

Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn

A pilot study into the effectiveness of leadership education in improving the dispositions for learning and academic performance of teenagers in school

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1. Introduction

This report, produced by the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter, was commissioned in June 2009 to explore the impact on young people of participating in short courses in leadership education.

The research is designed to be in two stages: a pilot study (from July-December 2009) and a main study (from January 2010-December 2012). The purposes of the pilot stage are both to trial and refine suitable research approaches and methods for the main study, and to provide the Challenger Trust with evidence of its potential value. The pilot is focused on the experiences of five students who participated on a single leadership course in a multi-cultural inner-city school; the main study will be farther reaching, undertaking a statistical analysis of approximately 1,000 students taking short leadership courses of different types across the UK, alongside an interview-based study of a smaller number of participants and their teachers.

The aim of the pilot research is to examine whether there is evidence to suggest a link between the five studied students' participation on the leadership course and both their attitude towards, and performance in, their academic subjects over a four-month period. In addition to this, the research examines whether broader attitudes and abilities that may help students to thrive in later life as well as in the classroom – such as confidence, communication skills and teamwork – show any change as a result of the leadership training. If commissioned, the aim of the main study will be to assess impact of leadership training on a wider scale and over a longer period, with generalisable findings that may influence the national debate over the provision of leadership education for teenagers.

A brief summary of the basis and findings of this pilot study is given in Section 5.

2. Background

2.1 The growth of leadership education

'Leadership', as an economic growth area, a cultural concern and an academic topic, has massively increased in importance over the last decade. The worldwide market in leadership development training worldwide was \$50bn in 2004 and on a sharp upward trend (Raelin, 2004). This represents one section of a wider field of management and executive education which is expanding rapidly in response to the perceived need of companies to prepare their workforces for changing environments (Bolden, 2009). In the academic sector, for example, the number of students taking Business and Administration courses rose by 40% between 1997 and 2007 (HESA, 2008).

In the UK education sector there is a particularly strong emphasis on school leadership - reflecting a general, cross-sector shift led by Government towards results-focused, diverse and increasingly autonomous providers of public services. Three examples will help demonstrate this: first, the formation of the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000, with a remit to promote high-quality leadership among school leaders; secondly, the implementation in 2004 of the statutory National Standards for Headteachers outlining the key areas in which they are required to perform (and which mirrors the focus and concerns of many courses in business leadership); thirdly, the commission in 2006 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) of a major three-year review, 'The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes' (Day et al., 2009). This project found that the quality of the leadership offered by heads, deputies and teachers was a significant factor in the academic achievement of students and was used to warrant further government investment in school leadership. Finally, the creation by the DCSF of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) in January 2009, the manifesto of which calls for all school-age children to have residential, extra-curricular informal learning opportunities. Many of the activities advocated by the Council promote leadership skills and dispositions.

In addition to a focus on senior management in schools, there has run in parallel a modest but significant focus on leadership skills and activity among students. This was written into the original remit of the NCSL – although funding for these activities was reduced soon after its inception. During that early period, however, a curriculum for leadership education for students was devised, refined and delivered by the University of the First Age (UFA) and delivered initially in the London area by UFA and Community Service Volunteers (CSV). Its core modules reflect the six key areas defined in the National Standards for Headteachers¹ mentioned above. Since then this course has been rolled out across the country on an independently funded basis. It is one of these courses, run by UFA, which forms the research focus for the pilot study. While internal and informal evaluation exercises have received very positive feedback from participating students and staff, there is as yet no rigorous external research on the impact and outcomes of such programmes – hence the need for this study. Interestingly, the Interim Report on the above-mentioned School Leadership review made several

¹ *These are:* Shaping the Future; Leading Learning and Teaching; Developing Self and Working with Others; Managing the Organisation; Securing Accountability; Strengthening Community

references to the perceived positive impact by staff and students of distributing leadership to students in the schools studied (Day et al., 2007).

The topic of leadership for students is relevant to two politically important aims: promoting social responsibility and increasing economic competitiveness. On the one hand the citizenship curriculum, which was devised to address a perceived lack of social integration into the wider community and lack of interest in democratic activity by young people, has largely failed to promote large-scale practical involvement (Pattie et al., 2004); instead, citizenship education has become focused on knowledge-based assessed elements – while the practical activities have remained voluntary. On the other hand, employers continue to express the concern that many young people entering the workforce lack the required basic and personal skills. The CBI's 2008 survey of education and skills showed, for example, that 86% of polled employers rated positive attitude and employability skills (such as self-management, teamwork and problem-solving) as the most important factor in recruiting graduates; degree results, by contrast, were rated most important by only 32% of employers (CBI, 2008). The CBI's previous response to the 2005 Leitch Review stated that 'above all a positive attitude... self-confidence, motivation, regard for others and integrity' were the qualities most needed for economic success – ahead even of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy (CBI, 2005). In both these contexts, the desired skills and capacities cannot be directly taught and must be developed through experience; leadership education promises to address this precise issue by offering students the chance to become involved in, and evaluate, meaningful and responsible community activity.

2.2 Conceptions of leadership and leadership education

In the academic community and among training providers, the model of leadership has largely shifted away from a 'great individual' perspective, which focuses on the leading individuals' skills and characteristics (Bolden, 2004, Bolden et al., 2005). Instead, the concept of 'distributed leadership' has gained ground: the idea that leadership is more usefully regarded as a quality of the relationships within a team with a shared goal, (Spillane, 2004) or as being conferred on someone who is seen by the group to be representative of their characteristics and values (Platow et al., 2006). By such definitions, the arts of leading and of following are intimately linked and the roles interchangeable, based on the situation. Day's distinction between leadership training, education and management is also useful here: leadership training is for individuals' present roles; leadership education, for individuals' future roles; and leadership management, for the present and future of an organisation (Day, 2001). Day sees the latter two functions as being equally important in the business context. However, applying this distinction to the context of young people's leadership skills, we can conclude that leadership education, with a focus on individuals' skills and dispositions for use in the future, is the most important: here the contexts of schools and communities can be seen as 'safe and confidential settings' (Bolden et al., 2005 p.18) where students are allowed to experiment with different approaches without risk to the organisation – as would be the danger in the case of a company or social enterprise.

Leadership South West's review of existing leadership education courses concluded that purely theoretical approaches were of limited use (Bolden et al., 2005): theoretical insights are only effective when training is practical and focused on the context – where participants are given the chance to apply their learning in the workplace and have the opportunity to discuss and evaluate the outcomes.

Within business-focused leadership development courses, this has led to 'more flexible, experiential and informal approaches, tailored to the requirements of individuals and organisations' (ibid., p.8), implying a reversal of many traditional educational priorities from the theoretical to the practical (Taylor, 2004).

While the concept of distributed leadership has received widespread support, it has also come under criticism. Some have argued that it is too vague, and that its associations with valuing all members' contributions could be used to enforce the delegation of power within a rigid, top-down command structure (Hatcher, 2005, Woods and Gronn, 2009, Strain, 2009). It can also be used rhetorically as a means of trying to elicit from workers a greater amount of work and commitment than their contractual due by giving them a sense of greater 'ownership' of the organisation without the tangible benefits. Strain has further argued that the linguistic distinction created between 'management' and 'leadership' has served a similar function: diverting the focus from the everyday relations of power and influence in an organisation onto the rhetoric of vision, values and inspiration – designed to gain the allegiance of subordinates to the leader's demands while leaving power relations intact (Strain, 2009). In response to these concerns, Woods and Gronn propose the term 'democratic leadership' as more explicitly indicative of the intentions behind 'distributed leadership' (Woods and Gronn, 2009 p.431).

