"Being heard": pedagogical strategies that support BIPOC students in postsecondary leadership courses

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Abstract

Purpose – Our goals were to explore the pedagogies applied by instructors that supported Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) student learning in a leadership course and the leadership behaviors BIPOC students identified as being applicable after the course.

Design/methodology/approach – Through survey research and qualitative data analysis, three prominent themes emerged.

Findings – High-quality, purposeful pedagogy created opportunities for students to learn. Second, a supportive, interactive community engaged students with the instructor, each other and the course material to support participation in learning. As a result, students reported experiencing big shifts, new growth and increased confidence during their leadership courses.

Originality/value – We discuss our findings and offer specific recommendations for leadership educators to better support BIPOC students in their leadership courses and classrooms and for further research with BIPOC students.

Keywords BIPOC, Leadership pedagogy, Teaching and learning of leadership, Higher ed classroom

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Racially minoritized students are more interested in leadership, in particular for social change, compared to their White counterparts (Oaks, Duckett, Suddeth, & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013); however, 85% of leadership educators are White (Jenkins & Owen, 2016) and may have trouble adapting their pedagogical choices, leadership concepts and leadership processes to students from different identities (GuramatunhuCooper, McElravy, Hall, & Harvey, 2019). This leads to the continued devaluation of people of color as leaders (Irwin, 2021), furthers manifestations of White privilege in the field (Davis, 2021) and creates an environment in which students of color do not use the term "leader" to describe themselves (Arminio *et al.*, 2000).

Academic engagement is an essential predictor of student success and persistence at their institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As gatekeepers for legitimacy in leadership, it is essential that leadership educators disrupt Whiteness in leadership and leadership education and attend to race, gender and other social identities that have been and continue to be marginalized in leadership development (Irwin, 2021; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Moreover, calls have been made to increase student behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagement in leadership courses through active learning strategies (Yamauchi, Taira, & Trevorrow, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that we explore and use tools in the classroom designed to engage Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) as students in our classrooms (Irwin, 2021). To do this, we must answer the following research questions: What pedagogical choices did the instructor make that supported BIPOC students' learning in a leadership course? And what did students who experienced these choices report with regard to leadership capacity?

Literature review
BIPOC conceptions of leadership
Traditional leadership theories and approaches have operated with color-blind and gender-blind assumptions that hide the impact of race and gender on who can be seen as legitimate in leadership and thus narrowly defined leadership as White (GuramatunhuCooper *et al.*, 2019; Kezar *et al.*, 2006; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Wilder, 2014). For example, measures such as the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and CliftonStrengths are particularly flawed and unreliable for BIPOC students as these measures do not address identity and power and lack internal reliability when used with BIPOC students (Dugan & Leonette, 2021). Yet, leadership educators persist in using them (Dugan & Leonette, 2021). Good leadership education should amplify racial awareness for everyone while removing the barriers to access that BIPOC students typically face, examining power dynamics and centering BIPOC students' understandings of and experiences in, leadership (Davis, 2021; Dugan & Leonette, 2021). Such examination should result in reflection upon not just how we teach but also what we teach.

The leadership paradigms we teach are typically derived from White, Western contexts and represent White, Western conceptions of power and human interaction (Davis, 2021; Dugan & Leonette, 2021; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Western conceptions of leadership position Whiteness as normal and ignore the fact that the concept of leadership has been long associated with White, male identities (Kendall, 2013; Kodama & Laylo, 2017). For example, a popularly taught concept of leading, the Social Change Model (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) defines leading as the creation of "positive" social change but does not explicitly define what "positive" means, and it emphasizes the practice of social justice and authentic leadership without examining how social identity and power relate to being permitted to be authentic (Dugan & Leonette, 2021). In general, only recently have scholars begun to unpack how great man and trait-based theories of leadership perpetuate the idea that only certain types of people can lead (Dugan & Leonette, 2021).

Time-tested purposeful pedagogy
Previous research has established pedagogical strategies that support learning for the majority of students in leadership education courses. Instructional strategies in leadership education courses that are widely accepted as effective include: case studies, class discussion, contemplative practice, exams, experiential learning, games, group projects/presentations, guest speakers, icebreakers, in-class short writing, individual leadership development plans, interactive lecture/discussion, interview of a leader, lecture, media clips, quizzes, reflective

journals, research projects and presentations, role play, self-assessments, service learning projects, simulation, small group discussions, storytelling, student peer teaching, team-based learning and team building (Allen & Hartman, 2008; 2009; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Jenkins, 2012; Komives *et al.*, 2011; Odom, 2015). With many leadership paradigms derived from White, Western contexts and conceptions of power (Davis, 2021; Dugan & Leonette, 2021; Ospina & Foldy, 2009), it is imperative to explore whether these pedagogies support BIPOC students in leadership education.

