RESEARCH ARTICLE

Knowledge creation by student leaders to promote their own leadership development: A multi-university social dream-drawing project

Baeteledipele ba baithuti ba ba nang le seabe go bopa kitso go ya kwa go tlhageng ga tlhabololo ya boeteledipele jwa bone: Porojeke ya go taka toro ya loago ya diyunibesiti tse dintsi

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ABSTRACT

Engaging student leaders in knowledge creation in support of their own leadership development is an important strategy in the scholarship of integration which seeks to promote research-based, student-engaged professional practices. This article describes a strategy for engaging student leaders in support of such development, drawing on the insights they gained from their own leadership experiences. South African student leaders participated in a multi-university, social dream-drawing study which was designed using a socio-analytical framework. Through this project, leadership experiences were made manifest at unconscious and conscious levels. Group sharing and reflection helped the participants recognise and process their leadership experiences, and to uncover and explore areas that needed development. Engaging in knowledge creation about their own development, the participating students co-produced an evidence-based understanding of the importance of integrated approaches about the development of student leadership. In addition, their participation in a process of compassionate engagement positioned them as co-developers of problem-solving insights in support of their own development and, more broadly, universities' social and cultural capabilities. Pule and Gibney (2023) also demonstrated this. The social dream-drawing findings furthermore indicated how such interventions could go beyond an examination of the perspectives of individual leaders to consideration of the nature of student leadership as a group, organizational or even societal function – considering intra- and inter-group dynamics; different organizational levels and their leadership sub-systems; and the role of student leadership in society at large. In addition, the research conducted through social dream-drawing may be seen as strengthening the argument for the broader adoption of the scholarship of integration in pursuit of strategic goals.

KEYWORDS

Co-productive research, leadership, student-engaged practices, student development, scholarship of integration, social dreaming

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MADIŠANA

Go akaretsa baeteledipele ba baithuti mo tlhamong ya kitso go tlhagisa tlhabololo ya boeteledipele jwa bona ke leano le le botlhokwa mo thutong ya go kopanya. Ka jalo, setlhogo seno se gatelela leano la go dira gore baeteledipele ba baithuti ba nne le seabe, ba nne botlhokwa mo tlhabololong e e ntseng jalo le ba ba tla solegelwang molemo ke yone, ba dirisa kitso ya bone e ba e boneng mo maitemogelong a bone a boeteledipele. Borutegi jwa go tsenyeletsa bo golaganya tiro ya dipatlisiso tsa borutegi le tiragatso ya seporofešenale, go tlhabolola tiragatso ya tlhabololo ya boeteledipele e e tsenyeleditsweng e e ikaegileng ka borutegi, e e tsenyeletsang baithuti. Baeteledipele ba baithuti ba Aforika Borwa ba ne ba tsaya karolo mo thutong ya go dira toro ya loago, ya diyunibesiti tse di farologaneng ba dirisa thulaganyo ya thuto ya tshekatsheko ya loago. Ka seno, maitemogelo a boeteledipele a ne a tlhagelela mo maemong a a sa lemotshegeng le a a lemotshegang a go itshupa. Go abelana ka ditlhopha le go tlhatlhanya go ba thusitse go lemoga le go sekaseka maitemogelo a bone a boeteledipele, le go senola le go sekaseka mafelo a a tlhokang go tlhabologa. Moeteledipele wa moithuti go nna le seabe mo maitemogelong a bona a boeteledipele jwa moithuti go bonala a tlhageletse mo tlhamong ya kitso ya bone ka ga tlhabololo ya bone. Maano a a neng a tlhagelela a ne a akaretsa go dirisana mmogo le go dira mmogo mo tlhabololong ya baeteledipele ba baithuti ka go dirisa leano le le kopaneng le go dirisa maatla a go nna le seabe ka bopelotlhomogi go rotloetsa tlhabololo ya baeteledipele ba baithuti. Ponelopele e, e akaretsa tirisanommogo magareng ga ditlhopha, seabe mo setlhopheng le mo maemong a mokgatlho, go dira le ditsamaiso tse di farologaneng tsa boeteledipele le kamogelo ya boeteledipele jwa baithuti mo maemong a setšhaba, ka jalo go rotloetsa maitsholo a go tsenyeletsa ka go dirisa mekgwa ya borutegi. Dipatlisiso ka go dirisa toro ya loago e nonotsha dikopo tsa go amogela diporojeke tse di kopaneng tsa borutegi tse di tsamaelanang le maikaelelo a leano la yunibesiti e e maleba.