These criticisms of distributed leadership are particularly apposite to the predicament of students, who, on the one hand, are generally situated within hierarchical institutions, and on the other, inherently hold an inferior status in terms of authority to the adults within those institutions. Efforts to elicit student 'voice' may backfire if they discover that, having been given reign and taken pains to gather opinions and form plans, they have no real authority to institute changes. Some have argued for the need to shift from educationalists attempting to teach students about citizenship towards allowing students to learn how to be democratic citizens through providing genuine opportunities to act (Biesta and Lawy, 2006).

2.3 A new pedagogy of challenge

Theories of teaching and learning can broadly be divided into two categories: first, those that focus on what we might call 'accretional' or 'scaffolded' learning; secondly, less common, those that focus on 'interruptive' learning (e.g Biesta, 2006). Variations on accretional approaches dominate research on learning theory and accounts within teachers' training: these promote steady, planned progress with the learner being supported to take a series of consecutive steps towards more complex understanding and processes. The expectation is that we largely know what we want the learner to learn, and have strategies in place to enable this to happen. The latter type of learning, however, is one we are more familiar with in out-of-school, everyday contexts: being put in situations where people do not know what to do, feel challenged to the point of discomfort, and are forced to adapt, improvise and act in unaccustomed ways in order to find a solution. Examples might include trying to communicate with someone who doesn't speak the same language, or taking on responsibility for others after a family bereavement. While these are usually accidental experiences, they can provoke profound changes in understanding, motivations and abilities. Biesta argues that this can be adopted as a deliberate pedagogical approach: educators putting learners in situations where they are confronted with very different perspectives, beliefs and approaches – and thereby forced to

reconsider, defend and adapt their own: "... it means that education ceases to be a process of giving, and instead becomes a process of asking, a process of asking difficult questions" (ibid. 2006, p.85). By presenting personal, context-dependent challenges, an interruptive pedagogy calls forth personal responses that reflect individuals' personality and values – allowing them to build self-knowledge and confidence. An older term for this, derived from the traditional independent school ethos and picked up by Gosling in the context of leadership, is 'character' (Gosling, 2004); the term we propose for an 'interruptive' pedagogy is a pedagogy of challenge.

A pedagogy of challenge is based around forms of dialogue: it contends that learning happens as one adjusts one's own perspective in response to those of others. One can do this directly through conversation or alone – through reading another's argument, for example. Dewey argues that our very environments can engage us in challenging dialogues 'by means of the action of the environment in calling out certain responses' (Dewey, 1966 p.11). For example, if a boy on an outward bound course is encouraged to climb a rock face for the first time, we might say that the environment 'calls for' strength and courage that he did not know he had. With regard to leadership, this accords with the distributed and democratic models outlined above where leadership is seen not as a fixed quality within individuals, but as emerging through the communications between members of a group: people are 'called' to lead in response to the demands of the context on their group. Both understanding of the shared context, and agreement on possible responses, emerge through communication. The hypothesis we want to explore and develop further through this research is that good leadership education is essentially communicative, challenging, emergent and active: it prepares learners to elicit and respond to the perspectives of others; it puts them in challenging situations in order to call out their unique responses, thereby building confidence, self-knowledge and a positive attitude. In relation to such education, Bennis states '...there is no difference between becoming an effective leader and becoming a fully integrated human being' (Bennis, 1999).

2.4 Dispositions for learning

The skills and attitudes associated with leadership cannot be captured or measured by a single indicator such as IQ, nor can they be developed through traditional classroom and curriculum based learning alone - especially that which is focused on individual understanding and achievement within narrow subject fields. Schools tend to take a largely 'abilities-centric' approach, while everyday language and experience suggests that successful activity inside and outside the classroom requires 'dispositional qualities' in addition to ability (Perkins et al., 2000 p.269). These qualities, Carr and Claxton argue, are crucial to learning:

To be a good learner you have to be able. But if such capabilities are necessary, they are not of themselves sufficient. One has to be disposed to learn, ready and willing to take learning opportunities, as well as able. (Carr and Claxton, 2002 p.10)

In the assessment of academic subjects, the factors of readiness and willingness can be largely bracketed out by the use of high-stakes examinations and assignments; these provide set times, places and deadlines for students' work and strong extrinsic motivation to succeed. Perkins and

Tishman's studies have suggested that, given subsequent opportunities to utilise knowledge and skills acquired for formal examinations, students may neither be able to identify such opportunities, nor be willing to act upon them – and that these factors may be more important than that of ability even in the case of academic tasks (Perkins and Tishman, 2001). A pedagogy of challenge, then, must focus principally not on abstract knowledge but on the cultivation of dispositional qualities: habits of mind and character that stimulate young people's intrinsic motivation for communication and action, and enable them to respond actively, insightfully and ethically to new and challenging situations. In this research we have termed these qualities 'dispositions for learning'.

2.5 Continuing a tradition of academic and practical learning

The application of this approach to young people is of course nothing new. As mentioned above, there is a long tradition in the independent education sector of promoting the value of team sports and often physically challenging outdoor trips, which became valued in the state sector as well. In addition, there has been a marked growth over the last 20 years in students taking Gap Years or other forms of break to experience other countries, cultures and activities before continuing to employment or university; in response to this demand, many Gap Year organisations have been founded. Some have focused more on leisure and enjoyment than on challenge and difficulty; others – including World Challenge – have tried to make students' experiences as valuable as possible to themselves and to the communities which they visit. These activities often include extended walking, camping and self-reliance, construction of facilities useful to the community, education and communication with those speaking a different language – all of which can take young people into unfamiliar territory in which they must find and develop within themselves new qualities in the face of difficulty. Such activities have traditionally been perceived as separate from and complementary to classroom learning; however, in the case of university admission, interesting and challenging Gap Years have often been seen as conferring an advantage to candidates – especially as increasing numbers of students attain high A-level grades. Leadership education in schools, then, may offer an opportunity to break down this barrier between abstract learning and practical experience, and in turn weaken students' impression that school is training for real life in favour of a sense of being active participants in real community life. They may also afford students opportunities to act democratically, in a way that the citizenship curriculum has so far found difficult to achieve.

The brief of this research is to explore potential, demonstrable links between short courses in leadership education for students and consequent improvement in their dispositions for learning and academic achievement. While academic achievement, for example in the form of GCSE and A-level grades, remains for schools the most significant indicator, recent initiatives such as Every Child Matters, and the subsequent reconfiguration and integration of children's services, have recognised the importance of other indices such as emotional well-being, health, enjoyment and readiness to achieve financial independence. Our argument is that the concept of 'dispositions for learning' incorporates a range of attitudes and skills that affect both academic performance and these wider indices. The limited scope of this pilot study makes it practically impossible to demonstrate a causal link between short leadership courses and academic performance; instead, its aim is to attempt to show, in the cases of the participants studied, a change in their dispositions for learning – and to detail any new approaches they take to their academic studies that results from that change. If this proves to be the case, we hope to demonstrate in the main study that seeking to change students'

dispositions for learning through leadership activity can act as a key to unlocking their potential in academic studies – and in wider fields of life.

3. Research design

3.1 Sample

This pilot study report is based on data collected in a single, multi-ethnic, inner city secondary school during a two-day leadership education course for approximately 60 students, who were selected by the school as potential leaders. The main study will follow many more students across a range of leadership education programmes in different schools and communities. The main study will also have a strong quantitative element made possible by the number of students investigated. By contrast, this pilot study, focusing on only five students aged 13-14, takes a qualitative approach. It represents a case study consisting of longitudinal semi-structured interviews, ethnographic participant-observation, interviews with student-selected teachers, and teacher assessments. The purposes of this pilot stage are to test and refine key research methods to be used in the main study, and to provide initial evidence to establish the likely viability and utility of that study.

3.2 Case study

A case study approach has been selected because the object of the research is the phenomenon of a leadership education course and its effect on its participants - rather than the participants themselves being the object of enquiry (Creswell, 2007 p.74-78). While recognizing that the experiences of five different students cannot be seen as representative of leadership education in general, they do nevertheless provide a basis from which both some common and divergent experiences on this particular course can be identified. The selection of five students also represents a caseload appropriate to the time and resources available. When using a case study methodology, an eclectic dataset is seen as an advantage as it allows a phenomenon being researched to be viewed from several different perspectives (ibid., p.75). The different approaches are detailed below.

