

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN DOCTORAL STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SITUATED IN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract

The purpose of this self-study is to examine how transformative leadership in student organizations contributes to doctoral students' professional development in higher education. Drawing from Mezirow's (1997) notion of transformative learning and Bass's (1990) theory of transformational leadership, the researchers discuss how an academic student organization, Alpha Upsilon Alpha, provided opportunities for transformative leadership in scholarship and service thus crafted academic identities and re-envisioned student organizations as spaces of transformative professional development.

Introduction

For many literacy education doctoral students who have established strong professional identities as classroom teachers, transitioning from the role of a teacher into that of an academic with well-established leadership qualities is not as simple as acquiring a new set of skills and expanding one's knowledge of scholarship. Crafting an academic identity with exemplary leadership requires a conscious engagement in transformative learning practices through which students use their newly acquired knowledge and skills in leadership and service (Astin & Astin, 2000; Austin & McDaniels, 2006). Engaging doctoral students in active preparation for academia through leadership in student organizations can assist them in professional development and identity construction (Hall, 2012). However, many student organizations still struggle to provide transformative approaches to leadership and professional learning

for students (Ewell, 2018). The current literature has not adequately explored the skills and resources that doctoral students need for successful leadership in professional development (Heflinger & Doykos, 2016).

In doctoral programs, in particular, professional development has traditionally occurred through short workshops on specific teaching techniques along with individual, apprentice-style mentoring relationships between professors and students (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Morris, 2017). While these time-honored practices can provide doctoral students with valuable experiences, they tend to emphasize the faculty mentor's philosophical stance, pedagogy, and research interests, thus limiting opportunities for doctoral candidates to develop their own epistemological beliefs and vision of themselves as scholars, leaders, and faculty members. In response to the limitations of traditional professional development approaches, professionals need to create spaces for engagement in transformative leadership for

scholarship and service opportunities in universities and student organizations (Ewell, 2018; Hall & Burns, 2009).

In this article, we respond to the needs of doctoral students seeking professional development within their busy, fast-paced practices of preparing lessons in their academic programs and classrooms and managing work related to service and leadership in their communities. To generate discourses around leadership in professional development through student involvement in academic organizations, in this self-study, we will describe what and how we learned from our transformative leadership practices as part of our professional development in a student organization. Self-study can include disconfirming data (Loughran, 2007); our purpose is not necessarily to find answers to all questions directed in the literature. We will problematize the research issues at hand and reflect on our shortcomings because describing “the failed, the difficult, and the problematic” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 18) enriches self-studies of professional development and transformative leadership.

Literature Review

A growing number of higher education studies examine how participation in student organizations promotes professional development (Gillentine & Daughtrey, 2001; Munoz et al., 2016), increases diversity on campus (Kuk & Banning, 2010; Perez et al., 2019), and enhances academic achievement (Farago et al., 2018; Hajart et al., 2007). These studies emphasize the importance of leadership and transformative practices in the development of students and their academic organizations. For example, Munoz et al. (2016) provide significant implications that student organizations need to attend leadership training and engage in experiential learning activities with transformative practices in professional development. Their study confirmed

Montelongo's (2002) literature review highlighting that professional development activities in student organizations motivate students to engage in service and leadership by enabling students to discover their goals and objectives. Montelongo also suggested that student organizations help students perceive their educational journey as more significant and relevant because they develop core academic competencies that involve learning to communicate effectively, thinking critically, and participating in a just society as globally diverse citizens.

In terms of leadership education, participation in student organizations can be a valuable experience that leads to professional development for university students (Dun et al., 2019). Hoover and Dunigan (2004) investigated leadership characteristics and traits of student organizations. They supported previous literature that the reason for student participation in student organizations is the opportunities they offer for leadership and professional development. Kelling and Hoover (2005) also found that students in academic organizations learn leadership skills such as teamwork, reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, responsibility, and self-esteem. The researchers stressed that cultural identity affects how leadership is viewed in organizations and suggested students from diverse backgrounds discuss leadership practices and cultural leadership ideals. Finally, Patterson (2012) confirmed the work of Peterson and Peterson (2012) in that student organizations promote the flourishing of intellectual development and managerial skills together with leadership. They considered involvement in student organizations as opportunities for skill development that will be useful in real-world settings.

