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Kevin Knight, Kanda University of International Studies,  
Chiba, Japan

Corresponding author: [knight@kanda.kuis.ac.jp](mailto:knight@kanda.kuis.ac.jp)

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## **Conceptualizing Leadership Development in the KUIS SALC**

Kevin Knight, Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan

### **Abstract**

On the campus of Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Chiba, Japan, a proposal was presented for the leadership development of KUIS students in the KUIS Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) (Knight, 2017). Following Scollon (2001) and his mediated discourse analysis (MDA)-based nexus of practice concept, this paper explores how and why multiple storylines and histories intersect so that ‘leadership development’ is conceptualized as consulting programs in the SALC. The paper shows that Knight’s (2013) conceptualization of leadership as involving communication for creating and achieving visions is the basis for the proposed consulting programs and concludes by asking how leadership and learner autonomy should be conceptualized in a self-access learning center.

*Keywords:* Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), leadership conceptualization, leadership development, learner autonomy, mediated discourse analysis, nexus analysis, nexus of practice, self-access learning center (SALC)

### **Introduction/Background<sup>1</sup>**

Little (2016) writes that ‘learner autonomy’ is “a slippery concept because it is notoriously difficult to define precisely.” Similarly, ‘leadership’ has been said to elude “comprehensive definition” as Southwell and Morgan (2009, p. 18) note in a review of leadership literature. The purpose of this paper is not to define (or to argue for a definition of) either learner autonomy or leadership but rather to explore *how* and *why* ‘leadership’ was conceptualized in a new facility for learner autonomy. Specifically, this paper investigates the creation and presentation of a *proposal* for the leadership development of undergraduate students at a self-access learning center in Japan (Knight, 2017). By providing an account (of the leadership conceptualization process) that illuminates the intersection of multiple storylines and histories in a *nexus of practice*, this paper shows that leadership conceptualizations are contextually bound. The paper ends with a discussion of Scollon’s (2001) mediated discourse analysis (MDA)-based nexus of practice concept and ties together the various factors that generated the leadership conceptualization in Knight’s (2017) proposal. In its conclusion, this paper promotes further discussion by asking how leadership and learner autonomy should be conceptualized in a self-access learning center.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper replicates and adapts the content of Knight (2015, 2017, in press).

The proposal for the leadership development of undergraduate students was presented on the campus of Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Chiba, Japan at a KUIS Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) Advisory Board meeting. According to its website, the mission of the KUIS SALC is “to foster lifelong learner autonomy” by supporting learners in:

- utilising appropriate communities, spaces, and resources for learning
- maximising their opportunities for interdependence and interaction with others
- becoming more aware and in control of their learning processes
- achieving their language-learning and other goals
- becoming confident language users
- developing language skills for future study and careers
- developing leadership skills

The KUIS SALC’s inclusion of leadership development in its mission provided justification for Knight’s (2017) leadership development proposal. In the following sections (2 to 4) of this paper, the various factors that contributed to the creation of the leadership conceptualization in the leadership development proposal are explored.

### **The Leadership Connection Project Website**

The conceptualization of leadership in the leadership development proposal was based on programs that had been created by Knight and published on his website, which is titled [The Leadership Connection Project](#):

- **KUIS Career Education Center:** [Kevin’s Company \(a business consulting internship program\)](#)
- **KUIS IC Department (International Business Career major):** [English for Business Career \(EBC\) courses](#) and [Leadership seminars](#)
- **TESOL International Association:** [ESP Project Leader Profiles and other professional development projects](#)
- **KUIS SALC:** [Global leadership competition in the SALC](#)

- **KUIS International Affairs Division:** [Inaugural Global Challenge program](#) and [KUIS-SolBridge workshop – Exploring leadership as a conceptualization](#)

According to the website, Knight (2013) conceptualizes leadership to be a “creative” activity that involves: 1) “communicating to create visions” and 2) “communicating to achieve visions,” and in the programs above, KUIS students in the roles of consultants work in teams (or alone) to create visions for organizations (i.e., the clients) through the following activities:

- interacting (through email and/or face to face) with leaders of the organizations
- conducting research about the organizations online and onsite
- analyzing the internal and external environments to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, etc.
- delivering recommendations (to the leaders of the organizations) in PowerPoint presentations

The connection between consulting and leadership is the concept of “vision” which is defined in Carnegie, Levine, and Crom (1995) as articulating “...a view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists” (p. 20).

Gardner and Miller (2014) also write about leadership and vision for managing self-access language learning:

Leadership...is crucial for change, innovation and development. Important expressions for organizations are those which show their vision for where they see themselves going, the mission they have been charged with by their institution, and their rationale for existing....Even in a position of middle management it is important for SALL managers to have a sense of direction about SALL if they are to do more than maintain the *status quo* (i.e., management rather than leadership). (p. 32)

Knight (2017) proposes the leadership development of students in the KUIS SALC by empowering them to create and achieve their visions in their roles as consultants.