Culturally sustaining pedagogies for BIPOC students
Multiple non-Western pedagogical strategies enable BIPOC students to connect to their learning and deepen their academic engagement (Bennett, Ravulo, Ife, & Gates, 2021). These pedagogical choices must break the cycle "of a deeply embedded belief and practice of Western universality," (Ermine, 2007, p. 198). Culturally sustaining pedagogies are appropriate to support students as subjects, not objects, in the learning process (Brown, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Such pedagogies include learning opportunities that develop critical thinking skills, inquiry-based instruction, the inclusion of perspectives and viewpoints that reflect students' identities through texts, examples and guest speakers and layering of cultures and cultural shifts into the course references and activities (Brown, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2014). However, the scholarship of how to apply these pedagogies broadly within leadership development programs is just beginning.

It is also essential that educators value the linguistic, literate and cultural practices of students of color and students from working-class communities as assets to the learning that should be honored and explored in the classroom (Paris & Alim, 2014). In doing so, educators must recognize ways that their teaching may be marginalizing the linguistic, literate and cultural practices of students and instead engage in pedagogies that disrupt that marginalization (Caraballo, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014). Culturally sustaining pedagogies require educators to not only understand the historical or heritage practices in students' communities but continuously engage in practices that resonate with the contemporary and evolving cultures of BIPOC students (Paris & Alim, 2014). In doing so, these pedagogies support engagement of BIPOC students and develop a cultural and linguistic flexibility among all students who will operate in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). As "culturally sustaining pedagogy is necessary for supporting access to power in a changing nation" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 80), understanding this work is particularly essential for leadership educators as questions of power are inherent to our field.

In the context of leadership education, Harper and Kezar (2021) found many strategies that support the engagement of BIPOC students in leadership education courses. These include: journaling and reflection activities focused on barriers overcome, sharing narratives of students with whom they share identities and who have undergone leadership development, providing examples of leaders challenging oppressive systems and using intergroup dialogs (Harper & Kezar, 2021). Studies outside the scope of leadership education have identified additional culturally sustaining techniques. These include spending more time on reflection than lecture, using small group discussions before large groups, teaching and supporting metacognition through activities and using peer-to-peer learning. Additionally, scholars recommend deep listening, sharing circles, storytelling, metaphorical representations, performance, hands-on learning and dance to support BIPOC students in the classroom (Ermine, 2007; Lemke-Westcott & Johnson, 2013; Louie, Pratt, Hanson, & Ottomann, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019). These findings suggest the need for supportive interactions between faculty and students and across classmates to help support student learning and growth.

A crucial element of supporting BIPOC students in the classroom is the concept of "flattening the hierarchy" by creating collective decision-making for the classroom, its processes and procedures and removing the instructor from their position as the only expert in the room (Foulis, 2018; Guthrie & Torres, 2021; Louie *et al.*, 2017, p. 25). To flatten the hierarchy, instructors must resist being the only expert and serve as a facilitator that pushes students to apply their own knowledge and expertise (Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019). Specific strategies such as *sentipensante* – students as the lead facilitators – engages the students in breaking down the hierarchy of the classroom while centering their voice (Guthrie & Torres, 2021). Collective decision-making and respect include providing many opportunities for student choice, collaborative grading through feedback, discussion and reflection and creating a culture for respectful public debate in class (Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019).

Contextualization also supports student learning as it creates opportunities for students to connect new information to their previous knowledge (Yamauchi *et al.*, 2016). Instructors who do not share their students' cultural backgrounds and experiences must be intentional about learning about their students in order to contextualize the curriculum and course experience. One way to accomplish contextualization is through the use of student-led discussions and small groups which can support students' ability to share their lived experiences, prior content knowledge and skills and interests (Salazar, 2018; Yamauchi *et al.*, 2016). Providing experiences and exemplars that connect to students' cultural and linguistic experiences and resemble the activities carried out by practitioners in their own communities develops contextualization (Au & Jordan, 1981; Durden, 2008). Further, when students can contribute to contextualization by speaking to their lived experiences, reflecting on those experiences in the context of the field of study and contribute their voice to discussions, they flourish (Colvin & Tobler, 2013; Durden, 2008; Foulis, 2018).

Thus, educators must create a learning environment where purposeful ethnic sharing is encouraged and nuanced identities are explored (Gay, 2010). Pedagogies that support critical remembrance – the preservation of memories of community resilience and possibility with the intention of disrupting marginalization – and acknowledge American participation in disrupting these communities are essential to the support of students experiencing the model minority/forever foreigner assumptions (Lin, Suyemoto, & Kiang, 2009; Uy, 2018; Vue, 2019). Critical remembrance pedagogies include cross-generational assignments, reflection, narrative sharing, empathy rehearsal and critical reading (Vue, 2019). Further, the intentional development of sociopolitical consciousness among students can facilitate the extension of their learning into the real world and engagement as leaders for change (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014).