Still, not enough research adequately focused on the role of academic student organizations in supporting and transforming student's abilities in leadership and professional development at a doctoral education level (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Stover & Seemiller, 2017). More studies are thus needed that explore

how student organizations may be leveraged as hubs of professional learning to support the transition of doctoral students into academic professions and transform academic identities, student practices, and perceptions, many of which are implicit in political and ideological conversations within academic circles (Kriner et al., 2015). Therefore, in this self-study, we draw upon Mezirow's (1997) notion of transformative learning as well as Bass's (1990) theory of transformational leadership to examine how our participation in a student organization shaped our identities through transformative practices in scholarship, leadership, and service and how such organizations may be spaces for professional development.

Theoretical Framework

Transformative learning is "the process of effecting change" in our experiences that are "associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned-responses frames of reference" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Transformative learning takes place when individuals re-envision problematic frames of reference and structures of assumptions, by engaging in critical reflection, establishing new points of view, and reflecting on our generalized biases. Transformative learning requires an environment where people learn from each other, become aware of frames of reference, and provide feedback to each other in extracurricular educational spaces such as student organizations. With this view, individuals question their assumptions and become more inclusive, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change.

Transformative learning has supporting principles for the theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990), in which a leader causes a change in individuals or groups such as student organizations through idealized influence, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (see Ewell, 2018). Idealized influence requires a leader to act as a role model. With this aim, leaders inspire individuals to achieve their missions, inculcate them with pride, and build trust in groups. Intellectual stimulation

promotes creativity by encouraging individuals to challenge the status quo. Leaders initiate positive change as they develop "new ways of looking at old problems" (Bass, 1990, p. 21). Then transformational leadership requires individual consideration in which leaders need to recognize each group member's strengths and weaknesses and act as a mentor for those who need emotional support.

Although transformative learning is "the essence of adult education" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11), and transformational leadership is essential in student work and organizations (Bass, 1990), very little attention has been given to how transformative learning and leadership take place in student organizations (Ewell, 2018; Taylor, 2009). An evident gap exists in the literature about transformative learning as a professional goal in doctoral education (Cranton & King, 2003; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). Still, the question remains as to how doctoral students engage in transformative learning practices and professional development. Based on our own experiences, we posit that student organizations are appropriate spaces for the kind of transformative leadership and professional learning that can support doctoral students' transition into their roles and identities as academics. Accordingly, we chose to conduct transformative leadership in our organizations, including AUA, as a process of productive change in leadership by which individuals created new frames of reference as they motivated, inspired, taught, and learned from each other.

The aim of this self-study, therefore, is to discuss how leadership in an academic student organization, AUA, (a) provided fertile ground for collaborative professional development, and (b) transformed doctoral students' academic identities within the field of language and literacy education. Drawing from reflective notes on the professional development practices of the researchers as AUA members, we present how the Alpha Gamma chapter provided opportunities for professionalization in the areas of scholarship, leadership, and service, thus helping us, as budding scholars and leaders, cultivate an academic identity committed to critical literacy and

social action and to shift our understanding of student organizations as spaces of professional development where transformative learning is possible.

Methodology

We conducted this self-study because we wanted to address the gap in the literature about doctoral students' identities, theory, and practice with regard to their professional development. With many opportunities for reflection, collaborative self-study can inspire doctoral students to constructively shape academic identities and generate constructive discourses on leadership (Loughran & Russell, 2002). Such engagement in professional learning practices initiates powerful ideological questions with the purpose of transformative learning and leadership (Loughran, 2007). Because self-study explores individuals' experiences as "living contradictions" (Whitehead, 2000, p. 93), it can teach doctoral students how to navigate conflicts between their academic work and social practices. To achieve "a validation process based in trustworthiness" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 817), we required evidence of transformative learning and leadership in our professional practices and used multiple methods to achieve broad perspectives on the research questions that we investigated.