3.3 Timescale

The student interviews are taken at different points of time; this is to ensure that the object of the study is not just the immediate impact of the leadership course on participants, but also its impact over time as they integrate the lessons they have learnt into their everyday lives. This is crucial to the use of the theoretical model outlined above, which regards learning as most powerful when rooted in real life experience. The period of time between interviews may be too short for this to be classified 'longitudinal research' in the traditional sense – Saldaña, for example, argues that a minimum of nine months (an academic year) should be considered a minimum for longitudinal research in education (Saldaña, 2003, p.6). However, the model of a pedagogy of challenge implies precipitating significant change in a relatively short time through targeted intervention – as opposed to a more purely ethnographic study which might highlight the effect of certain key factors against a background of continuity. Furthermore, even over these four months there were significant changes both in the school and in the students' lives – as is demonstrated in the results section below. Therefore, while it would not be appropriate on the basis of this time span (or indeed, limited size) to suggest that we can determine the 'end product' of the course in terms of its effect on students – or a 'from-to' approach, we can nevertheless build a picture of its perceived effect on them, among other factors,

up to that point – or a ‘from-through’ approach (Saldaña, 2003, p.8). A balance must be struck between on the one hand giving sufficient time before re-interview for the lessons learned to sink in and be developed in the light of experience, and on the other waiting too long, in which case so many other factors might come into play through which to interpret change that any changes cannot be reliably linked to the course. A summary of important external factors is given in the results section.

3.4 Research methods

3.4.1 Student interviews

The five student participants were interviewed alone three times each: first in the week before the leadership course, within a week of the course, and finally after around two months of school. Within these three semi-structured interviews, nine of the ten questions closely match those in the other two interviews - enabling comparison over time. In addition, this approach gives freedom to the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and allows the participants to define their experiences differently should they choose (Kvale, 2007 p.51-52). Interviews last between 20 and 40 minutes. After beginning with an introductory question, the second question in each interview involves a "diamond nine" exercise in which participants put the factors that motivate them in school into rank order, then justify their choices. Potential factors will be suggested for the exercise; participants also have the opportunity of adding and/or removing any of the factors. At the end of the second interview, having discussed if there were any academic subjects in which they thought they might change their attitude and approach, students chose a subject – and gave consent for the relevant teacher to be interviewed at the end of the research period.

The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed using NVivo computer software. The data was coded into themes using concepts derived through several iterative cycles, allowing the data to be analysed both longitudinally in reference to participants’ narratives of change, and laterally to identify patterns between participants at the different stages of interview.

3.4.2 Teacher interviews

The original intention was, in the case of each participant, to interview both their personal tutor and a subject teacher of their choice at the time of their third interview. The subject teacher would provide detailed knowledge of the student’s progress in that field and the personal tutor would provide a general overview of the student's attitude and behaviour throughout the research period. Unfortunately, in the school selected for the pilot study, students changed their personal tutor during this period, so it was decided to omit the personal tutor interviews. Subject teacher interviews took place at the end of the research period, around the time of the students’ third interviews. These focussed on any change in the students’ attitude to education and any change in their performance, and provided a broader perspective on their performance, increasing the reliability of the study.

3.4.3 Ethnographic notes

During the two-day leadership course, the researcher (Rupert Higham) participated as a facilitator alongside selected school staff and trainers from the University of the First Age, having first attended a one-day facilitators' training course. In addition, Rupert observed the training sessions and took notes. The aim of this was to describe events selected for their relevance to the research - whilst trying not to judge or interpret them. Although even the selection of events to describe will inevitably reflect some level of interpretation, this approach is designed to allow the greater part of the interpretation to happen at a later stage, in the light of a broader reading of all the data (Angrosino, 2008 p.38). The approach behind this ethnographic data is to observe the interface and conflict between the demands and expectations of the students' everyday school lives (as reflected in their behaviour and responses during the course) and those of the course trainers. In this sense, it looks to portray not a culture as such, but a dialogue between cultures - in line with the theory of the pedagogy of challenge outlined above.

3.5 Data analysis

The interview data was coded using a mixture of categories that came from the research questions and interesting new categories that emerged from the students. The data was coded both sequentially by question, allowing answers to related questions across the three interviews to be compared, and also thematically across data from all of the interviews, using concepts derived through several iterative cycles. Data from teacher interviews was analysed thematically only. Other methods of analysing interviews may include word frequency analysis and comparative analysis. The forms of evidence other than interviews, which are less abundant and detailed, will be used to throw light upon that arising from the interview data.

3.6 Interview analysis

The approach to analysis of the interview data is not to attempt to approach it without preconception and allow categories to emerge – as is generally the case with grounded theory. Rather, a dialogic approach will be used in which the study will attempt to let the narratives of the participants be heard, then identify themes within and across these accounts, and finally interpret them from the perspective of a pedagogy of challenge. The advantage of this approach is that it affords the researcher the opportunity to be confronted with unexpected ideas and associations, and to adjust interpretations accordingly – rather than looking to the data for confirmation of the theory. NVivo computer software enables this analysis of the interview data from multiple perspectives.

3.7 Research questions

In the light of this design, the research questions to be answered are as follows:

Main question:

What influence does the experience of the University of the First Age's leadership course have on 5 teenage students' dispositions for learning?

Sub-questions:

1. In what ways are the students challenged on the University of the First Age's leadership course?
2. How do students' dispositions for learning change as a response to their experiences on the leadership course?
3. What are the teachers' and tutors' perceptions of their students' dispositions for learning in the period following the course?
4. Does the leadership course influence the students' academic performance?

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

The analysis below looks for changes in students' dispositions over time; as mentioned above, any such evidence must be weighed against the importance of background factors. The following background information may be relevant to interpreting the data:

- The school under study is a multi-ethnic inner-city secondary (94% of students from ethnic minorities) in the West Midlands with a high proportion of students on free school meals. Having previously dipped in performance, the school has improved significantly over recent years, establishing a good reputation. The school appeared to be a largely harmonious environment with motivated staff and well-mannered students, albeit facing challenges.
- The students picked for the course were high achievers; the five Year 9 students selected for interview had already been involved on a year-long programme of leadership training within the school – not nearly as intensive as the course, but which had nonetheless given them opportunities to consider and practice leadership within the school and community. The 60 or so participants on the course were being invested in by the school to assume greater responsibility, both formally and informally.
- Three of the five participants cited PE as a subject in which they would be willing to have their teacher interviewed about their progress. The PE department at the school has a distinct leadership focus.
- The school took on a new Headteacher at the start of the academic year, between the second and third interviews; several participants noted a distinctly stricter approach in the school, with new priorities and rules.
- The time of the third interviews coincided with an examination period for the Year 10 interviewees; several said that these had altered their priorities, and those of the school.
- Due to deadline restrictions, this project spanned the gap between the summer and autumn terms; the initially envisaged two-month gap between the second and third interviews was expanded to nearly four to accommodate the summer holidays. This had several unintended consequences: both subject teachers and personal tutors changed for all students, making it difficult for staff to provide a balancing perspective on students' perceived change. In addition, four months is a long time for 13-14-year-olds; they are undergoing rapid personal, physical and emotional development, which must be considered alongside the effects of the course in analysing the final interviews.

Note on terminology: interviewees' quotations are titled anonymised as students A-E, with 'int. x' denoting the first (pre-course), second (5 days post-course) or third interview (4 months later). Quotations prefixed "I:" denotes the researcher's comments. Words in square brackets denote interjections from the other speaker.

4.2 In what ways are the students challenged on the leadership course?

Rather than provide an inventory and description of the activities on the University of the First Age’s leadership course, this section uses the participants’ stories, largely from the interviews directly after the courses, alongside the researcher’s ethnographic notes to highlight those aspects which were most memorable and important to them.