We cannot treat any identity group as a monolith, as people have different experiences and contexts than others with whom they share a racial or ethnic identity (Stage, 2007). Educators must recognize that cultural experience is not homogenous and therefore continually work to learn and incorporate perspectives and strategies such that students are positioned in a place of normativity (Ladson-Billings, 2014). White teachers often do not see the ethnic distinctions among their students and thus do not consider them in their pedagogical choices (Uy, 2018). No study of appropriate pedagogies can address the diversity of cultures and experiences across such a diverse grouping of people; thus, educators should familiarize themselves with the cultures of the BIPOC students in their classrooms, examine and interrupt their own biases and assumptions, connect to the lived experiences of their students and tailor their pedagogy to the students in their classrooms and the students who should be (Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019). These concepts are still new to the field of leadership education and to address them, we must first examine how BIPOC students conceptualize "leadership" and themselves in relation to leading.

Research process

Our research explored the experiences of BIPOC students who take postsecondary leadership courses, illuminated pedagogies their instructors used to support their learning and identified key leadership behaviors students learned from their classes. We examined instructor use of culturally sustaining pedagogies for significant learning through our first research question: *What pedagogical choices did the instructor make that supported BIPOC students' learning in a leadership course?* Second, we assessed students' perceived future application of leadership behaviors gained from taking a leadership course through our second research question: *What did students who experienced these choices report in regard to leadership capacity?*

Methods

This study was part of a larger investigation that explored the experiences of postsecondary students who completed undergraduate leadership courses at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. For this study, we combined survey research with qualitative data analysis methods to explore the experiences BIPOC students had in leadership education courses, identify pedagogies applied by instructors that supported BIPOC student learning in leadership courses and the leadership behaviors BIPOC students identified as being applicable after their courses. All students enrolled in undergraduate leadership courses completed the same pre- and post-course survey. This study examines the responses provided by students who self-identify as African-American/Black, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latinx, Middle Eastern, Indigenous/American Indian/Alaskan Native, Multi-racial and Other in a question about race and ethnicity. As researchers, we draw from constructivist and interpretivist perspectives, acknowledging experiences shape the realities of our participants and that those realities are valid and worth sharing (Sheppard, 2020). As this investigation specifically explores the experiences of BIPOC students, we also bring in elements of a critical perspective and acknowledge the realities in which many of our participants live, namely, in historically disadvantaged and/or oppressive contexts and institutions (Sheppard, 2020).

Positionality statement for the researchers

We are four leadership education faculty at three research-intensive universities in the United States. Two of us served as instructors in the courses from which the data were collected. As three White women and one White man, we recognize that we come to the field of leadership education from privileged identities wherein the examples and contexts in the field reflect similar cultures to our own upbringings. Further, we investigate the state of leadership education as scholars with privileged, majority identities that are often reflected and represented in the body of leadership course instructors and the materials our field prioritizes such as textbooks and existing case studies. Our commitment to understanding whose experiences are missing from our curriculum and pedagogical choices and the work to rectify that led us to structure this exploratory research study. Further, as two of us were likely instructors of the courses participants discussed in this study, we acknowledge that power dynamics may have influenced student responses. One way we attended to the instructor-student power dynamics and biases, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of our findings (Denzin, 1978), was by having the two authors who do not teach at the university lead data analysis.

Data collection

Data was collected in leadership courses taught within one department where several such courses are housed at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. These courses were open to all students enrolled at the university and consisted of students from dozens of different

academic majors. Examples of courses include a 100-level course on personal development, a 200-level course on the foundations of leadership, a 300-level course on leading groups and teams and a 400-level course on critical perspectives in leadership. These students were invited to complete an optional and anonymous pre-course survey during the first two weeks of the course and an optional and anonymous post-course survey during the final two weeks of the course. Surveys were not connected to students' grade in any way. After providing their consent, participants completed one pre-course survey in a semester and separate post-course surveys for each leadership course in which they were enrolled in a given semester. In this paper, we used data collected from students in 18 traditional 16-week courses and 12 online 8-week courses from fall 2019 through spring 2021. In 2019–2020, paper surveys were administered by a member of the research team who was not the course instructor in nine leadership courses that met in person and online surveys were administered using Qualtrics in six asynchronous online courses. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a shift to fully online instruction in the middle of the spring 2020 semester, the post-course survey in spring 2020 and survey administration in 15 leadership courses in 2020–2021 was conducted fully online using Qualtrics.

