive class relationships, as students are molded by interactions and relationships.

After identifying the current teaching approach used in the university, it was imperative to know the participants' desires regarding teaching. Through their recommendations, the participants played a part in responding to Research Question 2. As a result, teachers designed new interventions not only based on their experience and research but also on students' recommendations.

Interactive teaching. The first desire of the participants was to avoid passive learning. They expressed the need for more interactive learning activities and less lecturing (Journal 1, Flavia) and for pre-class readings considered as beneficial, as new knowledge is built upon prior knowledge. Teachers should come “not for lecturing but to go deeper in content, and students should read the material before coming to class” (FGD, Andra, p. 3).

Giving responsibilities. The second recommendation suggested was to receive responsibilities in their classes to develop their leadership and professional skills (Journal 1, Daria). Carolina said, “I think that it would help if teachers will give responsibilities to the students. In this way, students will learn faster and simpler by applying a certain thing” (FGD, Carolina, p. 5), and “make us more responsible” (FGD, Alexandra, p. 2).

Teacher-student relationships. Students desired to have open, friendly, gentle, and supportive teachers. Andra commented that “the big problem in our educational system is that teachers do not encourage students by telling them that they can be leaders and have confidence in themselves” (FGD, Andra, p. 5). Teachers should not doubt the students’ potential. They should “understand that I am in a development stage, I can grow, I have potential, and he is there to help me” (FGD, Matei, p. 4).

Student-student relationships. Reciprocal support, learning from other colleagues’ attitudes, behaviors, and their advice, are aspects to be strengthened in class. One participant said that “when you see good habits or positive attitudes your colleagues manifest in different contexts, you can assimilate them too” (FGD, Alexandra, p. 5). Communication was also mentioned as a skill students need to develop as leaders: “If you want to be a good leader, you need to efficiently communicate, to be ready to listen first” (Matei, p. 5) but also to feel free to express your opinion (Journal 1, Adriana).

Action Plan

Based on the data and recommendations from the initial phase, I developed an action plan for the CL implementation. This was organized into three main phases: planning, performing, and perfecting.

For the planning phase or pre-class activities, the teacher introduced a flipped classroom. The students read the materials before coming to class and had an assignment, to be completed before class, based on the reading. The materials and activities, as well as the lesson outline, were organized at this phase. The teacher would express this preparation under the motto: *Teacher ready, materials ready, classroom-ready, that’s the remedy!*

For the performing phase, the in-class activities were organized under the CL model proposed by Jonson and Johnson (2018). A variety of interactive strategies, structures, and techniques were used. Among these were expert jigsaw, corners, either/or, Venn diagram, KWL, think-pair-share, think-square-share, and random call. The class was organized into groups of four to five students, wherein they had specific roles, changed every class period: reporter, recorder, social person, and material person.

For the perfecting phase, student journals were planned and used as a post-class activity to help them reflect on their learning, to evaluate themselves, the group, and the teacher. Journals facilitated communication with the teacher by giving and receiving feedback throughout the learning process. They also served as research tools for identifying not only what should be improved in the class but also how student participants in research experienced their development during this study.

Final Phase

The action plan was implemented for a period of eight weeks, April–May 2018. Social Interdependence Theory was utilized for fostering the class relationships and developing leadership skills, while the Structure-process-outcome Theory was employed to plan, apply, and evaluate academic activity. The empowerment education framework revealed that students are experiencing impressive results in knowledge and skills when CL is intentionally planned and applied in the classroom. For the final phase, data were collected through eight in-depth interviews (IDI), six class observations, and document analysis (students' reflective journals—SRJ). Data analysis revealed the following students' experiences regarding CL in the selected class, responding to Research question 3.

Effective teaching. The strategies used in the class had a remarkable influence on developing a positive learning environment. Students were actively involved in the class, and the diversity of teaching methods was appreciated (SRJ 7, Eliana) and easily observed (Obs., April 18). The students were impressed: “For me, it was something new, and the methods seemed very efficient. Efficient and wow!” (IDI, Alexandra, p. 1). Andra said, “I am glad to see other teaching methods, different teaching styles, which attract students” (IDI, Andra, p. 1). These findings are supported by other studies that have mentioned that students actively involved in learning through CL expressed positive experiences regarding what was taught (Cavanagh, 2011; Karacop & Diken, 2017; Neumann et al., 2011; Nilson, 2010). Keeping students interested in learning must be a priority for teachers as this is an effective way to prepare them academically and professionally.