MAFOKO A BOTHLOKWA

Patlisiso e e kopantsweng ya ntshokuno, boeteledipele, mekgwa e e tsentsweng tirisong ke baithuti, tlhabololo ya baithuti, borutegi jwa tsalano, go lora ka loago

Introduction

Student leader development traditionally involves strategies for organizing, managing and administering leadership structures and activities, with a focus on leadership development through pedagogy (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Xaba, 2021). Theories in this field primarily come from Western psychological and sociological frameworks (Moja et al., 2014). In African contexts, including South Africa (SA), practitioners and researchers have tested these models for local relevance or created their own African-based knowledge (Luescher et al., 2018). However, South African student leadership development is still an emerging academic field, with little scholarly guidance (Xaba, 2021). Much of the research on student leadership has focused on activism and protest, leaving leadership development as an understudied area in need of further attention.

South African universities are expected to contribute to societal progress by preparing future leaders. This need, which has been recognised by the World Economic Forum (2015), is heightened by global demands for adaptability, reskilling and complex problem-solving among youth leaders. Universities must develop students' technical and soft skills in an integrated manner (Griesel & Parker, 2009). Soft skills, which can be cultivated through co-curricular activities, include a strong work ethic, as well as effective communication and interpersonal skills (Xaba, 2021). Meanwhile, South African universities define their approach to student leadership development in a range of ways, which has resulted in a lack of standardisation and coordination across institutions

(Luescher, 2018). This fragmented approach has undermined the sustainability of efforts to promote student leadership and has made it more difficult for universities to fulfil their role in fostering holistic development (Kuh, 2008).

Boyer (1990) introduced the idea of a scholarship of integration (SOI), which emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge and practice across disciplines. The development of a scholarship of integration is considered key to efforts to ensure that higher education can have a significant impact in the 21st century (Madiba, 2022). Such scholarship is seen as underpinning efforts to transform education by integrating specialists into a broader context, including in pursuit of student-leadership development.

Student leaders in South Africa are elected through the Higher Education Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997) or fostered through the South African Washington International Program (SAWIP); the University of the Free State (UFS) Leadership for Change initiative; and the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (Pule, 2017). Non-positional leaders, including those who emerged from hashtag student movements, also form part of the student leadership cohort (Pule & May, 2021).

This research utilised a social dream-drawing methodology, integrating psychoanalytic perspectives and social-systems thinking to explore student leadership dynamics at three South African universities. Through the use of dream drawings in group sessions, researchers and participants collectively examined unconscious and conscious experiences of leadership. This co-productive process aligns with the SOI framework and represents a contribution to the creation of a South African student-leadership competency framework. In particular, the project sought to advance leadership development by helping student leaders navigate identity; relational dynamics; and historical, social, and cultural perspectives, addressing the leadership challenges of the 21st century. This article aims to show how social dream-drawing can inform the evolution of integrated scholarship and enhance student leadership development through the production of knowledge by student leaders themselves.