Sample
A total of 1,166 students completed at least one survey during the combined 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 academic years. Of those, 1,096 completed the pre-course survey and 593 students completed both the pre-course and post-course surveys. For the purpose of this paper, we included only those students who self-reported their racial group on the pre-course survey and who completed a post-course survey for at least one course. The resulting sample of 585 students included 44 (7.5%) participants who identified as Black/African American, 89 (15.2%) identified as Asian/Asian American, 383 (65.5%) identified as White/Caucasian, 44 (7.5%) identified as Latinx, 6 (1.0%) identified as Middle Eastern, 16 (2.7%) identified as multi-racial and 2 (0.3%) identified with a racial group not listed on the survey. No students self-identified as Native American in our sample. In our sample, 186 (31.8%) participants identified as male, 394 (67.4%) identified as female, 2 (0.3%) identified as transgender and 2 (0.3%) identified as another sex.

With our focus on the experiences and significant leadership learning among BIPOC students in this paper, we removed students who identified as White/Caucasian from our analysis and based our analysis on the 202 BIPOC students in this sample. Among the BIPOC students, 78 (38.6%) students identified as male, 123 (60.9%) identified as female and 1 (0.4%) identified as another sex. We made the decision to group students in one collective BIPOC group rather than by their self-reported racial group to protect the identities of participants who are one of a very few from their specific racial or ethnic identity. We recognize the limitations of collapsing identity categories into an integrated "BIPOC" identity, but did so to protect students from their identity being revealed.

Instrumentation
Both pre- and post-course surveys were designed by members of this research team. The pre-course survey included questions regarding students' racial identity and the post-course survey included a number of open-response items inviting them to report their experiences within the course. Within the pre-course survey, we used only the question "What racial group do you most closely identify with?" to identify the BIPOC students in our sample. The options were: African-American/Black, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latinx, Middle Eastern, Indigenous/American Indian/ Alaskan Native, Multi-racial and Other with space to name one's racial identity. The racial identities referenced in this paper reflect the options listed within the survey administered in 2019–2020 and 2020–2021.

The post-course survey examined students' significant learning within the leadership course and how aspects of the learning environment contributed to their learning about leadership. Open-response questions invited students to respond to the following two prompts: (1) "Please describe some of the significant learning that you will take away from this course. Said another way, how are you different as a result of taking this course?" (2) "What specific leadership behaviors are you able to utilize now that you have taken this course?" A subsequent open-ended question asked students to elaborate on how the primary course instructor supported their learning about leadership. Note that these survey questions were asked of all students who completed leadership courses during these time frames, including BIPOC students. We did not ask questions specifically directed to BIPOC students (e.g. as a student of color, how . . .).

Upon completion of data collection, we organized the data for both surveys in a spreadsheet by matching the pre-course survey with the post-course survey for each student. Students assigned themselves a participant number in the pre-course survey that was a combination of their initials and four digits from their phone number. Students used this number again on the post-course survey to enable matching. The spreadsheet contained students' responses to Likert Scale items and open-ended questions.

Data analysis procedures
Once the data was organized, we filtered out BIPOC student responses from their White peers. This resulted in pre- and post-course survey data from 202 students. Two members of the author team carried out first-cycle coding independently using a descriptive coding scheme to analyze student responses to open-response questions. Each member used descriptive coding to identify the topic present in sections of student responses (Saldaña, 2009). This provided an inventory of topics for us to work from (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). Then, we met to discuss our coding and collaborate on code definitions. From this shared code list, we re-examined our original coding and refined the codes. Next, we independently worked through a second cycle of coding to develop a thematic organization from our first-cycle codes (Saldaña, 2009). We applied an axial coding strategy in the second cycle to develop our understanding of "the conditions, causes, and consequences of a process" so that we could build an understanding of how instructors' pedagogical choices connected to BIPOC students' engagement in leadership (Saldaña, 2009, p. 159). We then each developed a coding memo to suggest themes that emerged (Saldaña, 2009). These were discussed over several collaborative meetings and resulted in our organization of themes that make up the findings we present below.

Building quality into the study
We employed a few key strategies to build quality into our study. We remained reflexive throughout the research process by engaging in multiple collaborative discussions with co-researchers and making clear our paradigmatic orientations and assumptions in the above positionality statement (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). We also engaged in investigator triangulation during data analysis to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of our findings (Denzin, 1978). Additionally, we offer multiple illustrative quotes in our findings to accompany our themes, thus enhancing the transferability of our claims (Merriam, 2009).

Findings
Theme 1: inclusive pedagogy and relevant curriculum
The first theme, *inclusive pedagogy and relevant curriculum*, captures the ways BIPOC students described how their instructors designed and implemented effective and engaging

leadership courses. Students felt their learning was supported by the instructor through purposeful pedagogical choices. Students were able to clearly articulate the pedagogical choices that supported their learning. This finding emerged as participants described various aspects of course design and facilitation including but not limited to the ways in which the instructor: presented content, facilitated peer interactions, created engaging in-class moments, offered relevant examples, communicated with students and offered opportunities for students to reflect on learning.