Following the "four methodological features of self-study" (Loughran, 2007, p. 16), we first circulated emails through which we organized our questions and reflective notes on our transformative practices, identity development, and professional development activities in AUA and related communities. Second, using our "frames of reference through critical reflection" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7) on our assumptions about identity construction, transformative learning, professional development, and leadership, we discussed the issues and agreed on the affordances, challenges, tensions, differences, and similarities in tackling these issues. In this process, we took notes on how we afforded, limited, and eliminated spaces for transformative learning and leadership as we negotiated professional and cultural discourses. Third, we evaluated emerging themes in one

another's reflections. That is, we highlighted the most noticeable narratives, summarized common themes, analyzed, and deconstructed the related ideological inferences under the light of transformative learning and leadership. The conversations, questions, and reflections that we exchanged and evaluated provided evidence for this study. Through collaboration that relies on reflection, we aim to contribute to the debates among values, beliefs, and research-based evidence within self-studies. The findings will stimulate further conversations and research questions on the issues under investigation because we disrupt, challenge, and illuminate the common assumptions concerning transformative practice for leadership, identity development, and professional learning in student organizations.

Our self-study demonstrates how we weaved together our stories, reflections, and critical dialogues questioning and challenging how we, as doctoral students, engaged in transformative learning. At this stage, we continue by providing AUA's background and describing the research participants as AUA members.

Background of Alpha Upsilon Alpha and Research Participants. Chartered in 1985 under the International Literacy Association (ILA), AUA is an academic student organization whose purpose is "to recognize and encourage scholarship, the development of personal and professional leadership, and service to the field of reading" (ILA, n.d., para. 1). Taking its name from the Greek words for reading ("Anagnosis"), scholarship ("Upotrophia"), and leadership ("Archon") (ILA, n.d., para. 2), AUA thrives owing to the unceasing commitment of a group of students and faculty who encourage members to participate in on-campus and off-campus activities within their respective campus communities.

Our faculty representative, Dr. Gertrude Tinker Sachs, has played an integral role in AUA's Alpha Gamma chapter for 12 years. She has been a consistent source of support, guidance, and inspiration, providing scaffolding and leadership for our learning (see Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2014). Under her guidance,

we became autonomous and agentic units, which required more than mere emulation of how she acted as a scholar and tenured faculty member. Mentorship with the guidelines of our faculty representative disrupted the traditional “teacher/learner dyad” of our mentor-mentee relationships and encouraged us to engage in “a richly diverse field of essential actors and . . . other forms of relationships of participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). Tuba, the first author of this paper, explained how this unconventional and ongoing mentor-mentee relationship with Dr. Tinker Sachs transformed her academic identities, which then informed her teaching and research practices with critical perspectives (Angay-Crowder et al., forthcoming). Interrogating the relationship between language and power, we, as members of AUA, considered literacy as deeply connected to social action and democratic practices. Aligned with this understanding, we drew upon the notion of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to create a sense of belonging in our student organization. The newer members were initially encouraged to learn by observing more experienced peers, gradually gaining experience through participation in the community’s practice, or what Lave and Wenger identified as legitimate peripheral participation.

Three authors as research participants in this study are former P-12 classroom teachers and now faculty or staff members at different universities. We all studied in the language and literacy doctoral program of a southeastern university and positioned ourselves in critical literacy perspectives in our academic work (see Albers et al., 2015). Here, we share personal experiences as doctoral members of the AUA student organization and reflect on the authentic, transformative opportunities that have helped us with professional development and the construction of academic identities. In the following sections, we present our findings on how our AUA Alpha Gamma student organization provided each of us with transformative opportunities for leadership in scholarship and service. At the same time, we delineate how leadership supports our transforming academic identities.

Findings

Leadership Through Participatory Professional Development. AUA modeled the act of idealized influence for its members. This type of leadership was instrumental in cultivating our professional development because we transitioned into our roles as leaders in the field of language and literacy (see Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2014). For example, we planned organizational meetings that provided one venue whereby we assumed leadership roles in our community and our academic field of literacy. We coordinated our leadership work through face-to-face meetings on the university campus and via web conferencing platforms such as Skype and Blackboard Collaborate. As leaders of the Alpha Gamma chapter, the AUA officers planned and facilitated the gatherings, which generally included discussion about general business matters, member recruitment, and potential service opportunities. We also discussed ways we could contribute as leaders to our community, schools, and teachers in a more productive and participatory manner.