Theoretical framework: Socio-analysis

Socio-analysis blends psychoanalysis with systems thinking. It suggests that people's psychology and behaviour are best understood within their social contexts (Long, 2017). The social context comprises a repository of thoughts, feelings, actions and processes produced and enacted over time in a social environment through relationships (Long, 2017). The contents of this repository, which may be consciously expressed and unconsciously enacted, can be studied through the associative unconscious (Mersky & Sievers, 2019), which is a network of symbolic linkages representing the web of thoughts, feelings and meanings that are generated in groups (Long & Harney, 2013). Reverie, the conscious perception of the unconscious, facilitates the verbalisation of data from the associative unconscious (Ogden, 2019). As deployed by this study, reverie allows for a deeper cognitive and emotional engagement, inviting shifts in group thinking towards a

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broader understanding of the capacity for leadership among the group's members (Ferro & Nicoli, 2017).

Socio-analysis focuses on the group-as-a-whole as the unit of analysis (Long, 2017). In this context, student leadership at universities or at the national level, as well as across the broader societal system of higher education, can be viewed as a group as a whole. Dynamics emerge within individuals and groups, and between and among groups, affecting the group at organizational and societal levels (Long, 2016). The associative unconscious assumes that individual leadership experiences cannot be separated from their societal context (Long & Harney, 2013). Thus, exploration of individual leaders' experiences in a group setting can reveal insights that are applicable at both individual and group levels, as well as system wide.

Consequently, the broad definition of student leadership, as adopted in this research, transcends the individual and extends to group, organizational and societal levels (Long, 2017). In an effort to deepen understanding of student-leadership development, socio-analysis is deployed as an integrated theoretical framework, utilising insights from social dreamdrawing research (Mersky & Sievers, 2019).

Social dreaming, which is a methodology developed by Lawrence (1998), allows access to the associative unconscious through the construction of associations and amplifications around dreams that have been shared in a group. Social dream-drawing builds on this process, providing a verbal and visual tool for exploring social and psychological issues within groups (Mersky, 2008). The deployment of this creative, playful methodology can uncover deep insights about student leadership roles, according to Mersky (2013). Mersky (2008) expanded on Lawrence's work by using social dream-drawing to explore hidden elements in organizational and social systems (Long, 2016). The current research employed social dream-drawing as both a methodology and design approach (Creswell, 2014), integrating the social dreaming methodology developed by Lawrence (1998) and Bion's (1961) theory of dreaming and object relations. In the approach adopted by this study, dreaming is viewed as a form of thinking that can be accessed through the associative unconscious (Mersky, 2008). The process entails researchers and student leaders collaboratively deriving meaning about student leadership, while the researchers also seek to interconnect the findings derived from different sessions.

Methodology

Research design

Data were collected over two years for this multi-university study. The findings reported in this article pertain to data collected at three universities in the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Four groups of students participated – by chance, one of the universities recruited two groups for the study. The research is qualitative (Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014), employing abductive reasoning to explore possibilities creatively by making observations in the search for possible explanations of lived experiences, or by forming explanatory hypotheses (Long & Harney, 2013).

Research participants and sampling methods

Research participants were drawn from those who were elected to leadership at South African universities in line with either the Higher Education Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997) or the National Student Governance Framework.2 Sampling was conducted in a purposive, voluntary way within the pool using inclusion criteria (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). In addition, the study was open to students participating in SAWIP; the UFS Leadership for Change initiative; the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute at UNISA; and the Future Health Leaders Programme at the University of Cape Town (UCT), as well as student activists. An invitation document was sent to the respective student affairs offices so that all categories of student leaders could be included in the study. In most cases, the final lists of participants presented comprised only students elected to leadership under national statutory instruments.

Each group of students comprised 5-7 members who were homogenously drawn from the same university. A total of 21 dream drawings were collected from the participants. Table 1 below describes the participating groups.