4.2.1 “Outside your Comfort Zone”

At the start, the course facilitator asked all participants to spend as much time as they dared outside their ‘comfort zone’ – they were told that this raises the adrenaline and the level of challenge, leading to ‘powerful’ learning. This was a frequently repeated, central metaphor for the course – and one which was widely appropriated by the interviewees in both the second and third interviews:

Mmhmm, because before... I think most... since that two day course I think all of us have actually come out of our comfort zone. Every single one of us, we talk to each other more now. I’ve talked to people I don’t even know before, so I think that was a really good thing about the course.	Student E, int.2
I’d probably say it’s kinda stuck there, become more real. Mainly the ‘out of your comfort zone’ thing that become the main part.	Student C, int.3

While all the students recognised this as a good thing after the event, one noted that it had often been challenging, even scary, at the time:

Yeah. I came out of my comfort zone and it did feel kind of weird. Like not going with [student] and [student], it’s like, separated from the group, getting on with what we needed to do.	Student A, int.2
The activities, like... when we were told to do the activity I’m not used to someone telling me to do this – I felt really like, scared... I didn’t know how other people would react to it.	

Student A suggests that the different nature of the activities from what they usually do in the classroom was in itself disconcerting; it made her self-conscious because she did not know what to expect, calling on her to respond differently, deliberately. Being asked to work with people outside her friendship group had a similar effect. Two ways in which the students felt challenged to leave their ‘comfort zone’ by activities and discourses on the course are explored further below.

4.2.2 Working outside year and friendship groups

We learned now to communicate with people we don’t know. Before we would just look at a person but we don’t really go to him. But now it’s easier to break the line and go to him.	Student D, int.3
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During the course, some sessions were whole group (around 60), and some in breakout groups of

around 15 participants. Most sessions contained several activities, including short ‘ice-breakers’, which called for the participants to form different groups; an example of one designed to break down barriers between students was asking them to organise themselves in a line chronologically by birthday – without speaking – which caused a flurry of animated gesticulation. At the start and throughout, the course leader encouraged them to take the initiative themselves to form groups with people of different ages, ethnicities and backgrounds; when asked as a whole group to come up with ‘house rules’, several related to showing respect for others regardless of ethnicity or religious difference. The course leader also asked them to keep working with different people in each activity. There was some initial reluctance – some of the 6th form boys and some younger girls preferred at first to stay in friendship groups, or split as pairs or threes – but after a few activities the groups became heterogeneous. All interviewees cited this demand as a valuable experience – for several, the most valuable – that they gained from the course, even if it was challenging for some at first. A frequently mentioned aspect of this was working with older students:

<p>I: How did you find working with people who weren't your own age? C: I think that was quite good as well, because the variety of age, they sort of like, had different understandings of the things you had, and you could like, take those understandings and apply them to your understanding. With two different understandings you can find a mutual understanding of something, or if it's just like, you didn't know what it was you could, ask - they'd tell you and they'd help you sort of... improve. Like kind of an improved learning... environment</p>	<p>Student C, int.2</p>
<p>When all of us had to mix up with different genders from a different year, and we were like, is there going to be friends, and learning to talk with older kids or even years below us, like – all of us mixing together, people I don't really know, and sometimes I don't know what to say to them because I don't know what their reaction is going to be towards me saying something towards them, so... when I say something to them, they quite respond to me quite good so I came out of my comfort zone and said, ‘actually, this is not that bad’.</p>	<p>Student A, int.2</p>

Here Student B mirrors Student A’s reflection above that working with people she did not know exposed her to the possibility of unforeseen responses; she is used to working with the same students in predictable classroom scenarios, which can lead to predictable, codified social relations and interactions (Biesta, 2006, p.68). Student C describes an ‘improved learning... environment’ in which new perspectives can enrich his own and help him ‘improve’. This sense of vulnerability and fear of ridicule, followed by excitement, satisfaction and a sense of a space of growth, is the process of interruptive pedagogy at work (see 2.3 above): the students recognised themselves moving out of their comfort zone in order to communicate meaningfully with people they did not know – at the risk of appearing foolish. The *action* of entering into open dialogues with new people and realising that they *could* learn from them, rather than the content of those discussions *per se*, was an empowering experience which engendered trust and confidence. It is precisely this kind of learning experience that the challenge model of pedagogy captures, and the accretional model does not.

4.2.3 Tough questioning and being critical

An activity regarded as memorable by several students was one in which they were first asked to bid for £250 for a community activity in groups of 5-6. They were then asked to switch roles and act as a board choosing between different bids, and to give feedback to an unsuccessful bidding group, acted

by 1 or 2 facilitators. Two students refer to this as a key moment on the course:

<p>When we had to do the bid [oh yeah?]. And like, we were sitting there... and I wanted to say something but I couldn't – no words were able to come out until they were like saying that he hadn't got the bid. And I thought, 'Oh God, they're going to start... start moaning or something'. And I thought, 'Oh God, I can't do this'.</p>	<p>Student A, int.2</p>
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Even though this was a role play, this student felt genuine apprehension at the thought of giving critical feedback, and froze; this may have been exacerbated by the thought of any form confrontation with adults, even in role. In a discussion of the activity afterwards, the facilitators said that they did not feel they had received a straight answer from the students, nor received useful feedback on their bids, and that they had felt that some comments were hostile in tone. Some students said that they had found the activity genuinely uncomfortable, not wanting to disappoint the bidders and thereby skirting around the issue – and even attacking the bid in an attempt to justify the rejection before it was given.

<p>I: Are there any other moments from that course that stand out for you? C: I'd probably say choosing and making the decision of the.... the bids for grant money. ... I: ... What was the lesson you got from it? C: It was more like helping you to make fair decisions, and if you like, disappoint someone, how to feel that... I think it sort of simulated, like a real-life situation, it seemed like something that would happen in the real world, because in the real world you have to make decisions, and most of the time decisions benefit one party, but disappoint other, more parties, like, than they help. So you'd have to... explain to them why and how, and give them improvements and things like that.</p>	<p>Student C, int.2</p>
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Despite the challenging nature of the activity, Student C reflects positively on it, recognising that both the 'real-life' element and the requirement of trying to gauge others' thoughts, reactions and feelings were valuable to him. Even though this was a simulation, he recognises that this was a tricky ethical situation that called for insight, tact and judgement – and as such he identified the use of practicing such responses in preparation for real-life situations outside school. This short exercise may or may not in itself prepared him better to give critical feedback; he nonetheless demonstrates and awareness of the learning potential of such situations. In terms of Perkins' definition of dispositions for learning, he appears at least to be better prepared to identify relevant learning opportunities in future and willing to apply his experience (Perkins and Tishman, 2001). While this pilot project cannot demonstrate a firm link between such developments in dispositions for learning and academic improvement, the students' comments here are suggestive – further research is needed to test this on a larger scale.

4.3 How do students' dispositions for learning change?

This section looks at how the students' dispositions for learning change as a response to their experiences on the leadership course. It focuses upon change across time, comparing individual students' comments between the three interviews and looking for evidence of students' changes in understanding, approach and action as a result of their participation on the course. Particular

attention will be paid to whether changes students demonstrate straight after the course are still evident four months later.

The particular dispositions discussed below emerged through cross-referencing the interview data for recurrent themes on the one hand, and assessing relevance to the leadership course’s themes and activities on the other. Although the researcher’s theoretical perspective must inevitably influence these choices, a genuine attempt was made to reflect the students’ understandings rather than work towards a predetermined list of dispositions.

It is worth restating that all five interviewees were, at the time of the first, pre-course interview, outstanding students who had demonstrated qualities we would associate with good leadership. The focus of the interviews was therefore on asking them to describe where and how they thought the course had helped develop their skills and performance.