Tuba joined the discussions of leadership by connecting her participatory work in AUA with broader discourses at the 2016 JoLLE@UGA conference where she presented. She drew upon the “art-based approach to transformative learning” (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009, p. 45) to discuss how activist literacies can inspire students and engage them in creative and transformative practices. The conversations about an art-based approach to transformative learning during the AUA writing retreat, her presentation, and the reflections after the conference about the uses of art in classroom teaching facilitated “the process of transformative learning” which involved “taking action on one’s reflective insight, and critically assessing it” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). The input Tuba received prompted her to think critically about art as a form of literacy and its importance in education. Compelled to further the conversations, she then wrote a manuscript in which she proposed strategies for incorporating art into a multimodal-oriented curriculum (see Angay-Crowder, 2015). Engaging in a process of dialogic

exchanges, reflection, and thinking deeply about the importance of an art-based curriculum enabled Tuba to take action toward enacting change within communities.

Technology and its related learning are viable means to foster collaborative, transformative learning in professional development for teachers and teacher educators (Albers et al., 2016; Whitelaw et al., 2004). Encouraged by the promises of technology discussed during AUA meetings, in 2011 Christi, the second author of this paper, joined the project of Global Conversations in Literacy Research (GCLR) (visit the project website at <https://globalconversationsinliteracy.wordpress.com/>). GCLR as a series of open access, one-hour web seminars delivered by internationally-known scholars in the field of critical literacy inspired Christi's dissertation study that focused on teacher educators' integration of web seminars into their pre- and in-service literacy education courses, a professional development approach not previously examined in the extant literature (see Pace, 2015). As a result of conversations with Christi, many AUA members were encouraged to participate in GCLR's critical, online literacy project as research assistants. Inspired by GCLR's professional development opportunities, Tuba wrote her dissertation that investigated doctoral students' academic literacies and intertextuality during GCLR web seminars (see Angay-Crowder, 2016). We all realized that online professional development provides opportunities for teachers to share their knowledge and experiences, to learn from others, and to collaborate in addressing real-world issues (Albers et al., 2015, 2016). Many AUA members broadened their conception of professional development and acknowledged the many benefits arising from extending beyond traditional, one-shot activities that typically occur within an institution's physical borders. We see this change in thinking as another example of transformative learning as a part of innovative professional development.

Another leadership opportunity was created as a result of an intellectual stimulation in 2014 when AUA members challenged the status quo by positioning

themselves as the Executive Committee Members of the Georgia Association of Teacher Educators' (GATE) annual conference. GATE is the state affiliate of the National Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), the only national educational association comprised of members solely committed to the improvement of teacher education. While we were honored to be given the responsibility of supporting the Executive Committee, a few coordinators initially expressed concerns about our capability as doctoral students to perform this work effectively. Yet AUA members insisted that they take on this leadership role and produced counter-arguments against the concerns raised. We changed the coordinators' perspectives by taking on responsibilities that included accepting conference proposals, sending formal acknowledgments of receipt of these proposals, and establishing an on-line blind review proposal process, which was a new initiative. We also participated in the proposal review process in collaboration with GATE professors from around the state.

At the end of the conference, GATE committee coordinators not only shifted their perceptions about AUA members' capacity to organize the conference, but they also publicly recognized Alpha Gamma's leadership and service, praising us for our commitment to professional work and successful implementation. For Christi, this moment gave her a sense of agency because it marked her acceptance into academia by veteran peers. She believed that her work and that of the other AUA members was valued, which enhanced her understanding of the role of an academic, thus shaping her academic identity. This public acknowledgment verified that transformative learning is "the process of effecting change" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). We not only transformed other's perceptions but also improved our leadership skills during the conference, thus positively contributing to our ongoing identity transformation from doctoral student to academic. With our effective leadership, we demonstrated how the professional development of individual educators can improve the cooperative efforts of all concerned.

The aforementioned examples illustrate how AUA

has served as a productive platform for honoring our leadership skills. First, planning and organizing Alpha Gamma meetings have afforded us an authentic experience of working collaboratively with the organization's officers and our faculty representative Dr. Tinker Sachs. Second, we have been able to transfer these skills to other endeavors, such as participating and presenting at conferences, researching and writing, and assuming leadership roles in academic projects such as GCLR and Global Conversations in Doctoral Preparation (GCDP), which we will explain later in this article. As a result, our student organization fostered our professionalism and academic identities in the area of leadership.

