

Beyond Words: Classroom Strategies that Reflect on Nonverbal Cues and Leader Identity Development

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Introduction

Interpersonal skills are **foundational to leadership** and **vital to human relationships** (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011, p. 484) Defined as **learned behaviors in social interaction**, involving **complex verbal and nonverbal exchanges** (McConnell, 2004; Northouse, 2022)

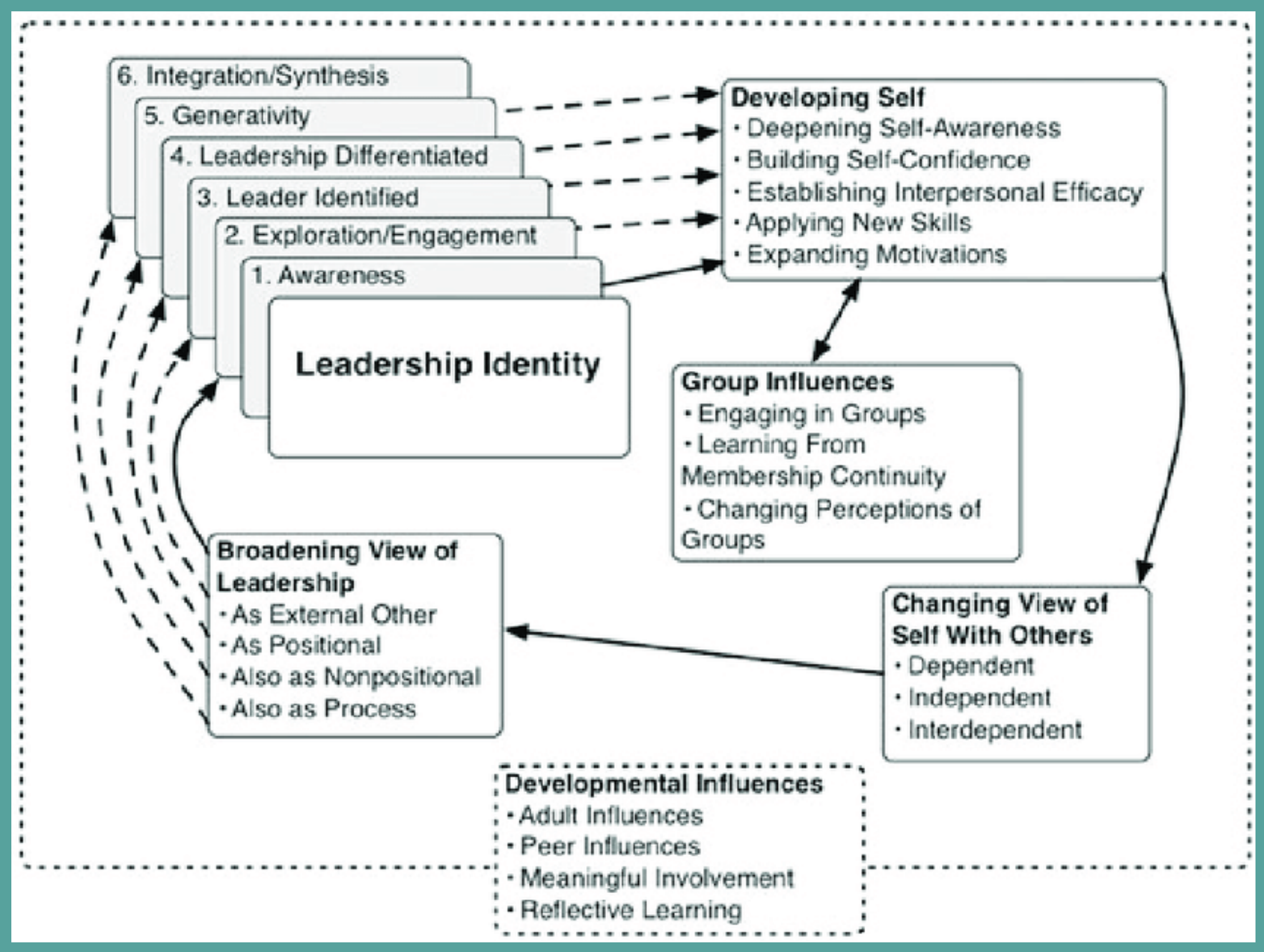
Linked to **effective leadership behaviors** and the capacity **to influence others through relationships** (Riggio, 2024)

Leadership education emphasizes **interpersonal skill development** as a **way for students to practice leadership** as a social process (Komives, 2013; Matkin et al., 2023)

Gap In Literature Little research exists on instructional strategies for **developing students' nonverbal communication skills** specifically

Purpose Explore undergraduate students' **perspectives** on **nonverbal communication** and its **role in effective interpersonal communication**

Conceptual Framework



Leadership Identity Model (LID)

How individuals **develop as leaders** through **experience, reflection, and social interaction** progressing from seeing **leadership as positional to relational** (Komives et al., 2005).