4.3.1 Confidence

All the students talked about having grown in confidence as a result of the course, and about how that increased confidence had had a demonstrable impact over the subsequent months – either in their academic work, or in their wider lives, or often both. For many, this was the most valuable lesson they felt they had learned.

Student B suggests in the first interview that she needs others to draw her out to improve her learning, but lacks confidence take the initiative:

<p>I: ...when do you think you learn best? B: When people ask me questions. I: ... What do you think that does for you, being in conversation with someone or having people ask you questions? B: It helps me to speak out louder in class. I: Is it because normally you wouldn’t speak? B: I’ll just get on with my work by myself.</p>	<p>Student B, int.1</p>
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By the second interview, she demonstrates a new willingness to show initiative and belief in herself:

<p>I: What was your impression of the course over the last couple of days? B: It think it was fun working with people I had never talked to before, and it gave me more confidence to speak out loud. I: Do you think you will act differently in the school community as a result of the course? B: Yeah – I think I’ll speak more and talk to people I don’t usually talk to. I: And why will you do that? B: Because I’m gonna be confident and meet new people.</p>	<p>Student B, int.2</p>
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This determination seems to have borne results by the time of the third interview:

<p>I: How would you say that your approach has changed or your understanding has</p>	<p>Student B, int.3</p>
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<p>changed? B: Cause like, now I put my hand up in class. I: Right, and why didn't you do that before? B: I don't think I was that confident. I: OK, and what difference has it made, asking questions in class? B: It makes me feel open. I: That's interesting – can you explain that a little more? B: Like... I've got control over myself.</p>	
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This sequence of quotations suggests that not only has Student B determined to be more confident, and through doing so helped bring about the sort of classroom dialogue which she believes will help her learn, but that she also has a greater sense of her own agency: she has 'control over herself'. It Not only has she grown in confidence, but she recognises that she has done so.

In the case of Student A, who stated that she felt confident before the course started, there is still evidence of a shift in attitude from what seems to be a defensive assertion of her right to be heard towards more open and tolerant self-expression. In the first interview she talks about telling another student how much they can contribute towards a group project – as long as 'you're not changing any basic level'. This fear of her opinions being challenged was confronted on the course (as shown in 4.2.1 above), but in both the second and third interview she suggests a more respectful and open stance towards others: 'the course has made me listen to people, and like, understand what they're going through'.

For all the students, the challenging experiences of the course have been remembered as watershed – marking a shift from more cautious, defensive habits towards open, confident engagement with others.

4.3.2 Valuing peers as partners in learning

All five students rated 'other students and friends' as more important in either the second or third interview than in the first. In no cases did it drop in perceived importance in the third interview. This, supported by the examples below, suggests that students took on board a central theme of the course: respecting colleagues and working in partnership to achieve shared goals.

For example, Student D cites other students as a motivating factor in a competitive sense:

<p>So, good lessons, like, motivate you, and friends and students, they also, like, you see your best friend is doing badly in P.E., and he's helping you, or even not, you try to be on, like, his level or even higher – that motivates you.... If you're the lowest of the class you know you have to keep up with them, and you try harder and harder. That way you do your job properly.</p>	<p>Student D, int.1</p>
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By the third interview, this perspective appears to have changed:

<p>I think I would put 'trips' back a bit, and 'other students' up – because we talk to them and we motivate each other. So friends are really important, even if you're not quite doing well they still can help you or talk to you or cheer you up if you don't feel good.</p>	<p>Student D, int.3</p>
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And I think if you feel better because you've been cheered up by friends you've got really more motivated and do the work more.	
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While he remains focused on academic achievement as his key priority, Student D's shift in language to referring to other students in the second person, including them as colleagues in a shared project of doing well in class, suggests that he now sees them as having intrinsic value – rather than seeing them principally as markers against which to judge his own progress. Communication and cooperation are also important to him:

I'm not now afraid if someone asks a question and I don't know. Before, for example, I couldn't ask someone to do something for me if I didn't know that person. Now I just ask them politely and see if they do or not, and I'm not really afraid if they say no, because I can ask other people as well.	Student D, int.3
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As with Student A above, this quotation also suggests a new-found confidence: moving from a defensive, cautious stance towards recognising peers' value and a willingness to engage with and learn from them for mutual benefit. In the same pragmatic spirit, Student D also recognises the wider potential benefits of learning to work with others:

The part where we had to go out of our comfort zone – we could be with friends, but that was not the point of the activity, to be with friends. Just go to people you don't know and try to work with them. And even if you get a job you have to work with people you don't know – even people you don't like – but in a job you have to do it, you've got no choice whatever.	Student D, int.3
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There is a comparable shift in perspective from Student E, who in the first interview represents her learning as standing in isolation from other students, of whom she says: "I can't share my education with you, you can't share yours with me". As with Student D, she gives the impression of an environment in which cooperation is of limited use, and may even be a sign of weakness.

After the course, however, Student E suggests a more cooperative approach: 'sometimes I'm trying to figure it out on my own, but my as a group my friends are always there... to help each other'. Pragmatically, both these students also state in the final interview that they have come to see their friends as a potential source of distraction as well as help in class, and that they have chosen not to sit next to them, instead spending time together outside lessons – a choice which both say has improved their concentration.

Both these students' statements suggest that their experiences during and since the course have left them feeling empowered in the classroom, distinguishing between genuine collaboration and distraction.

4.3.3 Learning from multiple perspectives

Another point of agreement among all students interviewed was that during the course they had come to appreciate the value of a range of points of view – especially from people outside their normal friendship groups – in forming their own opinions and making joint decisions. This reflects a

central theme of the leadership course, which encouraged the formation of diverse groups for all joint activities and reiterated the importance of allowing all voices in those groups to be heard.

Student A, when about bringing in outside perspectives to her learning in the first interview, answers:

I can understand that whatever you learn in the classroom, there's always somebody with a different information – that's the same information, but in different views.	Student A, int.1
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There is a formal acceptance of the importance of outside perspectives here, but it lacks authority; as shown above, she is wary of taking other people's ideas on board in case they challenge her own. In the second interview, however, her belief in the importance of others' perspectives is firmly grounded in experience:

I've started listening to people, taking their opinions down, feeding back, with lots of people, and really just trying to get myself in to groups where I can say my word and what the school needs, and how we're going to change it.	Student A, int.2
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And while the positivity - even zealotry – of this statement directly after the course is tempered a little by the time of the third interview, four months of accepting others' perspectives seems to have been something of a humbling experience:

<p>A: Because when we're doing teamwork it's easier to talk to them rather than sitting back and not talking to anybody.</p> <p>I: So you can learn from their opinions and perspectives?</p> <p>A: Definitely – their views.</p> <p>I: And before you didn't really think that?</p> <p>A: No.</p> <p>I: What did you think before?</p> <p>A: My opinions rule everybody's opinions!</p> <p>I think it was the course that helped me a bit - instead of pushing for the front, pushing from the back. And... being a bit more open to people.</p>	Student A, int.3
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There is evidence here not only of her awareness of the importance of taking on other ideas, but of a growing maturity and recognition of personal development as a result of applying the learning from the course over the subsequent months.

By contrast, Student B admits in the first interview that she often lacks the confidence to initiate and participate in discussion, even though she knows it helps her to learn. Furthermore, when asked how she intends to improve her performance in Maths, which she struggles to understand, her response is to pledge to 'do more work at home' – even though hers is an issue of more of comprehension than of application. Her comments in the second and third interviews, however suggest a more active approach to seeking others' views: "I think I learn better in a group of people, because you give ideas, and you can like, combine ideas and get a new idea." Gaining the confidence through the course to ask for others' perspectives has allowed her to find new ways to overcome difficulties in her work as they arise, rather than always wrestling with them alone.