Table 1: Summary of the sampling process

University	Number of participants in the group*	Gender distribution	Type of student leadership
University 1 (sample A)	6 (1 abstained due to an unexpected academic test)	2 females (1 abstained) 4 males	SRC and residence committee
University 1 (sample B)	7 (2 abstained due to positive COVID-19 results)	2 females 5 males (2 abstained)	SRC of historically merged campus, and committee of male residence at the historical main campus
University 2	6	1 female 5 males	SRC
University 3	5	1 female 4 males	SRC – and all participants belonged to the same political structure

**Total dream drawings collected: 21*

Data collection methods

Student leaders were asked to bring a drawing of a (nighttime/sleep) dream relating to their student leadership experience (Mersky, 2008). Each of the leaders took a turn to describe and explained their dream and the accompanying drawing. Then the members of the group talked about the dreams that were presented, freely associating by describing what came to mind in thinking about the various dreams. In this way, the dreams became social (Long, 2016), as social meaning was attributed to the dream material (Mersky, 2013) and the group-as-a-whole produced an understanding of

2 For more on which, see: https://saassap.com/national-student-governance-framework

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the various dreams and their dynamics (Mersky & Sievers, 2019). A meaning-making dialogue was then undertaken to link the free-association insights that had been offered with social issues experienced by the group (Mersky, 2013).

Mersky (2008) advises that researchers (or facilitators of the social dream-drawing methodology) have an important role to play during data collection and the process of considering the dreams and the drawings, helping group participants link the dreams to one another and presenting hypotheses about the group's dynamics and experiences of related social issues. Once this work has been undertaken, the participants should collaborate with the researchers to explore the various hypotheses that have been presented in order to obtain insights regarding their own experiences of leadership.

Data recording

Verbal descriptions of the dreams and the dream-drawings were recorded. The voice recordings were later transcribed to help with data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). Researchers also kept notes of their observations during the data collection. Photographs of the dream drawings were captured and kept as records (Mersky, 2012).

Data analysis

The data analysis used a triangulation method (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014) to substantiate the role of student leaders as co-producers of the knowledge created through the process of social dream-drawing. In this regard, the student leaders worked with the researchers to make sense of their dreams (including by drawing them); link them to each other; contribute free-associated thoughts and impressions; and explore what these might mean for student leadership. After the data were collected from the focus groups, the researchers read the transcriptions of the group sessions, paying particular attention to the emergence of themes (Mersky, 2013), including across the sessions. Researchers then undertook member-checking by asking the student leaders to confirm that the emerging themes that had been identified had been understood correctly. In this way, the themes described in this report may be seen as accurately representing the experiences of student leaders as explored and identified during the social dream-drawing process; while the data analysis represents insights that emerged during a process of reflection after the data had been collected.

Ensuring data quality and integrity

At least two facilitators are required to collect data effectively under the social dream-drawing methodology – paying attention to detail, capturing nuance and ensuring the credibility of the process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Mersky, 2008). During the present study, these facilitators were required to check in with the participants about their understanding of the task at hand; ensure that the dream drawings that were presented were produced according to the instructions provided prior to each session; and apply a consistent approach to how the dreams and drawings were presented and discussed at the sessions.

Consistent with Lawrence's (2008) conception of social dreaming, the dreams and drawings shared concentrate less on the dreamers or research participants and more on

the shared material. The phenomenon 'depersonalises' the shared material, therefore minimising the risks linked to issues of confidentiality in this study. Due to the nature of the research design, where dreams, corresponding drawing and associations are shared, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are central to the study. Member checks were used to verify the quality of the findings and conclusions made which addresses the traditional practices that relate to potential biases in voluntary sharing.

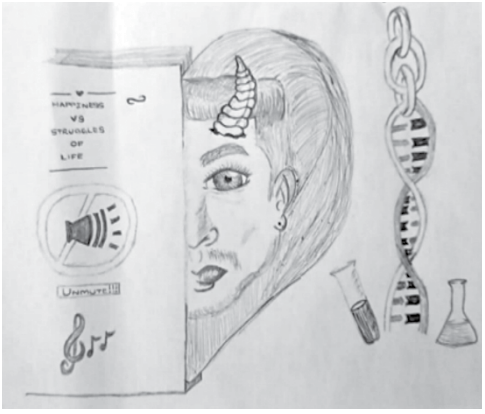
Although the generalisability of the findings reported here can be questioned, the study's deployment of a socio-analytical methodology means that the dynamics observed at the individual/group and organizational levels may be viewed as representing those taking place in society at large (Long, 2016). In other words, the themes emerging through the associative dialogues that took place may legitimately be analysed for their broader societal significance (Long, 2017).