Leadership in Service With Social Action. The ubuntu notion, "I am because we are," is the foundation for AUA's community projects. Our leader believes that "we all need to draw on our living, teaching, and researching contexts to create the conditions for the betterment of humankind" (Angay-Crowder et al., forthcoming). Accordingly, AUA members, as critical literacy educators, favored theories that helped transform dominant discourses that often remain uncontested. By partnering with local organizations to bring literacy and literacy awareness to our communities, we took leadership by putting our theories into critical praxis (e.g., Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2014).

Accordingly, members volunteered at the Kids Shelter (pseudonym), a community shelter that provides homeless children and their families positive living conditions for current and future generations. In support of the shelter's mission, AUA Gamma members volunteered to assist the preschool teachers by reading with the children whom the shelter serves. Reading with children in this particular setting allowed us to better understand their specific needs and interests and respond to them by modifying the reading strategies we applied. Although it took several visits to the preschool students' classrooms, Tuba and her colleagues who worked on this service project overcame challenges and learned how to navigate the shelter's classroom norms, eventually

becoming an integral part of its learning community.

Not having previous experience reading with children, Tuba initially felt uneasy. Coming from the Turkish cultural background, she thought she did not have the requisite familiarity with the children's established classroom norms and the community's cultural discourses. However, inspired by Christi's idealized influence as an AUA peer, Tuba changed her perspectives and gain confidence in supporting the particular age group that was "foreign" for her. Connected through the internet, Christi, who lives 150 miles from the shelter, joined Tuba and the children to read a story. With the scaffolding and inspiration that Christi provided, Tuba felt that she was prepared for her own reading, which eased the adjustment process for her. Eventually, Tuba's confidence increased as she interacted with the students and then took the lead in working with them on their reading skills. This transformative experience at the Kids' Shelter prompted Tuba to reassess her leadership skills with enough competence to support students within a teaching and learning context unfamiliar to her, but one where the students felt completely at ease.

Further, AUA's service work at the Kids' Shelter provided situated learning experiences through which AUA members generated the self-confidence and competence needed to take leadership in an active engagement with the local community by sharing their knowledge and love of literacy. For example, one AUA member, David, organized his second graders to select books from their classroom library to donate to the children at the Kids Shelter. Motivated by the strong desire to make a difference in children's lives, he, along with another second-grade class at his school, organized a school-wide book drive, collecting over 300 books for the home. This experience exemplified how a disorienting dilemma can be a catalyst for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Realizing that the children in their local community did not have access to books and organizing the book drive, the AUA member and his students not only transformed their thinking about providing access to literacy for all but also took on

the leadership role in the initiative. Participating in service-learning projects allowed them “to experience learning more directly and holistically” (Taylor, 2009, p. 6). Under the AUA member’s guidance, not only were his second-grade students able to make a difference in their community but also another community in our state.

To support the education of young English language learners (ELLs), in 2014 AUA members partnered with the Urban Literacy Clinic (ULC) at Georgia State University (GSU). The voluntary work of language and literacy included organizing the books in their reading library. In so doing, they made the required resources readily available to teachers who prepare the research-based literacy lessons for ELLs whom they tutor there. Even AUA members who do not live near GSU found creative ways to get involved with this outreach. For example, Christi used internet communication to contact volunteers and suggested how the books might be reorganized. She also made a monetary donation for the purchase of containers to house the books and offered to create labels for the containers. Christi’s contribution illustrates that with a little creativity, which is integral for transformation (Dirkx, 1998), AUA members can turn challenging circumstances of access and availability into transformative opportunities to actively participate in their organization’s community outreach. More importantly, working collaboratively and creatively, all members were able to support ULC’s mission to improve literacy among ELLs living and attending school in the greater Atlanta community.