Student D states in the first interview that he believes that learning in the classroom is a partnership between the teacher and the individual student; His third interview, however, suggests a change of emphasis:

<p>D: I think I've acted a bit differently because before I would stick with a few friends and just hang around with them - but now I just go and talk to different people I never knew...</p> <p>I: And do you feel that you've gained from that? To speak with a wider group of people?</p> <p>D: Yes, because you can share ideas, knowledge... and you can get different interests... difference motivates you, so...</p> <p>I: OK that's interesting. So the very fact that people think differently, act differently or believe differently, that itself makes you interested?</p> <p>D: Yes. Every human is not the same. Everyone's got different points of view. I like to see everyone's points of view and then make a judgement.</p>	<p>Student D, int.3</p>
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Here he describes actively seeking others' opinions – not just to benefit his own work but also for his own interest and development. The idea of listening to other ideas so he can 'make a judgement' suggests a higher order of learning than getting help understanding the question from someone else, or sharing right answers. Instead, he now finds the contrast of others' different views against his own to be intrinsically motivating; he has come to appreciate a pedagogy of challenge as one that will contribute to his overall development of character rather than looking only to build on his subject-based knowledge.

Together, these comments suggest that the students on this course have learned to seek out and make use of a range of perspectives both their academic and personal development; furthermore, through this process they have developed, in line with the ethos of the leadership course, a more consistent ethical stance in favour of diversity and open communication.

<p>I'd also like to say that I really enjoyed the course, because it gave me a clearer idea in my mind as to how working with different people, different cultures, different races – it really helped me to see... we could work with different people no matter what colour they are because we are all equal.</p>	<p>Student E, int.2</p>
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4.3.4 Listening skills

The leadership course focused explicitly on the skills of listening to others, trying to understand others' perspectives and encouraging others to share and follow through with their ideas – which, it was argued, enable a team to get the most out of its members. In the second interviews, students demonstrated having taken on this message; in the third interviews, however, it is reflected less strongly.

On several occasions, course participants were asked to discuss plans and presentations, and to come to decisions, as equals in their groups. Student C demonstrates below how he saw these practical opportunities as developing his personal skills:

<p>C: Because like, in our group, there was quite a lot of debating and arguing over the</p>	<p>Student C, int.2</p>
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<p>ideas and which bid to go for and things like that. And I was more like saying, ‘what if we do this, and add his ideas to this, and mix them together - then you’d get a better idea out of both’. And I was like, support, really.</p> <p>I: And can you think how, before the course, how might have you been differently in that situation?</p> <p>C: Before the course I probably would have just added my idea to the argument, and then people would have stood their ground – and it might have got out of control.</p> <p>I: So the simulation of what might happen in real life was useful for you [yeah]. And what did you take from that simulation? What was the learning, do you think?</p> <p>C: Kind of like, see it from their point of how you’d feel, and then explain your reasons and apply it with them, sort of like empathy - be empathetic.</p>	
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The language here reflects his personal engagement with others and a new-found sensitivity to their thoughts and feelings; he also suggests that he believes these skills will be useful to him in real-life situations. In his third interview, however, he focuses on what he has learned about himself and his plans for the future, making little mention of other students. This tendency to talk less about listening and empathising in the third interview was pronounced among all the students, with the exception of Student A, as demonstrated in section 4.3.3 above. It may be that Student C’s discernment of opportunities to develop these skills on the course did not transfer strongly into subsequent classroom experience; it may also be that a return to a regular classroom routine had not provided him with such clear and memorable opportunities as arose on the course; or, as Student E’s comments below suggest, they may not see those skills as directly relevant to their immediate academic objectives.

<p>I: OK. You were talking earlier on about how you feel you can learn a lot more from different people from different backgrounds and cultures [yeah]. Does that affect the way that you learn at all...?</p> <p>E: No, not to do with my learning, not really. Because it’s not really to do with my learning, but I would like to know more about different cultures and that, yeah.</p>	Student E, int.3
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Here she suggests that there is much to learn from listening, but as a personal interest outside formal learning. It is nonetheless something she has come to regard as important since the course:

<p>Before I never used to realise how making ... like how we had to get into groups and stuff like that, I’ve learned to spend time with lots of different people now I’ve become a young leader. People come to me and ask me things and that makes me feel a bit more... better in myself. People will come to me and ask me something about giving them... a long response, yeah.</p>	Student E, int.3
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Student E here portrays herself as better prepared to adopt a role of responsibility as a result of the course; she sees herself as someone who knows how to listen, who gives the impression of being sympathetic, encouraging others to confide in her, and who can respond sensitively. This, for her, is as a friend and mentor rather than as a co-learner in the classroom. Taken together the students interviewed seem to have recognised the utility of these skills in completing the challenges set during the course, and have expressed a feeling of excitement through having done so; however, the final interviews suggest that they have not retained a sense of these skills as vital to their academic

learning, but rather as having contributed more broadly to their personal development and wider roles outside the classroom.

4.3.5 Impact beyond the classroom

Another central message of the leadership course was that leadership skills should be applied in different areas of life: home, school and community. In the previous section it was argued that some students felt that they could not easily apply all the skills they learned through the course within the classroom context; all, however, attest to some change in their personal and social lives outside of the classroom as a result of the course.

For Student A, the greatest change is in her personal life:

<p>I: How would you sum up what leadership means to you now? A: Erm... I think it's like helping others, not just to help yourself. I: And do you think that will make any difference on your life outside school? A: Yeah 'cause, now since the last 2 courses, from Monday night, I came in the house and ran straight upstairs and sat in my room, thinking about the activities and my mum thought something was wrong with me. I went, 'naa, I'm just thinking to myself'. On like, the Tuesday, talked to mum, showed her my certificate, and told her what I'd been doing over the last couple of days, and she said, 'that's why you were so quiet'. Even my uncle, I went up to my uncle's house on Monday, and like as well he said, 'I've seen a completely different change from you, Alexis'.</p>	<p>Student A, int.2</p>
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Here she suggests that she has transferred lessons learned on the course significantly into her family relations; this change in approach seems to have had an impact over the subsequent months:

<p>I: So how have you been differently with your family and home life since the course? A: Talked to them a bit more, started going out with them rather than just staying at home and ignoring them.</p>	<p>Student A, int.3</p>
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All four other students, in their final interviews, talk about having joined more after-school and outside-school clubs in the months after the course. Two of these said they were now in a club at least 5 nights a week.

While Student B says she thinks her increased club attendance might be coincidental to going on the course, she nonetheless cites increased confidence in talking to people as her key lesson from it; a point also made by Student C just before the following comments:

<p>I: OK - so it's talking to different people in different contexts [mmm] and gaining stuff from that, learning stuff from that. C: Yeah, cause before I only went to one club every two weeks - and now I go to about five. I: Wow! What would you say that you get from all of that? C: Just, like, different experiences, different people, just... a variety of lifestyle.</p>	<p>Student C, int.3</p>
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At a period of life where young people are prone to rapid social and personal development, the course may not have been the direct cause all of this increased extra-curricular activity; nonetheless, the extent of its growth over the research period is remarkable. These comments reflect a desire for wider life experience in addition to academic learning – one which the breadth of activities and interactions on the course seems to have stimulated.

4.3.6 Accountability / responsibility

A theme reiterated throughout the course was that of taking responsibility for one’s actions. Several students responded to this directly in their second interviews, but by the third interview none took up the theme directly.

The course’s emphasis on responsibility was reinforced in several ways: for example, participants and facilitators alike were asked to let the students run activities with minimum intervention from adults such as chairing discussions and setting their own rules. In addition, participants were invited to think about how they might be held accountable for their performance in course activities, their academic work and in their roles within the school.