LID centers **reflection and meaning-making** as **key drivers of growth**; it offers a useful lens for **understanding how students recognize, interpret, and internalize nonverbal communication** as part of **leadership identity development**.

Methodology

Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Explore (N = 42) Undergraduate Perspectives

Nonverbal Communication

Connection to Leader Identity Development



Enrolled AGLS Students



42 Reflection Statements

De-identified

Inductive Thematic Analysis

Researchers



Course Instructor & Teaching Assistant

Developed audit trail to enhance **confidentiality and dependability** (MacQueen et al., 1998)

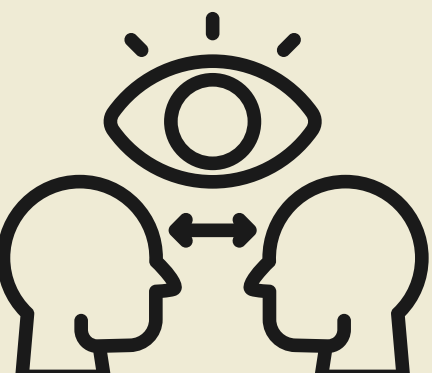
Horizontalization to identify significant statements

Engaged in **Bracketing** to minimize bias

Identified themes related to **leadership cognition** through reflection on **interpersonal skills and nonverbal communication**

Results

Nonverbal Communication



Eye contact and facial expressions carry more weight to **convey confidence, emotion, and leadership presence**.



Interpersonal Skills



Self Awareness



Listening



Self Improvement

Showed that **students connected their understanding of nonverbal communication to emotional intelligence, giving and receiving feedback, and aligning values with leader behaviors**.

Connections to Leader Identity

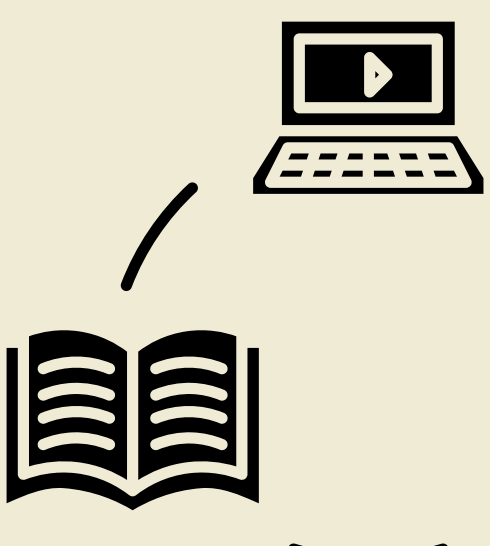
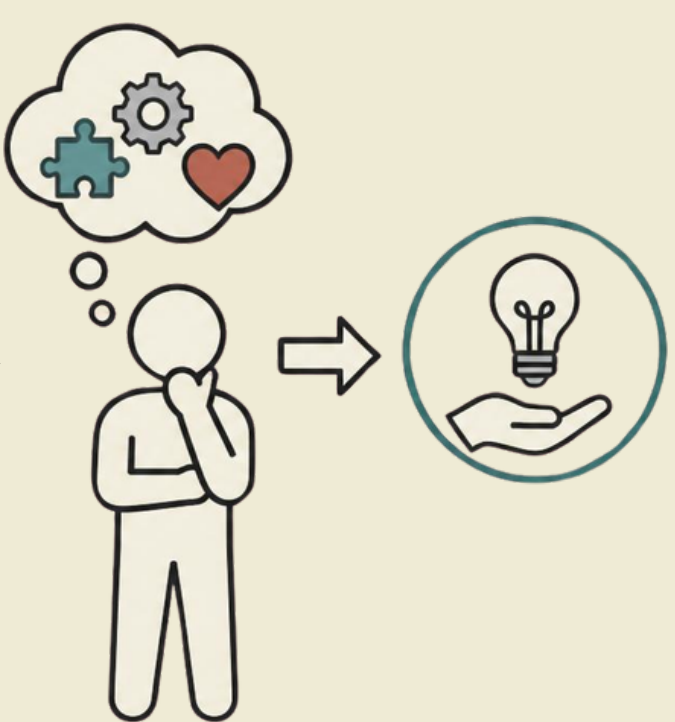
Reflection on nonverbal communication helped **students view leadership as a developmental process**, strengthening their leader identity through **teamwork, relationship building, focused communication, and greater awareness of their personal strengths and self-presentation**.

Conclusions / Implications



Self Awareness: Reflection supported **students' personal leadership development** and **understanding of their leader identity**.

Meaning Making: Students **connected reflective experiences** to deeper **commitments** to their **leadership growth**.



Instructional Practice: Reflection assignments **may inform strategies for advancing leadership development in students**.



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