Interactions within our local communities made us also realize that we had more work to do to improve and promote leadership in increasing access and success for traditionally underrepresented populations. As Kuk and Banning (2010) explained, student organizations have not given attention to supporting the efforts of diversity on campus. Following their suggestions for increasing diversity, we first questioned ourselves: “Does AUA serve as a significant social network for culturally diverse students on campus?” To avoid experiences as “living contradictions” (Whitehead, 2000, p. 93), we as AUA

members had to monitor our actions or practices, making sure that they accomplished our mission for promoting multiculturalism in both local and global contexts. For this purpose, then, we identified behaviors not previously thought through or for which there was insufficient supervisory leadership. Next, we looked for stereotypic depictions of race and culture on our campus (e.g., advertisement describing Asian students achieving high academic scores and African American students involved in sports and dance). Realizing that we needed to establish more productive relationships and collaboration with multicultural organizations on campus, we discussed possible solutions such as supporting study abroad and language learning programs for more diverse cultures and/or programs. We also partnered with Multilingual Communities (pseudonym) to improve the literate lives of these multicultural adults and children. Thus, we took deliberate actions to first problematize and then address issues of race and culture, which ultimately promoted and enhanced our institution’s leadership in diversity goals.

Transforming Academic Identities Through Leadership in Scholarship. Establishing academic identities is important for doctoral students as they work toward achieving research goals in their specific areas of interest (Austin & McDaniels, 2006). Similar to the participants in Hoover and Dunigan (2004), we took leadership roles in scholarly activities to reach our goals that included transforming our academic identities. We participated in research that drew upon teacher identities to improve pedagogies (e.g., Angay-Crowder et al., forthcoming), and investigated how teachers and scholars practiced literacy in ways that guided them to critically examine their world. In conducting such an analysis, we frequently engaged in social action within our communities as a way to promote social justice. Through its annual writing retreat, research projects, and conferences (among other initiatives), AUA provided opportunities for us to collaborate in ongoing and prospective research and take part in professional presentations.

Crafting academic identities in higher education can create tensions for doctoral students and academic

faculty alike (Coke et al., 2015). One aspect of academic identity requires that we engage in scholarly research and writing. Meeting or exceeding expectations of research, teaching, and service brings challenges for newly appointed members of university faculties or doctoral students in higher education. Following Hall's (2012) suggestions, we made this transition into academia more seamless through apprenticeship and relationships that we developed in our student organization. We cultivated intellectual stimulation by managing relationships and achieving career success and satisfaction as we challenged the traditional and perceived power differences in our roles as students, teachers, mentors, and leaders.

For example, Tuba, as the newcomer and novice member of our organization, initially approached the challenge of writing for publication with trepidation. She felt intimidated due to her problematic frame of reference that only a few academic insiders could write professionally or have their work published. As a community of practice, more experienced writers in AUA challenged Tuba's assumptions by sharing stories about how they overcame their anxieties as novice writers. Sharing knowledge and insights about conducting research and writing for publication boosted Tuba's confidence and changed how she positioned herself as a writer. By learning from more experienced Alpha Gamma members, Tuba honed the research and writing skills necessary for developing as a literacy scholar in her local communities as well as the broader language and literacy community. We all became more confident and knowledgeable in the process. Our collaborative writing practices supported individual consideration in the organization. Thus, we grew professionally and began to interact more so as colleagues, eventually coming together to collaborate on writing projects such as this paper.

AUA also fostered the development of our scholarly identities through its annual writing retreat. The Alpha Gamma chapter hosted single-day and sometimes weekend-long intensive writing sessions, which provided all members a supportive environment to focus on writing projects beyond their required

doctoral coursework. These projects included the development of manuscripts, Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposals, and/or research projects. AUA members offered and received feedback about their research projects, exchanged ideas, shared personal insights and experiences, and learned as future academics how to dedicate time for writing amidst the many other tasks vying for our attention.

Each year, a faculty member from the College of Education's Language and Literacy unit at GSU volunteered to attend the writing retreat to lend further support. These guest scholars typically afforded one-on-one or small-group conferencing with AUA doctoral students about a particular piece of writing. They also offered suggestions about the direction of our writing and prompted us to consider alternative approaches. Collaboration between faculty and doctoral students satisfied needs for deeper relationships garnered through professional development. The guest scholars then engaged us in discussions about time management, the nature of job searches, the expectations of working in universities and colleges, and the design of research in preparation for dissertation work. Our interactions, observations, and active collaboration with these knowledgeable and established academics have served as valuable models of leadership for us. This kind of support in leadership represented an important source of intellectual stimulation that fueled ongoing identity development and transformative work in our scholarship.