Student B reflects this theme when asked about what she finds challenging in school:

<p>I: ... I was wondering if you’d had any new thoughts about what the challenges are now? B: Needing to keep a good reputation. I: Is that something you’ve thought about more, something that’s come out of the course [yeah]. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you understand by what’s the importance of keeping a good reputation? B: Like if I do something wrong I can own up to it - I can take responsibility.</p>	<p>Student B, int.2</p>
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Although her comments are characteristically brief, they suggest significant personal reflection on her role within the school and self-understanding as a result of the course. Student C also reflects on his school role:

<p>... the training, it helps you with your skills and meeting new people and things like that. So if there’s a new student and you see them and they look kind of lonely or lost, it would be easier to go up to them and talk to them. And is that because you would want to do that, or is that because it’s kind of your role or job? I think it’s kind of both in a way. But more, like, want to do it. More because you’d want to. And so what have made you not do it before? I’d probably say, like, because I was sort of shy before.</p>	<p>Student C, int.2</p>
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Both talk of their standing among other students and a desire to act as a role model. These ideas, however, are largely absent from the final interviews with all the students; across the third interviews, there is a shift in language away from school roles and group activity towards personal lessons learned through the course and how these may enhance their school learning and personal lives. A possible explanation is that the students have not recognised themselves as having been given sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for matters wider than their personal learning since the

course, and that this lesson has been lost; further evidence for this is discussed further in the next section.

4.3.7 Response to pressure of examinations

When asked by the researcher what most motivated them in their learning, all students put ‘good grades’ as either their first or second most important factor in all three interviews; in addition, every student, when asked in the first interview what they thought was the purpose of school, replied that getting good grades was the key factor alongside helping shape their future career. The desire and perceived need to do well in exams is evident throughout the rest of the first interviews:

Most challenging thing about school life is probably doing exams, and kind of being a part in it because that just... the main thing in school: exams. You learn and then you do your exams. You learn and then you do your exams.	Student E, int.1
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Yes, because what I’m at now, I’m just collecting everything I need now to get me into Year 10, to get me into Year 11, to get me into college and get myself to university. That’s all I’m into right about right now.	Student A, int.1
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None of the second interviews, by contrast, mentioned exams; this may well be due to the recent vivid of the experience of the course on the one hand, and by the timing: the penultimate week of the school year on the other, in which Year 9 students had neither had recent exams, nor did they have any coming up soon. Students in these interviews talk far more about the importance of working as a team and of learning from others’ perspectives. However, as noted above, the third interviews took place when these students were preparing for, or had just had, GCSE exams. Student D, when asked what he had done in the school community as a result of the leadership training since the course, replied:

I think we didn’t do quite much as we have to prepare for our GCSE tests, which were quite hard... we didn’t really have time to do that much – but I think we organised – never did it, but we planned – the leadership workshop for Year 7 who just came. And a fundraising organisation for – I think it was called Tsunami, something like that.	Student D, int.3
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Student B suggests a similar pressure of time:

I: Has it changed the young leaders programme, or anything like that? B: Yeah, because now we’ve got exams we don’t have much time for that. I: How do the exams change things? B: More time revising.	Student B, int.3
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Both these statements suggest that participants on the course had been able to do less than they would have liked within the school community subsequently. In addition, there is evidence that in class time students were unable to use the cooperative, communicative approaches to learning they developed on the course. Student D’s science teacher, when asked how well he was communicating

with others in lessons, admitted that the syllabus content of the triple-science course he was undertaking placed such demands on the students' time that opportunities for cooperative activities were very limited. This is reinforced by Student E's observation when asked about applying her leadership skills in the classroom:

I communicate with everyone, but because this year has become harder because we're doing GCSEs, I try to concentrate as much as I can instead of talking and that...	Student E, int.3
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However, Student B's comments suggest that she has applied her experience on the course to approach the exams more positively. Having said in the first interview that exams were the most challenging aspect of school, and that she was afraid of letting herself down in them, she says in the third that she was feeling 'prepared' and 'confident'; a view reflected also by Student D...

While the students are prepared to accept the examinations both as a challenge to be met positively and an opportunity to secure distinction for themselves, they recognise that they require of them a substantially different approach from the one they took on the course. Given the high stakes involved, there is a clear shift between the second and third interviews from cooperative, community-focused activity towards individual, examination-focused activity.

4.3.8 Summary

Taken together, the evidence presented in this section demonstrates significant development in students' dispositions for learning as a result of the leadership course. Not only is there evidence of improved skills in communication, of learning to respect and value others' opinions and contributions to shared activity, and of increased participation in school and community life, but there is also a strong sense of increased self-knowledge, and of lessons learned having been reinforced through subsequent experience. There is even evidence of significant personal and moral development as a result of experiences on and following the course. These are the main foci of professional leadership development programmes; they are also essential elements in building 'character' in young people, preparing them to face future challenges intelligently, ethically and with confidence.

4.4 What are the teachers' and tutors' perceptions?

Due to the practical difficulties outlined in section 4.1 relating to the change of year between the second and third interviews the researcher was unable to interview students' tutors, and some of the teachers in the subjects nominated by students had only been teaching them for a few weeks this year, and never before the course. This makes it impossible to provide a substantial answer to the question, "What are the teachers and tutors' perceptions of their students' dispositions for learning in the period following the course?" Instead, the evidence gained from teacher interviews has been used where relevant in the previous section to broaden the perspective on students' comments.

4.5 Does the leadership course influence the students' academic performance?

The nature of the data in this pilot study does not allow a causal link to be drawn between the students' learning from the leadership course and their academic performance; this would only be possible over a longer period with access to performance data, and with a much larger cohort of students. However, there is strong anecdotal evidence within the data to suggest that students feel that their academic work has improved as a result of their experiences on the course. All five students said that the course had made a difference to their academic performance; three cited specific subjects in which they felt they had improved, while two cited skills and habits they have learned which allow them to work better across the board.

The clearest example of perceived progress in a difficult subject comes from Student C, who in the first interview relates that the effort he makes in English leads only to frustration:

<p>I: OK what about English, then? What is it about English that's tricky for you? C: Wording, like, how you word things, 'cause that's quite important. 'Cause if you don't word it right, you might give the wrong impression and come across wrong, and then that can lose you marks and grades and things like that. So it's not really that it's difficult, it's more the wording on how to answer things. I: Right. Is that because... there isn't a clear answer, as it were? C: No - there's a clear answer - it's just I can't find how to put it. I: It doesn't come naturally [yeah]. Does it seem a bit awkward? C: Yeah, 'cause I put a word down and read the sentence back and it doesn't feel like I was to get what I was saying - so I change the words... but that still doesn't feel right.</p>	<p>Student C, int.2</p>
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Student C, who as earlier shown gains satisfaction from solving puzzles and finding the 'right' answer, seems to struggle in a subject in which clarity of argument, rather than finding the correct solution, is required. After the course, he acknowledges the value of sharing perspectives as potentially beneficial to him in this regard:

<p>I think the fact that you're doing the tasks with other people, I think that's going to help slightly in English, because in English when you do literature and things like that you have to know different points of view, take them into consideration and things like that if you have a debate or a report or things like that. You need to take how other people see something... during the tasks, you had lots of different opinions, lots of different views, and you had to understand those to complete the task and collaborate with one idea. And I think the course would help me with that.</p>	<p>Student C, int.2</p>
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When asked in the third interview whether his change of perspective regarding English had led to any lasting change of approach, he replied:

<p>C: Yeah, probably in English I've been trying harder to understand, like, different terms and how to put them into essays.... I: Do you think it's led to any improvement in your performance? C: Yeah. Before I struggled to write a paragraph, but now it just flows out... I'm struggling to fit it into a paragraph. I: Wow, that's very different, isn't it [yeah]? ... And do you think that's because you made the decision to try to improve?</p>	<p>Student C, int.3</p>
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C: Yeah, probably.	
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This final extract suggests a significant, liberating sense of progress – but it does not link neatly with Student C’s new-found appreciation of multiple perspectives and teamwork in interview 2. However, when the medium of assessment is essay-writing such collaboration is more difficult, even forbidden. Nonetheless, he demonstrates having deliberately attempted to improve his English, and having found a way which uses his facility to solve problems – using the ‘tools’ of technical terminology to provide a productive new perspective on the material. In addition, it suggests increased resilience and innovation in the face of challenge; in the first interview he stated that he did not think he could further improve his academic performance, even in the subjects like English where he was struggling.