Supporting one another. Students perceived reciprocal support as promoted and enhanced during class, being open to more collaboration (SRJ 4, Carolina). One student mentioned that “the way we have been organized helped us to be open in groups, and each one of us could talk, sharing ideas. It was not just listening, but it was active involvement” (IDI, Alexandra, p. 1). Two-sided support was noticed in-class observations (Obs., March 21) and mentioned by Flavia: “You can share the information you achieved with others, and this will help you and will help others too” (IDI, Flavia, p. 1). The finding of the constructive influence of peer or group support is advocated by the intentional use of the positive interdependence theory applied in this study, and it also was mentioned by other studies as a worthwhile contribution of CL in students' academic growth (Herrmann, 2013; Johnson et al., 2013; Karacop, 2017; Miller, 2017). Leaders support their team as teachers support their class. Learning should be organized as such group support manifest and develop reciprocal support skills, emphasizing cooperation rather than competition.

Solving problems. The students experimented in class on how to solve problems when collaborating with colleagues. This skill was developed, as an individual contribution to solve the group's tasks was planned, promoted, and visible during class activities (Obs., April 25). It was a positive experience for participants: “We had occasions when someone had another opinion, and we

debated on it. Why do you think like this? What is your reason for it?” (IDI, Eliana, p. 1). Adriana stated, “I am ready now to listen to each person and, together, to solve a case” (IDI, Adriana, p. 2). When students know that their contribution to solving the group tasks affects the entire group, then personal responsibility increases (SRJ 2, Andra).

The positive contribution of individual accountability in students’ academic development, including solving problems in their groups, are findings supported by research (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Johnson et al., 2013; Karacop & Diken, 2017). Teachers, as leaders, are asked to solve problems. Therefore, they may learn how to do it during their academic preparation.

Helpful classroom management. The participants emphasized the benefits of classroom management by flipping the classroom, working in groups, and taking roles. Weekly assignments were considered very useful for developing knowledge and skills. As Adriana stated, “the assignments were not like those of the other courses when you should learn only for the final exam. Here we had them every week. This helped me” (IDI, Adriana, p. 1). Andra said, “I did my assignments on time, and they had a continuity. The professional or the leadership skills do not develop in one week but need time to be learned, to try if an idea is good, and if is working” (IDI, Andra, p. 2).

Using a flipped classroom may be considered effective and timesaving for in-class activities, students’ learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2014; Shaykina & Minin, 2018), course content structure (Hsieh, 2017), and class organization (Zappe & Litzinger, 2017). Students are exposed to the content of a topic before coming to class. Therefore, in-class activities are extending their knowledge. It is the responsibility of the teacher to artfully design learning materials (Ozdamli & Asiksoy, 2016; Price & Nelson, 2019) and to bridge pre-class and in-class activities (Crawford & Senecal, 2017).

Working in groups. Working in groups was a permanent practice in class (Obs., May 2). Cooperating for a common goal created cohesion: “I cooperate with the other groupmates, and we work together to achieve an objective” (IDI, Flavia, p. 1). Through group work, students developed the feeling of academic accomplishment and involvement (SRJ 2, Andra). Positive interdependence and working together for group achievement are results supported by other studies (Herrmann, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Karacop, 2017). The ability to work in groups is an important leadership skill. However, not all students have an innate ability to collaborate with others. Therefore, they must be taught and trained how to do it during their academic programs.

Taking roles. Due to the role students had within their groups, they developed several skills such as taking responsibility for their and others’ learning, taking care of their behavior, even overcoming shyness. Daria mentioned that “each of us had a very well-defined role, and the group was supporting us as they respected our role” (IDI, Daria, p. 1). Having different roles shaped both introvert and extrovert

personalities: “Being responsible as presenters, forced us to present in front of the class, and this helped us” (IDI, Carolina, p. 1). Experiencing different responsibilities and roles (Obs., May 9), helped students mold their actions: “In every class, we had another responsibility, and it helped us because people who don’t have leadership skills had the opportunity to develop them by speaking for the whole group. This helped me to see how it is to be silent, the person in the back of the stage” (IDI, Andra, p. 1).

The benefits of taking roles in groups have been also highlighted by other studies (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Sahadeo-Turner et al., 2015; Senn et al., 2015). Teachers may have different roles and leadership positions in their professions. By assuming different roles, today’s students, teachers in the making, learn how to handle different roles and responsibilities.