The capacity to be open to others' perspectives sits neatly at the heart of transformative practices (Dirkx, 1998). As AUA members, we understood each other's viewpoints because we had many opportunities to reflect on our lived experiences. For example, writing retreats provided Rebecca, the third author of this paper, a space for critical reflection that is integral to transformative learning, leadership, and identity development. During writing events, AUA colleagues and invited professors acted as agents of idealized influence for her developing academic identity. That is, they became role models for critical reflection for Rebecca's writing development. In this process of

transformational leadership, she held informal, one-to-one conferences with these scholars. From this experience, Rebecca realized that despite being new to the doctoral program, she could offer her valuable insights to her more experienced AUA peers about their own scholarship. Thus, she shifted her thinking and no longer ascribed to the dominant view of schools and universities as sole owners of learning and knowledge. Finally, encouraged by stimulating intellectual conversations and critical reflexivity, Rebecca developed her professional identity, transformed her skills, boosted her confidence, and took the agency to write for publication. By establishing positive leadership abilities together with other AUA members, she was able to ask for and receive useful feedback from more experienced writers. Without the support and push of her fellow members, Rebecca believes that her first article would not have been published.

Additionally, Rebecca felt that participation in an AUA writing retreat early in her studies prepared her to conceptualize her identity as a scholar. She attended the retreat to learn from the mentorship sessions regarding conference presentations because she aimed to be well prepared for her first solo presentation at an upcoming literacy conference. Rebecca expected to inhabit a subordinate position in the traditional mentor-mentee dyad at the retreat, deferring to the recommendations of more experienced participants. She, thus, was rather surprised to receive individual consideration from more experienced AUA leaders during the mentorship sessions. Advanced doctoral students and guest faculty attending this retreat recognized Rebecca's strength at organizing and presenting ideas with persuasive arguments. Therefore, they advised that she take the leadership in facilitating conversations during the sessions. This disruption of traditional school-context power structures presented Rebecca with what Mezirow (1991) referred to as a "disorienting dilemma" (p. 168). As Coke et al. (2015) suggested, this kind of dilemma can occur when transitioning between roles in academia. In such a case, a person may experience a disconnection between their own

and others' perspectives or realize that their previous views and approaches are no longer adequate, which results in disequilibrium (Mezirow, 1991). However, Rebecca negotiated the tension between the roles of a doctoral student and a scholar in the context of the retreat by shifting her identity from "being" a doctoral student to engaging as an academic (Dirkx, 1998, p. 11). In other words, the dilemma resulted in a transformational leadership experience for Rebecca as it connected her to her internal resources related to her academic identity (Illeris, 2014). Her authentic experience is an example of how we see our student organization as a community of practice that fosters professional development and leadership opportunities in the field of scholarship, thus allowing us to shape our developing academic identities.

Another important means of improving scholarship was sharing our research in local and international communities of GCDP (visit the project website at <https://globalconversationsindoctoralpreparation.wordpress.com/>). AUA members as part of the GCDP project team provided a series of open-access web conference sessions in which doctoral students from across the globe shared their expertise with other doctoral students about a range of topics on the preparation of doctoral students. Tuba, as the coordinator of GCDP invited all doctoral students to share stories and research in this transnational space "that is liminal—i.e., between communities, languages, and nations" and develop transnational identities that "go beyond bounded, static, and territorialized constructs and norms" (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 41). All AUA members participated in the GCDP webinars with different roles as presenters, moderators, facilitators, and coordinators. During these webinars, we aimed at transforming our problematic frames of reference by detaching ourselves and other international scholars from limiting language ideologies and facilitating criticality and "creativity that attempts to go beyond existing language systems and monolingual ideologies to construct new textual homes" (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 58) for webinar participants. For example, during our

chat discussions and presentations, we challenged the use of dichotomies terminologies such as first language (L1) versus second language (L2) and promoted translanguaging that “transgresses and destabilizes language hierarchies” and “that transform a present space with historicity, creativity, criticality, and power” (Garcia & Wei, 2014, p. 68).