Student A took a more direct approach to improving her attitude in PE and Maths, in which she said she struggled in the first interview, following the course:

Yeah, like PE and maths now... I was sitting down with my teacher this morning in form time, and I asked them to explain to me, what is maths about? So I think I’ve took a liking to maths now since that talk this morning because, it’s not just numbers that you’re learning about, it’s other stuff as well. And with PE, in trampolining as well in first period, Miss told me yeah, that if you like a subject it’s like what you like actually <i>inside</i> the subject - that you can’t just say that you <i>hate</i> PE It’s like, you have to give an individual answer to what you dislike about it. But now, the subjects like, tap into the stuff in PE that I do love, so I can’t say that I dislike PE altogether.	Student A, int.2
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Here Student A has adopted the ‘challenge’ approach of the course, seeking to understand and change her own negative opinion of these subjects through dialogue with her teachers so as to gain new motivation and interest. This is borne out in the third interview:

I: Has your approach to P.E. changed, or has it stayed the same? A: It’s different because there’s all different areas to it. I: So are you saying you’ve come to see it differently [yeah]? Can you explain a bit more? A: Right, you don’t just go... put your P.E. kit on and go do a sport outside – you can do different areas... and that it’s easier to understand when you’re doing the practical than just the teacher talking to you. I: OK – so you’ve come to appreciate the mixture of the practical stuff and the theory stuff? A: Yeah.	Student A, int.3
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Her openness to the different activities within PE has persisted, and her attitude has changed. In English and maths she suggests that it is her new-found confidence in working with groups that has helped her to improve her attitude:

I: So, can you think of any changes in approach to any of your other subjects after the course, or is it largely the same? A: Basically, my English and my Maths – I think I listen to my teachers more than I used to instead of doodling on a piece of paper.... I: OK – so you feel like you can concentrate more [yeah]. Why do you think you can concentrate more now?	Student A, int.3
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<p>A: Because I've, like... done it and seen it and I've practiced it over the couple of terms we've had.</p> <p>I: When you say you've done it and practiced it, what... is this the lessons you've learned from the course [yeah]? So what have you done and practiced that you learned from the course?</p> <p>A: In my groups, like, instead of sitting back and letting them talk about it I'd like, get in and start talking about the subject and what we're doing.</p>	
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Student A's move from relative isolation in the classroom to focused teamwork has helped her to remain on-task; she has also acknowledged the need to change and consciously practice new habits of learning. Similarly to Student C, this suggests both resilience and the ability to approach learning reflectively in order to improve performance. Both have learned to see the subject they find more difficult as a challenge to their approach to learning rather than as an impasse, and have found a new way forward on the basis of their strengths.

As well as progress in specific subjects, students talk about broader changes in approach and behaviour which have impacted on their academic performance. As shown in section 4.3.2 above, Students D and E feel they have improved through learning to separate themselves from their friends in the classroom and avoiding distraction. For Student D, he also found he was able to gain from the support and perspectives of students he had not previously known. Similarly, Student B suggests that her deliberate change of approach of looking to engage through questioning has made a significant impact on her performance:

<p>I: I think when we spoke before you said it helps when people ask you questions. So is that something that's happened more since the course?</p> <p>B: Yeah....</p> <p>I: ... Do you think that your marks are getting better or your work is improving?</p> <p>B: Yeah.</p> <p>I: OK. So do you think you might do better in your exams as a result or do you think it won't make such difference?</p> <p>B: I think I'll do better.</p>	<p>Student B, int.3</p>
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It is difficult for students to assess the perceived impact of the broad range of skills and dispositions developed through the course on themselves and their academic performance; the skills and working methods required of them in the classroom and examination hall are markedly different. Furthermore, the leadership course contains little or no information content which is of direct relevance to their academic studies. Indeed, two of the students interviewed were cautious about attesting to any direct change in approach to their studies in the light of their experiences on the course. However, when drawn upon to describe their experiences in the classroom in the second and third interviews, all revealed significant changes in attitude and approach to their studies which they acknowledged had brought about significant improvement. How significant this perceived improvement might prove in terms of higher grades in tests warrants further exploration.

5. Summary

5.1 Leadership in context

The worldwide market in leadership education has soared over the past decade. This private sector shift towards investing in leadership has been mirrored by the UK Government, which has taken a range of measures to raise the profile and capacity of senior management across the public sector, and particularly in education. This creates an opportunity to advocate leadership skills among young people in order to raise achievement, promote employability and develop practical citizenship.

5.2 A pedagogy of challenge

The theoretical framework underpinning this pilot study maintains that there are underlying dispositions for learning, such as resilience, open-mindedness and motivation, which are significant in preparing students for life beyond school, and at least as important as subject-specific ability in determining their academic performance. Furthermore, according to this theoretical framework, leadership education works by putting people in challenging situations that require them both to draw on their skills and experience and to find new approaches. Its value lies in the new understandings, attitudes and abilities gained in response to the challenge. As well as developing knowledge and skills, this can significantly alter young people's understanding of what they are capable of achieving.

Unlike much structured teaching focused on curriculum-subjects, this 'pedagogy of challenge' is well-suited to develop these dispositions for learning. This is not a new approach within school education; it has previously been associated with extra-curricular activities designed to build 'character' and develop the 'whole child'.

5.3 Research results: lasting impact and improved dispositions for learning

This pilot research study finds that the leadership course provides challenging activities which make a lasting positive impression on participants. They internalise concepts such as 'working outside your comfort zone' and apply them productively to situations they had found difficult before, both inside and outside the classroom.

Participants report sustained dispositional change including: increased confidence, using multiple perspectives to solve problems, improved communication skills, greater participation in wider school and community life, greater maturity and self-awareness, and a more positive attitude towards academic challenges such as exams. These self-reports from students are supported by examples from their own experiences over time.

Some aspects of leadership focused on during the course, such as taking responsibility and teamwork, are shown to be less 'embedded' in students than those above. These may be less compatible with their learning context in the run-up to major examinations.

Participants draw direct connections between what they learned on the course and their subsequent improvement in attitude and attainment in their academic studies. While this pilot cannot generalise on the basis of these anecdotal findings, there is strong evidence to suggest that a wider study could demonstrate such a connection.

6. Recommendations

This pilot study leads to the following recommendations for future research:

- (1) A thorough investigation of the impact of leadership training courses on the character development and academic performance of young people is required.
- (2) This extended project should be undertaken on a wider scale and over a longer period so as to provide generalisable findings that may influence the national debate over the provision of leadership education for teenagers.
- (3) It should consider the different categories of leadership education course so as to enable comparison between the affects of each type of course, including consideration of variables such as course length, age-range, selection process, and aims, methods and content.
- (4) It should also study a much larger number of students from similar schools and backgrounds who can be divided into 'experimental' and 'control' groups who have and have not completed leadership education courses.
- (5) It should draw upon qualitative data from the students to explore whether their perceptions of leadership and leadership education in relation to their dispositions for learning and academic achievement change over time.
- (6) It should also draw upon qualitative data from the students' personal tutors and subject teachers to provide a general overview of the students' attitudes to learning and community participation, and to provide detailed reflections on the student's dispositions for learning and their academic performance.
- (7) Finally, the research should draw upon quantitative data over a number of years, including demographic information (e.g. the age, gender and ethnicity of the respondents, and whether they qualify for free school meals); responses to psychometric tests measuring shifts in 'dispositions for learning'; and academic results for the students' end of Key Stage (KS) statutory assessments. Analyses of these data will facilitate an assessment of the impact of different factors, such as participation in different types of leadership education, upon students' dispositions for learning and/or academic achievement.

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