In terms of ethical integrity, clearance for this research was obtained from the General/Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC) at the relevant university. Furthermore, each university where data were collected provided institutional permission for data to be collected there.

Findings

The data from the research are presented here in the form of photographs of two of the dream drawings, which have been chosen as best demonstrating some of the key themes that emerged during the sessions. Each image, which is accompanied by a caption describing the dominant idea of the dream, is followed by a synopsis of the dream, and then a description of the associations and meaning-making that emerged during the discussion about the dream and the related drawing.

Figure 1: Sourced from Dream 3. University 1, sample A: Dynamics of identity in student leadership and student leaders' mental health



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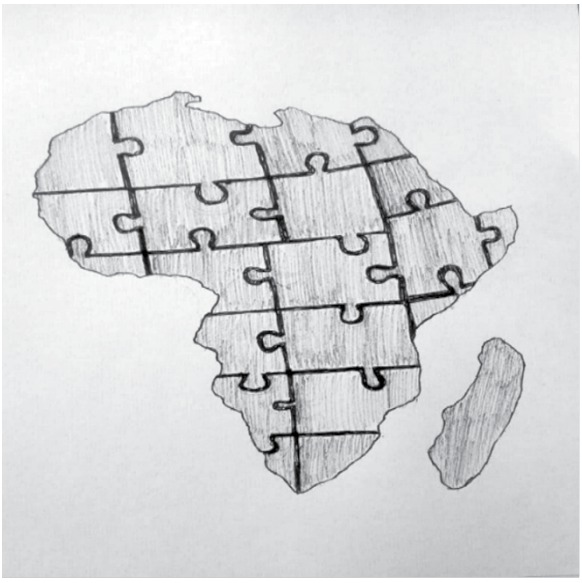
> *The dreamer described this dream as one he had dreamt after becoming a student leader. In the dream, he said, he was bitten by a snake; and the tail of the snake stuck out like a horn on the forehead of the student leader, who developed a half-face. This horn-like snake tail remains on the forehead of the student leader throughout their term in office. The snake bite changes the DNA of the student leader (as is depicted by the DNA helix on the right of the drawing). The test tube and glass jar next to the helix show the DNA of the student leader before and after he took on a student leadership role. Once the DNA has changed, the student leader is placed on mute – unable to voice the vision which brought them into a leadership position in the first place.*

This dream led to a conversation about leadership identity and crisis in leadership identity; the discourse around being silenced; mental health issues linked to losing one's sense of self or identity in a leadership role and the depression that can accompany such loss; and the frustration of not being able to speak out. The conversation about this dream indicated student leaders' need for integrated support given that the burden of student leadership can be greater than anticipated. Student leaders also spoke about the difficulties of feeling and having to act in two different ways – as if they had been split into a student in the classroom and a leader outside. One student leader said: "*It is very difficult. I have to wear one face when I am in class and show the other face outside*". This sentiment is echoed by the split face in the image of the dream drawing.

Figure 2: Sourced from Dream 4. University 2: African unity and the burden of student leadership



> *The dreamer described a dream in which they sat at a table listening to music and building a puzzle. The completed puzzle would be of a united Africa, with clear demarcations among the respective puzzle pieces depicted the diversities of an Africa that could be united based on a pan-African identity. In the dream, the dreamer saw a map of the world in blue and green, once the puzzle was completed. The dreamer also said he had seen himself sitting under a light in a dark room while building the puzzle. He could only see his face and, more profoundly, his hands moving in the act of completing the puzzle.*

During free association, the group was preoccupied with the description of the lighting in the dream. "*I associate the light with an illusion*," said one participant. The idea of illusion inspired discussion around what comprises illusion versus what comprises the real within student leadership. The building of the puzzle was associated with unity or things coming together. The group wondered whether unity could be realised or whether it was an illusion. In this regard, it was noted that student leaders struggled with the idea of the different parts of the university working together to pursue a united Africa and investing in them as future leaders. As one participant said: "*Lecturers and management seek different things*."