Students were pleased with the preparedness and organization of the instructor and class content, their timely feedback on assignments and responses to course inquiries and consistent communication about course deadlines, content and expectations. Students often connected the aforementioned mechanisms to the instructor themselves with statements such as, "[Instructor name] was always prepared! Had a very positive attitude and always answered questions along with elaboration when needed", "they were very available during the course. They embodied good leaders by getting to know us personally and being very open and honest" and, "she was always accessible, was excited and passionate." Many students appreciated instructional videos for online leadership courses, "she made very detailed videos and instructions to help guide us throughout the course material" and "she helped with the introductory videos for each module and some mini lecture videos." Others appreciated the scaffolding of course content, "giving small tasks to guide us on the right track to success to complete the program" and "they did manageable chunks of work and time that didn't feel too overwhelming."

Second, students appreciated the instructor's use of engaging content in their respective leadership courses. "Engaging" in this case, was described as learning through the strategic use of examples, supplemental learning resources and interesting lectures. Students especially appreciated the lectures, both live and via video. One commented,

> Definitely the weekly lectures where the bulk of it is learning from the slideshows in class. I think those are incredibly helpful because it is not only to review the topics we've read about, but also to reinforce and strengthen our own knowledge of the course content.

Others commented, "lecture videos were amazing", "interactive lectures" and, "so many examples during class of different scenarios in which the leadership theories applied to, which was incredibly helpful as it helped us envision that we're in those positions ourselves and were able to use those theories effectively." Another said, "I felt like the lecture summary and the mandatory videos were more instrumental because they were the ones that were most understandable, easy to learn from and brought practical value to the theories we learned." Students also found the supplemental resources offered by the instructor to be engaging and helpful in their learning. Students captured this with statements such as, "linked supplemental material" and "our professor provided us with many, many resources to fully understand the concepts for each week."

While students found great value in the interactive lectures and engaging supplemental resources, they also appreciated the diverse and dynamic pedagogical repertoire the instructor brought to their courses. Students acknowledged the effectiveness of "various forms of learning" and getting "a few different ways to learn the material." One student connected these activities to their learning, "the various articles, podcasts, TED talks and activities that we were assigned helped me get a hands-on learning of interpersonal intelligence, and made the course extremely comprehensive and interesting." Others shared, "they used a great mix of different medias to teach this course and made the work relevant to the real world", "rather than just reading articles for every assignment, we got a few different ways to learn the material" and, "I think all of the modules helped me learn from reading articles, TED talks, doing little personality tests, and reflecting."

Students valued the relevant and relatable nature of the content. The instructors' use of current events, relatable texts and applicable activities enhanced the learning experience. Many students commented on the effectiveness of hypothetical scenarios in class as helpful to their learning. One student commented, "my course instructor gave us hypothetical situations to place ourselves in regarding the course material; this helps us really feel what it is like to be in that certain situation." Others commented on the value of scenarios being helpful to "learn how to react in real life situations" and the importance of connecting weekly assignments to in-class activities "because the best way for me to learn is to actually apply the material that I learned to an actual activity." Other students commented on the significance of relevance with statements such as, "my course instructor was an extremely impactful teacher and mentor. She used examples to illustrate course concepts and always made the content relevant to our lives" and, "a lot of our learning came from real-life scenarios, which can help us learn how to react in real situations." Further students shared their appreciation for "insightful case studies", rich stories, group discussions and other in-class activities that promoted engagement with their faculty and peers.

Theme 2: creation of a supportive, interactive community
BIPOC students captured the importance and impact of their own active participation in the course and noted the value of being able to share their perspective, engage in discussion and connect course concepts to personal stories, examples and situations. Leadership students described the supportive learning environment as happy, open and psychologically safe. Students felt heard, seen and valued. The instructor was energetic, positive and empathetic to the students' struggles and was accessible and available to connect with students through in-person and virtual means. Many students utilized phrases such as, "happy because I was being heard", "safety and open" and "always on the student's side" when asked about the role their instructor played in the course. They also consistently commented on the passion and enthusiasm of the instructor, "they kept great energy all semester", "she was energetic and helpful and I could tell she cares a lot about students" and, "brought a positive attitude." Students were also keenly aware of the environment in which the instructor strove to cultivate, an environment that welcomed student voice, participation and authenticity. This was accomplished through sympathy, understanding and meeting students where they were at, especially given current national and global events. One student commented, "the instructor tried to foster an environment where people were included and could talk without worry." Others said, "the instructor is great. He always tried to foster an environment that was inclusive and secure to help promote participation" and, "very aware of current climate and life in general and made me feel like an actual human being and not only a student in her class. Very willing to help." Many students explicitly referred to instructor availability and accessibility and how this affected their learning. For example, students shared comments such as, "she made the environment stress free and checked in with us daily", "being sympathetic to situations and was always willing to help" and, "she is very accessible, you can always ask for help." Throughout data analysis, it became clear the leadership instructors were intentional with how they showed up within their courses and how they created environments that made students feel valued and heard.