### **Leadership Seminar**

Another factor that had an impact on the creation of the leadership development proposal was Knight's leadership seminar for KUIS students with an International Business Career (IBC) major in the Department of International Communication (IC). The seminar students address the following questions (replicated from the course syllabus) in connection with their activities to learn about and experience leadership:

- What is leadership?
- How do leaders practice leadership?
- How do leaders communicate?
- What are leadership skills?
- How can leadership (skills) be developed?
- What can we learn from leaders?
- How can research on leadership be conducted?

In order to obtain answers to these questions, the students conduct semi-structured interviews with leaders. They are also introduced to various leadership publications with a focus respectively on leadership research (Nohria & Khurana, 2010), leadership experts (Liu, 2010), and leadership communication (Fairhurst, 2011).

In addition to conducting research in the seminars, the students experience project leadership that involves creating and achieving visions (Knight & Murphey, 2017):

In order to *provide* students with leadership experiences for internship/job interviews and business career development, a project-based learning (PBL) approach is utilized in the leadership seminars. The PBL approach integrates language and content learning, and it complements an ESP [English for specific purposes] approach (Stoller, 2002). In the leadership seminars, the students must work in teams to achieve their own socially responsible and original visions, which requires the students to be creative and to effectively collaborate. Creativity in this case may involve finding new ways of responding to situations and to be willing to take risks (Richards, 2013). Risk taking is associated by Candlin (2002) and Benner (1984) with expertise. The expert intuitively knows what to do to get the desired result. Although an *expert* intuitively

knows how to create, the students in the leadership seminars are not experts and need to struggle to create collaboratively. (p. 2)

In their efforts to create and achieve such a leadership project, one team of students in the seminar made arrangements for the Director of the KUIS SALC to make a presentation to the class. As discussed in the next section of this paper, all of the students in the seminar would later work together to create a pilot program for a leadership competition to be held in the new SALC facility that was to be constructed the following year. For this purpose, the SALC Director met again with the students to show them the blueprints of the new SALC building.

### **The Global Leadership Competition in the KUIS SALC**

The idea for a global leadership competition in the KUIS SALC was initiated by a meeting between Knight and the Chairman of the Sano Educational Foundation. The Chairman was wondering if Knight's leadership development activities with KUIS students could be conducted in the new building on campus where the SALC would be located. The SALC Director wanted to attract students who did not normally use the SALC and to increase student engagement and ownership in the new facility so Knight and the SALC Director agreed on the following:

- The purpose of the competition would be: a) to provide KUIS students with leadership development experiences and b) to increase the number of visitors to the SALC.
- The competition would be designed in collaboration with the seminar students and in accordance with self-access learning principles.
- Knight's seminar students would be the participants in a pilot competition.

This approach had mixed results. As Knight and Murphey (2017) write above, the students struggled to create collaboratively for various reasons. One reason was that the students would be participants in the pilot competition so some of the students wanted the competition to be easy and not time consuming, including the students to whom Knight assigned leadership for creating the project. For example, in a pilot competition, the students

held individual presentations in the (old) SALC, but the project leaders chose not to use the promotional resources offered by the SALC to increase the number of visitors. In contrast, in a different project, one of the seminar students, who was highly motivated to share his internship and educational experience in the Republic of South Africa, conducted research to identify and recruit two other KUIS students (not in the seminar) who had also studied in African countries. He led his team to create and deliver an impressive presentation about Africa to the campus-wide audience that included a former member of the Government of Japan, and he thereafter obtained a two-year internship working at a Japanese embassy overseas.

As Knight reflected on his seminar students' performances above and his objective to create a global leadership competition in the KUIS SALC, he realized that a good model for the competition was Kevin's Company in British Hills (BH) (Knight, 2012). Kevin's Company is a one-year internship program for KUIS students, who act as business consultants in a simulated company where BH (which is part of the Kanda Gaigo Group) is the client. As noted in section 2 of this paper, in Kevin's Company, the student consultants conduct research about BH in teams and compete to give the best recommendations (to the leaders of BH) in PowerPoint presentations. Knight discussed his idea with the SALC Director who suggested that SALC experts become involved so that the competition would be a global one. An outline of the proposal for the global leadership competition in the KUIS SALC is as follows:

- KUIS students in Japan will compete in teams.
- SALC experts overseas will be team mentors/coaches.
- The teams will investigate the SALC (online and onsite through multiple research methods).
- The teams will provide competitive presentations about how to improve the SALC.
- Prizes (including a cash prize) will be awarded.

Knight and the SALC Director recognized that the inclusion of a cash prize would depend upon the approval of the Chairman.