Discussions and Concluding Remarks

Participating in our student organization was a transformative experience because we imagined how professional development could otherwise be. AUA provided us the space to acquire professional skills, including communication and relationship building through transformative practices, decision-making, and leadership, all of which are essential to advocating for and advancing the transition to academic careers. By developing social networking skills, collaborating with mentors and other doctoral students, and taking on leadership roles, we grew as individuals and academics ready to advance our profession. AUA membership, with its regular meetings and activities, such as writing retreats and volunteering options, enabled us to realize that the most innovative professional development processes for academics should be ongoing, supportive, and collaborative (see Albers et al., 2015, 2016). Therefore, we agree that participating in dialogic exchanges of ideas, knowledge, and scholarship through connected learning tools such as webinars or blogs can engage students in transformative professional development in communities of practice (Bali & Caines, 2018; Yang, 2009).

Perhaps the most important benefit of serving in a student organization is the confidence students gain, an essential trait of all successful leaders (Patterson, 2012). Through AUA-led initiatives, we learned to believe in our abilities to lead others and to gain from our academic experiences. We also realized that student organizations have the potential to serve as significant agents in leadership. AUA encouraged our members to look beyond our campus life and (re)envision our future as leaders and developing

scholars in the field of literacy. Furthermore, AUA's professional development activities for doctoral students supported leadership as a fundamental function of our professional role. Through its many activities, we learned how to plan, organize, manage, and make decisions by engaging in real-world contexts.

AUA provided opportunities for establishing social and professional networks with people on and off-campus and connecting more broadly with members of the profession through conferences. The stories AUA members shared through publications and presentations function as a form of critical discourse, as they allowed us to fully participate in educational contexts that encouraged critical examination of society and the world. Inspired by these critical endeavors, we promote critical literacy in authentic ways that should take place in situated practices of student organizations as communities of practice. Therefore, we support Kriner et al.'s (2015) claim that student-based organizations should be recognized as a viable, important form of learning community that can further professional development through transformative leadership. Creating a culture of professional development within a community of practice is critical because it promotes a subtext of learning, transformation, and leadership; builds a level of trust; and develops a sense of team with clear goals and a solid foundation for success (Blanton & Stylianou, 2009).

We posit that student organizations should operate through transformative leadership in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which help understand and discuss how members of student organizations learn, grow, and lead with academic identities. Integrating communities of practice into doctoral programs and student organizations presents the opportunity for students to engage in transformative leadership and to learn with their peers in an effective learning space (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Kriner et al., 2015). In our AUA community, this participation included the implementation of critical perspectives that supported the notion of transformative learning as it describes “how adults learn to make meaning

of their experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 198). In our student organization, we assisted each member in negotiating their transformation in a way that nurtured the development of identities and the AUA community. Providing support for student identities in communities of practice is both critical and transformative in the professional development of doctoral students (Hall & Burns, 2009; Heflinger & Doykos, 2016).

The professional development opportunities in AUA transformed our identities and traditional roles, for example, mentors versus mentees; all mentors became learners (see Angay-Crowder et al., forthcoming). However, we still need to problematize other issues of identity, such as gender, class, and race in relation to student organizations with more inclusive understanding (i.e., emotional, cognitive, social, environmental, and societal dimensions) in the context of transformative learning, leadership, and professional development (Illeris, 2014). While engaging in reflections and discussing our transformative practices in scholarship, service and leadership, we should identify the affordances, challenges, tensions, and commonalities in addressing the problems in student organizations. As current and future educators, members of student organizations should seek to generate new knowledge by conceptualizing learning and problematizing the issues of professional development in transformative and innovative ways as we prepare to meet the demands of a global society.

Finally, we believe that all doctoral students must engage in self-study that can bring trustworthiness and integrity to our profession through critical reflection (Loughran, 2007). Then, we can promote professional development and identity construction, motivate ourselves to become educational leaders and optimize teaching and learning experiences for ourselves and community members. We posit that the planning and delivery of doctoral education should include more opportunities for transformative learning, which “is relatively rare within settings of adult education” (Dirkx, 1998, p.11). We need to continue discussions and critical reflections about

participating in student organizations as an effective avenue for transformative professional development. Through critical reflection, we can transform habits of mind and a point of view (Mezirow, 1997). By fostering reflection and communication, acquiring new knowledge, making choices for change, and acting upon our changed perspectives, we will “generate awareness and acceptance of [our] purposes” (Bass, 1990, p. 21) and continue inspiring, energizing, and intellectually stimulating student involvement and leadership within our student organizations.

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