Students described intentional strategies used by the instructors to foster interactive dialog and conversation designed to support critical thinking about leadership topics. Many students specifically connected such interactions to their learning. For example, one student commented, "she engaged with the students. She asked us questions and let us answer, she has us volunteer for activities in class, and she made us discuss thinking in groups, which all helped me to learn better." Students also connected during the participatory elements of class to their learning with statements like, "allowed us to lead lectures, use breakout rooms

effectively and had good assignments that got us to think critically about aspects of our everyday life", "The instructors really facilitated the discussion part in our course and I really benefited a lot from communicating and working with my classmates" and, "the instructor also used a [catch box] in class to engage all of the students, further allowing us to internalize and share our thoughts on the many different theories" – the catch box is a microphone that can be tossed around the room to encourage sharing and allow everyone to hear. Another student commented, "group discussions were the most important in supporting my learning because it gave us a chance to apply what we're talking about." Additionally, students resonated with the conversational and story-based structure offering phrases like, "told good stories in class that related to the real world. Was really inviting and encouraging to everyone so we can chime in and share our thoughts", "the teaching structure was more conversational than lecture based", "allowed for open participation in classroom" and "she incorporated a lot of stories and personal examples."

Theme 3: big shifts, new growth, increased confidence

BIPOC students in our study reported they not only learned leadership skills and behaviors as a result of taking a leadership course, they also increased their confidence in applying them to real-life leadership situations. As students reflected on their experience, they were asked about specific leadership behaviors they are able to utilize now that they have taken the course. Many students captured their responses through application statements such as "I now know how to. . .", "I can now utilize. . .", "I am able to. . .", "from now on I will. . .", "I will use this now. . ." and "I can do this now. . .." They were also able to identify specific concepts from their courses (e.g. I am able to use the power of "thank you" to help your team feel competent in order to have a more productive team), rather than speak in generalities (e.g. I can now communicate better). Statements like these imply both newfound confidence in their abilities to apply what they learned in class as well as their ability to identify specific concepts and ideas to implement in the future.

While each student identified unique statements when answering this survey question, a few key ideas emerged from both the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 academic years. First, many students had paradigm shifts about leadership, approaches to leadership, who should or could be a leader and what a leader should do. These shifts, students noted, will be implemented in future leadership and followership applications. Two students enrolled in an advanced course on critical approaches to learning, for example, stated, "deconstruction and reconstruction are definitely the two newest and biggest tools in my arsenal" and, "I have learned how to deconstruct and reconstruct different leadership theories. I have also learned that all forms of leadership are good, you just have to be cognizant of the situations in which you apply them." Others mentioned paradigm shifts related to other concepts from their classes, "I better understand leadership in the context of being the leader and the follower and the importance of the connection between the two", "I am able to lead with an even broader perspective. . .to understand how to lead by making ethical decisions and facilitating effective conversations", "I am now able to identify a systems flaw as opposed to looking for blame in people" and, "learning about all the different leadership theories brought many new perspectives to the term "leadership" and what it takes to be an effective leader."

Second, many students mentioned new insights and learnings in regard to personal growth, self-awareness and how to "think in a different way." Two students shared,

> I am more aware of who I am as a person, and what I need to be doing specifically with regards to leadership to improve my own techniques as someone in-charge, and also someone playing the role of a subordinate. Perhaps, I seem to have identified behaviors that need be worked upon to craft an environment crucial for the growth of everyone in the organization.

> I wasn't aware of so many aspects to not only be a successful leader but also a successful teammate and an accomplished person. I have learned a lot about people and why they do what they do and how we can use this awareness to promote peace, happiness, and satisfaction.

Others included statements like, "I became more confident and I learned what values I consider important", "I'm more mindful of myself and others in any situation", "I'm more aware of the importance of emotional/cultural intelligence and resilience" and, "this course helped me reflect on myself rather than searching for the right answer on Google." In addition to shifts in perspectives about leadership and advancements in awareness and personal growth, students also emphasized their abilities to work more effectively with others. This emerged as they spoke about their new abilities to bring people together to work toward a common goal, how to navigate challenging team dynamics and how to create a welcoming team environment and culture. For example, one student shared, "I'm more capable of gauging how effectively the team will be able to complete an assignment together. Working with a team this semester has taught me to be more firm in my decision-making and a better overall team member." Other students shared, "I can utilize what we learned in the course about decision-making and navigating conflict in any sort of team setting" and "I seem to have identified behaviors that need be worked upon to craft an environment crucial for the growth of everyone in the organization." Many students, like the one below, specifically connected prior experiences to course activities and new learning:

> I feel more prepared to work in teams and groups because I understand the dynamics within a team more. Prior to being a part of this course, I always struggled and wondered why my teams weren't successful. But being a part of this class showed me, through different activities and readings, the ways teams go through hardships then eventual success."