At the same time, there was an association with the lyrics "We are the world, we are the children, we are the ones to make a better day" of the song written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie (USA for Africa, 1985). In this context, the group saw themselves as the youth who should unite Africa and, with the right developmental support, achieve success for Africa.

One group member exclaimed: "*Putting the pieces together is challenging*", perhaps referring to the complexity of integration. Another replied: "*I actually have no memory in actually completing a puzzle ever before*." In some ways, the student leaders saw themselves as lacking the capacity to complete the puzzle. In this regard, the group talked of finding it hard to make the links required for integration; and the pressure that they faced as student leaders who may lack the confidence to fulfill their leadership roles. In this context, the design of the map in the drawing became associated with a question mark. In summary, the participants saw cause for hope but also wondered whether they would succeed as leaders given the present extent of their leadership development and the obstacles to integrating different initiatives in support of a more holistic development approach.

Discussion

Through a process of making sense of their dreams and their drawings of these dreams, student leaders at different universities produced several insights concerning their own leadership development. Given that the associative unconscious, which gave rise to these insights, assumes that individual leadership experiences cannot be separated from their societal context (Long & Harney, 2013), the issues revealed may be taken as representative of those facing student leaders at individual, group, organizational (campus), and systemic (national and global) levels. Accordingly, this discussion speaks to strategies and insights for student leader development that could have a significant impact at a range of levels.

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Co-producing student leader development through an integrated strategy

Issues that student leaders face are complex and concern not only their immediate, diverse student constituencies but also their institutions, the higher education sector and society at large. Student leadership requires a range of intellectual, emotional, psychological, and other capacities to navigate the historical, economic, and social aspects of being South African and global citizens (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Xaba, 2021). In particular, they are required to play a key role in transformation efforts at a range of levels (Pule & May, 2021). Figure 2 in this research references the importance of responding in integrated, holistic ways to the challenges faced – with specific reference to the idea of African unity. Pan-Africanism is a loaded concept with significant implications in terms of history, culture, social organization, gender roles, and justice. Nonetheless, the research found that student leaders saw themselves being responsible for enacting transformation, including in terms of promoting integration and holistic success. In this regard, the student leaders became sceptical about whether they were united and following an integrated approach in their leadership – which raised the issue of whether their development in and outside the classroom was being integrated (Jones et al., 2017). When united (or integrated), student leaders can marry their intellectual capacity to make decisions, be logical and pursue their academic studies with their emotional capacity to care for and nurture others in a holistic way.

Accordingly, the findings indicate the importance attached to an integrated mode of leadership development, under which student leaders' engagement in both academic and cocurricular activities may be reflected in the adoption of a more integrated approach at the institutional and systemic levels, so that collaborative problem-solving and strategising are promoted to achieve transformation (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Mino, 2020). In this way, student leaders may be strategically positioned at the core of an integrated transformation strategy enacted at a number of levels (Nkonoane, 2015; Xaba 2021). The dreams that were shared and the analysis of these indicate that student leaders are preoccupied with playing a unifying role and challenging the institutional cultures that maintain siloed practices. Meanwhile, university departments that collaborate to promote integrated student development may come to experience the benefits of an integrated approach in support of other institutional goals (Mutero & Chimbari, 2021).