In what follows, are presented the participants’ experiences regarding the outcomes of CL implementation. Its positive results are encouraging for the educators who intentionally plan to develop students’ leadership skills. The participants mentioned, as an effect of CL implementation, awakening attention, improving communication, developing critical thinking, developing decision-making skills, assuring long-term retention, and applying knowledge and skills.

Awakening attention. This was the first outcome mentioned by the participants. One student said, “the tiredness disappears, and the boredom does not appear. There is always something new, and you are catching all the information fast. In this course, we came out of the pattern” (IDI, Alexandra, p. 2). This positive situation was visible in in-class activities (Obs., May 2) and experimented by students. Different studies support the findings that interaction makes learning effective as students are actively involved in in-class activities (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Johnson et al., 2013; Neumann et al., 2011; Senn et al., 2015). Learning takes place through students’ maximum attention. Therefore, CL may support teachers in keeping students active in class.

Improving communication. The communication skills of students developed as they were actively involved in group and class discussions. Active listening was part of communication, and students overcame the fear to speak: “We had the responsibility to speak for our group. It helped us to overcome the fear to speak” (IDI, Carolina, p. 1). When group members trust each other, they communicate better: “When I trust in my group or other groups from our class, it is easier for me to speak and I am no longer afraid to speak” (IDI, Flavia, p. 1). Communication skills, developed through CL, is a finding supported by several other studies (Johnson et al., 2013; Kirbaş, 2017; Sumarmi, 2017). As communication is a significant skill for leaders and teachers are leaders, then an intentional learning process must be structured and applied for developing students’ communication skills.

Developing critical thinking. Critical thinking was developed in the CL-class: “Students have to think by themselves and find solutions” (IDI, Andra, p. 1). On some occasions, the students could not merely accept a colleague’s response but started asking questions like, “What are your reasons for supporting this?” (IDI, Eliana, p. 1). Based on these CL methods, “I can observe how others are thinking, I can embrace some behaviors that can help me when I will teach” (IDI, Flavia, p. 2). Analyzing other opinions, interacting with them, and reflecting on what was presented, are findings supported by other studies in developing students’ critical thinking (Asari, Ma’rifah, & Arifani, 2017; ten Dam & Volman, 2004; Johnson et al., 2013), and better prepare them for their profession. Teachers, critical thinkers may help their students in developing critical thinking skills. As such, they can train thinkers and not students who just memorize what was taught.

Developing decision-making skills. CL developed students’ decision-making skills. The teaching strategies placed the students in the position to make choices based upon their analysis: “The corners method looked very good to me. I liked the idea of choosing” (IDI, Flavia, p. 1). Alexandra also mentioned this method: “There were more words, and we had to decide which to choose and why” (IDI, Alexandra, p. 1). How instruction is applied and how it prepares the way for decision making is a finding of several other studies (Istrate & Velea, 2011; Johnson et al., 2013; Noh & Yusuf, 2018). Decision-making is a skill a teacher must-have. Therefore, when using CL, teachers develop students’ decision-making skills preparing them to lead their future classes.

Assuring long-term retention. CL strengthens long-term memory. One student said, “we will remember the content a long time from now, due to the way the course was taught” (IDI, Lavinia, p. 1). Making connections between content and something unforgettable was efficient: “It helped me retain information for a longer time, and I made connections with something I cannot forget, a feeling, a sensation, and this helped me to remember” (IDI, Alexandra, p. 2). Carolina concluded, “even if you don’t want to learn, you are still learning because you were involved in class” (IDI, Carolina, p. 1). Other studies support the finding that CL has a positive influence on students’ long-term retention (Chatila & Husseiny, 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Johnson et al., 2013; Macpherson, 2015; Tran, 2014). As a result, they can access knowledge even after a long time and may use it properly.

Applying knowledge and skills. The goal of teaching is student learning. As they prepare to become teachers, it is desired they transfer knowledge and skills to the workplace. For Andra, this objective was fulfilled as she decided to use CL in her teaching: “I will give my students roles and will change them every class meeting. I want to model my students on how to be leaders” (IDI, Andra, p. 1). Daria remarked that “working by groups gives everybody balance. I will use group work, in connection with the content and objectives” (IDI, Daria, p. 2). Understanding the importance of CL and manifesting the desire to use what students learned is supported by other studies (Altun, 2015; Crosby, 2017; Johnson et al., 2013;

Karacop, 2017; Karacop & Diken, 2017). When teachers use CL in their teaching, students are motivated to transfer both knowledge and skills to the workplace. That is a notable outcome.