Through paradigm shifts about leadership, increased personal growth and awareness and enhanced abilities to work effectively with teams, BIPOC students who completed leadership courses found value in what they learned and were eager to utilize their new knowledge and skills in the future.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to explore the experience of BIPOC students who take postsecondary leadership courses, illuminate strategies their instructors used to support their learning and identify key leadership behaviors they learned from their classes. While it is not earth-shattering that our study connects time-tested, purposeful pedagogy to student learning and growth, it is essential to highlight the role pedagogical choices– when combined with the development of a supportive and interactive community—play in effectively engaging and supporting BIPOC students in a course (Allen & Hartman, 2008; 2009; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Jenkins, 2012; Komives *et al.*, 2011; Odom, 2015). After experiencing inclusive pedagogy and a supportive and interactive classroom community, students reported experiencing big shifts, new growth and increased confidence in the leadership capacities.

Our results suggested that the instructors in our study supported BIPOC students in ways that support findings from past research: connecting to lived experiences (Salazar, 2018; Louie *et al.*, 2017; Yamauchi *et al.*, 2016), the instructor as a facilitator, not the sole expert (Guthrie & Torres, 2021; Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019), peer-to-peer learning (Zinga & Styres, 2019) and student choice (Zinga & Styres, 2019). Specifically, students in this study praised instructors for offering a variety of learning resources, creating opportunities to connect with peers and communicating with students through timely feedback and acknowledgment of sociopolitical events that may be impacting learning. Additionally,

deconstruction and reconstruction to incorporate a diversity of perspectives (Brown, 2021), critical thinking and reflection on learning (Brown, 2021; Harper & Kezar, 2021; Zinga & Styres, 2019) and small group work and discussion (Salazar, 2018; Yamauchi *et al.*, 2016; Zinga & Styres, 2019) have been shown to support BIPOC students' learning. Instructors in our study seemed to have purposefully woven in these pedagogical and curricular strategies. In addition, the students in our study reported that instructors engaged in some practices that past research suggests are essential for a culturally sustaining pedagogy, such as providing opportunities for student voice and flattening some of the classroom hierarchy through student-led activities (Colvin & Tobler, 2013; Louie *et al.*, 2017). However, as we do not have access to the teaching plans for each of the involved courses, it is not clear how these opportunities were presented and how much choice and voice students were given in decision-making.

There is evidence to suggest instructors who taught students in this study may have met Brown's (2021) criteria that Black students need teachers who believe in them and affirm their identities, as the study participants reported feeling psychologically safe, heard and able to participate authentically in their leadership courses. Students indicated that the use of real-life scenarios and case studies was important to their learning. However, we do not know if these examples were rooted in BIPOC communities and centered on BIPOC leaders. We do not have evidence that the affirmation of identities addressed race and ethnicity. In fact, we do not know if instructors addressed race and ethnicity in the context of leadership and leadership theories. We have no evidence from students that the instructors took specific actions to affirm the concerns of BIPOC students – especially relevant to Black students as their identities were discussed across campuses and public spheres in 2020.

As in previous studies (e.g. Arminio *et al.*, 2000), the BIPOC students in this study did not refer to themselves as "leaders" in their responses, but they did express increased confidence in their ability to apply leadership to real-life situations and to work with others in groups and teams. They support this increased confidence with specific leadership skills and concepts – deconstruction and reconstruction, leader-follower relationships, ethical decision-making, etc. – that they feel prepared to use. Multiple students named deconstruction and reconstruction as skills they feel prepared to use after their leadership courses. This newfound ability to challenge the leadership paradigms typically derived from White, Western contexts and conceptions of power (Davis, 2021; Dugan & Leonette, 2021; Ospina & Foldy, 2009) may have enabled them to challenge the association of leadership with White, male identities (Kendall, 2013; Kodama & Laylo, 2017) or the idea that only certain people can lead (Dugan & Leonette, 2021). Further, it may have attended to Harper and Kezar's (2021) call to provide examples of leaders challenging oppressive systems. Combined, deconstruction/reconstruction with examples may have provided the opportunity for BIPOC students to become more confident in their ability to lead.