Advancing student leadership through compassionate engagement

The social dream-drawing research also identified the idea of the silenced student leader who feels unable to undertake their role effectively, and can become frustrated and unhappy with the restrictions on their ability to speak out even as they appear to have been granted a position to do so – a frustration that can, in time, give rise to mental health concerns. Compassionate engagement fostered through the social dream-drawing process allowed student leaders to verbalise their need to talk to a mental health professional in response to experiences of feeling depressed; being silenced; and being subjected to other power dynamics, as was previously noted by Pule and Gibney (2023).

The ways in which the student leaders were able to express some of their mental health concerns during the dream-drawing discussions also indicate how this process can strengthen student leaders' capacities to identify and address the individual, group, organizational and individual challenges they may face. The student leaders' susceptibility to mental health issues, as reported during the dream-drawing process, was based on perceptions derived from 'reverie' (Ogden, 2019). In a clinical setting reverie consists of the analyst building an impression of a client by allowing unconscious elements to intrude on awareness (conscious functioning) so that the unconscious is no longer hidden (Ferro & Nicoli, 2017). In relation to the social dream-drawing process, the members of the group effectively acted as analysts, perceiving a range of unconscious manifestations due to their compassionate engagement with each other. In this way, through reverie, the participants were able connect with the data being presented in ways that enabled them to make sense of their subjective experiences, at individual, group and/or organizational levels. In general, student leaders' participation in their own development through a compassionate integrated approach positions them as co-developers of insights who can have significant impact not only in relation to their own development but also in terms of enhancing universities' social and cultural capabilities (Mino, 2020).

The data-dreaming discussions also indicated that interventions to promote student leadership development should be both proactive for long-term impact on leadership development, and reactive, focused on the volatile, rapidly changing requirements of an environment in crisis. Meanwhile, with reference to the promotion of co-governance (Sebola, 2019), the deployment of the social dream-drawing methodology placed the student leaders at the heart of efforts to promote their own development, positioning them as beneficiaries who were being actively consulted as part of an interdisciplinary university initiative.

The social dream-drawing findings further indicated the ways in which interventions to promote student leadership can go beyond an examination of the perspectives of individual leaders to consideration of the nature of student leadership as a group, organizational or even societal function – considering intra- and inter-group dynamics; different organizational levels and their leadership sub-systems; and the role of student leadership in society at large (Long, 2016).

Conclusion

This study aimed to practicalise its research findings, applying and implementing them in the environment in which they originated. In other words, student leaders were engaged to produce knowledge about their own student leadership experiences with the aim of fostering their development as leaders. The study used social dream-drawing as a methodology so that the perspectives of the researchers could be integrated with those of the student leaders, with a meta-understanding being produced by interconnecting the findings from the sessions.

A scholarship of integration approach was employed as an effective way of engaging student leaders as partners, co-developers and active participants. The strategy fostered

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the production of student leaders' voices and sought to attend to these voices in the quest for sustainable co-curricular, collaborative student-leadership-development approaches. The choice of approach was important given that a key outcome of such research may be that student leaders (who are central to university business and management) are positioned as core participants in, as well as beneficiaries of, integrated student-leadership-development efforts.

This research concludes that the scholarship of integration could be a powerful tool for addressing the gap between theory and practice regarding student leadership development. In this context, social dream-drawing research as a scholarship of integration approach revealed the potential of integrated approaches for student leadership development – thus reinforcing calls to promote sustainable, impactful and holistic student leader development to achieve institutional strategic goals at universities.

Summarily, suggested interventions for higher education institutions that are rooted in the scholarship of integration that emerged in student leaders' knowledge creation regarding their own leadership development could include:

- Collaborative leadership workshops that bridge academic and co-curricular activities.
- Interdisciplinary projects that encourage collaboration across different university departments.
- Support systems for mental health and leaderships resilience, such as peer counselling programmes or access to psychologists.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the University of the Free State General and Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC), Ethical Clearance number: UFS-HSD2020/1528/191/21. Additionally, institutional permission to conduct research at the various institutions was obtained through the respective institutions' ethics committees.

Potential conflict of interest

No conflict of interest is known to the author to declare.

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