In addition to the global leadership competition in the KUIS SALC, Knight listed five additional consulting programs that could be offered in the SALC. As in the case of the global leadership competition, the consultants would also compete in teams to investigate (online and onsite, etc.) the SALC and provide competitive presentations about how to improve the SALC. The participants could include:

- International students visiting KUIS (e.g., SolBridge students)
- KUIS seminar students (e.g., Knight's leadership seminar students with mentor/coach who is graduate student at University of California, San Diego's School of Global Policy and Strategy)
- Business leaders from the global community who lead teams of students and/or professionals
- SALC interns and/or
- SALC advisors

Each of these could be different consulting programs. In addition, scholarly research of student consulting activities could be related to languages for specific purposes (LSP), professional communication, project-based learning, content-based instruction, soft-assembly (Knight & Murphey, 2017), self-directed learning, and leadership development.

Seven advantages of the proposed consulting programs are also included in the proposal. The first is leadership experience for students. When program participants are acting as consultants and giving recommendations to the SALC administrators, they are communicating (and competing) as leaders to "create a vision." Second, a wide range of perspectives from different stakeholders would be provided through a variety of research methods. Third, the ongoing feedback about how to improve through the consulting programs would be "built into the system," and it could be free of charge, for the most part. Fourth, the SALC can control the focus of the consulting activities. For example, in Knight's leadership seminars, the students were seeking ways to expand student participation in the SALC at the request of the SALC Director. Fifth, the participants in such consulting programs would be engaged in (self-access) learning about self-access learning. Sixth, the SALC could become a global leader in leadership development. In this connection, the SALC could become a model for others (individuals and institutions) interested in such leadership development. Finally, SALC consulting projects can be related to marketing, materials, facilities, activities, personnel, projects, etc., and the number and types of stakeholders could be expanded.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Scollon's (2001) nexus of practice approach illuminates how storylines and histories intersected in the creation and delivery of the proposal for consulting programs for leadership

development in the KUIS SALC. Scollon & Scollon (2004) define a nexus of practice as “the point at which historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, and objects come together to enable some action which in itself alters those historical trajectories in some way as those trajectories emanate from this moment of social action” (p. 159). Jones and Norris (2005) discuss a nexus of practice in terms of Scollon’s (2001) mediated discourse analysis (MDA):

MDA strives to preserve the complexity of the social situation. It provides a way of understanding how all of the objects and all of the language and all of the actions taken with these various mediational means intersect at a *nexus* of multiple social practices and the trajectories of multiple histories and storylines that reproduce social identities and social groups.... (p. 5)

A nexus of practice can be investigated with a nexus analysis. The nexus analysis approach provides for the exploration of social power, mediated actions, and cultural patterns. Three guiding questions for conducting a nexus analysis are representative of critical discourse analysis (CDA), interactional sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology (Scollon & Scollon, 2004):

1. How are social power interests produced [and reproduced] in this discourse?
2. What positions and alignments are participants taking up in relationship to each other, to the discourses in which they are involved, the places in which these discourses occur, and to the mediational means they are using, and the mediated actions which they are taking?
3. How are sociocultural or historical thought or cultural patterns [expressed] in the language and its genres and registers providing a template for the mediated actions of participants in the nexus of practice? (pp. 173-175)

In this paper, these questions are applied to the creation and the delivery of the leadership development proposal, and the respective influence of various stakeholders and mediational means is clarified.

How effective would the proposed consulting programs in the KUIS SALC be for leadership development? Nohria & Khurana (2010) of Harvard Business School identify “a

set of dualities that... seem to be at the heart of research on leadership” including a dyad focused on “leader development” (p. 7)

- a. Leader development should be thought of in terms that emphasize leaders’ capacity for *thinking and doing* (which puts an emphasis on various competencies).
- b. Leader development should be thought of in terms that emphasize leaders’ capacity of *becoming and being* (which puts an emphasis on an evolving identity).

These two approaches to leadership development are both inherent in the consulting programs proposed for the KUIS SALC. In addition, Knight’s leadership development proposal and conceptualization of leadership as involving communication for creating and achieving visions reflect and promote the mission of the KUIS SALC (i.e., empowering KUIS students for “achieving their language-learning and other goals, becoming confident language users, developing language skills for future study and careers, and developing leadership skills”) and the Bergen definition which “views learner autonomy as ‘a capacity and willingness to act independently *and* in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person’ (Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander, & Trebbi, 1990, p. 102)” (Smith, 2008, p. 396). In a *TESOL Blog* post, Knight (2016) writes of leadership and learner autonomy as creative activities: “Leadership and learner autonomy are both focused on ‘achieving your dreams!’” In sum, this paper provides an account of how leadership was conceptualized in the KUIS SALC and leads to another question for scholars to investigate: “How *should* leadership and learner autonomy be conceptualized and conducted in a SALC?”

#### **Notes on the contributor**

Dr. Kevin Knight (PhD in linguistics, MBA, MPIA) is an associate professor in the Department of International Communication (International Business Career major) and a researcher in the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE) of Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, Japan. In TESOL International Association, he is an ESP blogger, ESPIS former chair, and co-editor of ESP News.

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