Recommendations

We encourage leadership educators to use collective decision-making and collaborative grading, push students to apply the knowledge and expertise they have gleaned from their communities, position students as facilitators and create a culture for respectful debate in class to further support and sustain the BIPOC students in their classes (Foulis, 2018; Guthrie & Torres, 2021; Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019). Further, we encourage leadership educators to immerse themselves in confronting their own biases (Zinga & Styres, 2019) and biases in the commonly taught leadership theories. Leadership educators can engage in critical reflection on their own power and privilege, cultural scripts and assumptions about others and in educating themselves about stereotypes, prejudice and

discrimination paying particular attention to perspectives that conflict with their existing beliefs about people with identities that differ from their own (Crittle & Maddox, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019). Incorporation of Lea's (2004) work in cultural portfolios in their course work can encourage students and educators to confront the biases present in the scripts and narratives we hold and share about leadership.

The work of culturally sustaining leadership education programs goes beyond the pedagogical choices to include the content we teach. Thus, we must celebrate the cultural and lingual fluency many BIPOC students embody and how it contributes to the process of leadership education (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). We can teach leadership theories rooted in collective and community action to fit their conceptions of leadership and how leadership is enacted in their communities (Davis, 2021; Dugan & Leonette, 2021; Hotchkins & McNaughtan, 2021; Oaks *et al.*, 2013; Torres, 2019). We could teach leadership theories that require engagement in sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014) to achieve social justice goals (Hotchkins & McNaughtan, 2021; Oaks *et al.*, 2013) and that employ the deconstruction and reconstruction practices students in this study appreciated.

Future research should examine when and how leadership educators affirm (or do not affirm) BIPOC identities and BIPOC conceptions of leadership in their courses. Leadership Education programs should audit their course materials – scenarios, case studies, texts and theories taught with BIPOC leaders and students to determine when and how their courses affirm BIPOC identities and what can be changed. We encourage leadership educators to collaborate with BIPOC communities and leaders and across institutions, geographies and areas of specialization to develop and share resources that address race and ethnicity in leadership and leadership theories and center the leadership work and theories in BIPOC communities.

We have no evidence in this study as to whether, or how, instructors created a learning environment to support the development of sociopolitical consciousness among the students, a key component of culturally relevant pedagogies and particularly salient to leadership education as development can facilitate the extension of their learning into the real world and engagement as leaders for change (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). Future research should explore how leadership educators can develop such consciousness, engage in purposeful ethnic sharing and identity exploration (Gay, 2010) and engage in critical remembrance to disrupt marginalization in order to create learning environments that value students from minoritized groups (Lin *et al.*, 2009; Uy, 2018; Vue, 2019). Further, a culturally sustaining pedagogy would require that our teaching honor the leadership paradigms in which BIPOC communities operate (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) and we are not able to determine whether that occurred in the courses in this study. Failing to do so reproduces harmful racial discourses and representations and furthers the marginalization and devaluation of people of color as leaders (Irwin, 2021; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Thus, it is imperative that future research address the ability to value BIPOC leadership paradigms. This may correct the current imbalance wherein BIPOC students are underrepresented in leadership education (Oaks *et al.*, 2013).

Conclusions
We see that BIPOC students appreciate many of Jenkins' (2012) signature pedagogies of leadership education. In addition, we conducted this study, in part, to investigate recommendations that leadership educators further adapt pedagogical choices, leadership concepts and processes to students from different identities (GuramatunhuCooper *et al.*, 2019), combat White supremacy in the field (Davis, 2021), value people of color as leaders

(Irwin, 2021) and create an environment in which BIPOC students use the term "leader" to describe themselves (Arminio *et al.*, 2000). These scholars all indicated the need for leadership educators to intentionally engage in culturally sustaining pedagogies. While our participants deeply resonated with and positively reacted to the pedagogical choices of the instructors, we believe deeper, intentional engagement in culturally sustaining pedagogies would further affirm BIPOC students' identities in leadership and contribute to greater diversity in leadership education. Suggested strategies include intentional recruitment and support of instructors and guest speakers who share and/or are knowledgeable about BIPOC identities and leadership in BIPOC communities (Guthrie & Torres, 2021), increased use of collaborative development of classroom protocols and procedures and collaborative grading to co-create community and flatten the hierarchy (Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019), intentional use of case studies, narratives and metaphorical representations that center BIPOC leaders and communities (Colvin & Tobler, 2013; Durden, 2008; Ermine, 2007; Foulis, 2018; Gay, 2010; Lemke-Westcott & Johnson, 2013; Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019), student-led classes (Salazar, 2018; Guthrie & Torres, 2021; Yamauchi *et al.*, 2016), intergenerational and cross-generational learning (Bennett *et al.*, 2021; Vue, 2019) and substantial opportunities for reflection (Ermine, 2007; Harper & Kezar, 2021; Louie *et al.*, 2017; Zinga & Styres, 2019).

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