After identifying the positive outcomes of CL, it was implemented in the perfecting phase. In responding to Research question 4, the participants made recommendations for improving the process model by extending CL in other classes: "I would like all teachers to use these teaching methods. We need both theory and practice" (IDI, Lavinia, p. 3). Flavia made an important observation regarding the appropriate transfer of CL knowledge and skills to the classroom. She said, "I saw a colleague at school when she did this [using CL in a competitive activity], it was chaos there, no one was any more listening" (IDI, Flavia, p. 4). In conducting observations, I identified and noted in the observation guide, as a weakness, the fact that students did not have micro-teaching sessions for practicing the taught CL strategies. The teaching competencies and the leadership skills are better developed when students apply in different contexts what they have learned. Besides, students recommended changing the groups occasionally and having more practical activities.

The Process Model

Based on the data from the final phase of action research, I developed a new process model that suggests extending CL to other classes. By adding micro-teaching sessions, students may be better prepared for their professions, successfully assuring the transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the workplace. The model keeps the threefold format: planning, performing, and perfecting, as seen in Figure 1.

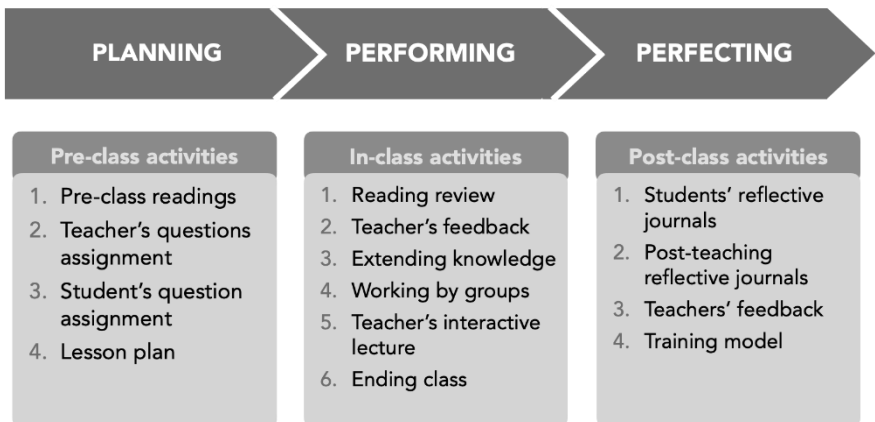


Figure 1. The 3P's of the process of CL implementation.

The students who used with partial success CL in their practice motivated me to introduce a new element in the second cycle: training students in using CL. It
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aimed at helping them develop teaching skills and successfully transfer CL to the workplace. For achieving this goal, it was introduced the training model of Joyce and Showers (2002). This training model is a research-based framework for professional development, with four core components: (a) knowledge and theory, (b) demonstration of skill, (c) practice of skills with feedback, and (d) group coaching and teachers' study groups.

The core components of the process model developed during this cycle of action research are represented in Figure 2. All four components contributed to the successful implementation of CL in the selected university, leading to the development of students' leadership skills.



Figure 2. The core components of CL implementation.

Conclusion

This action research case study revealed that when using CL, students develop leadership skills, preparing them for professional life. The 21-st century skills may be developed better under a paradigm where the teacher is not anymore, *the sage on the stage, but the guide on the side*, as one teacher from my doctoral program often said. When teachers use CL, organize students working by groups, use roles in groups, and flipped classroom, then positive outcomes regarding the development of leadership skills appear. Attention was kept awake, understanding, and long-term retention increased. Communication skills, active listening, critical thinking, decision-making, individual and group responsibility, transfer of knowledge and skills, all have been activated and developed through CL. As shown in this study, when intentionally planned and used, social interdependence theory, structure-process-outcome theory, and empowerment education framework facilitate academic and professional skills development.

The new proposed process model suggests for further studies the use of microteaching sessions, added under the training model of Joyce and Showers, for successfully assuring the transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the workplace.

Regarding the generalizability of the findings, the limitation consists of conducting the study in one university. However, the model resulted can be applied in higher education, with contextual adjustments if necessary, as its components are research-based. As in qualitative research, the transferability of the findings is in the reader's hands; the recommendation is the model to be tested.

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*Gianina-Estera Petre, PhD
Education Department, Guest faculty
Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies
Silang, Cavite, Philippines
petreg@aiias.edu*