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ARTICLE

School strike for climate are leading the way: how their people power strategies are generating distinctive pathways for leadership development

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Abstract

Since November 2018, Australian high school climate strikers have become leaders in the movement for climate action, giving rise to a new generation of young people who have learnt how to lead change. This article focuses on the question of leadership across social movements and in global youth movements. It then investigates the different forms of leadership emerging in School Striker for Climate (SS4C) through a qualitative survey of its leaders. We argue that leadership is multifaceted, shaped by the different strategies that movements use to engage people in collective action. We present three different people power strategies – mobilising, organising and playing by the rules – and explore how these different strategies generate varied pathways for leadership development. We identify the strengths and limits of each strategy, and we find that peer learning, mentoring, learning by doing, confrontation, reflective spaces and training are important leadership development tools. This article's greatest strength comes from the positionally of us as researchers – two of us are student strikers, and the third is an active supporter, giving us a distinctively engaged perspective on a powerful movement for change.

Keywords: leadership; social movements; people power; school striker; community organizing; climate change

[Author 1 – researcher] By about midday on 30 November 2018, Sydney's Martin Place – the pedestrian plaza that cuts across the city's financial district – was swarming with waves of school children as far as the eye could see. Every five minutes or so, after a bus door closed on Castlereagh Street or a train departed Martin Place Station, hundreds of uniformed students carrying handmade placards and waving mobile phones ran down the hill into the Plaza's amphitheatre. I was in the assembled crowd with my primary school aged children. They were experiencing a delighted shock as we continued to welcome newcomer protesters with squeels of delight. The tall buildings on either side of Martin Place intensified the acoustics, reverberating rally chants throughout the city. Hundreds of media outlets from across the world swarmed the amphitheatre where the students spoke. They recorded the carnival that was Australia's first student strike – that had arisen out of a fear of catastrophic climate change combined with widespread student frustration that political leaders were failing to do enough to prevent it.

[Author 2 – striker] That day in 2018 changed me. We had been anticipating a turnout of a few hundred people, but by the time I was standing on stage we had over five thousand students alongside several hundred adults. Hundreds held hand painted cardboard placards, bearing messages in support of climate justice with a youthful tone of cheekiness and rage.

> We found a community together, knowing that once you joined the strike, you were surrounded by thousands of other kids who cared as much for the future of the planet as you did. Unlike other political or environmental spaces, we felt as though our voices were heard by those around us and genuinely mattered. Though we were so new as a movement, I had a deep sense that something had fundamentally shifted during that strike. Young people were no longer looking on from the sidelines as mere spectators to the trajectory of our futures. For the first time, our generation had made the clear choice to take a stand. We found power in our collective voices.
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> [Author 3 – former striker] Cut forward to the Schools Strike on 20 September 2019, I remember standing on the stage facing the flood of people, huddled with our team of student organisers, speechless. Well almost. I laughed. How else do you express the joy of 80,000 people chanting with you, standing with you in the fight for justice? Despite the world of differences between us, what I felt that day was our connection. I still feel it. Everything I learnt as a leader in SS4C I now carry with me as a university student, as a woman of colour. My experience as a striker paved a way for my understanding of climate justice, recognising the intersectionality of race, gender, socioeconomic status and the environment. Going from being graded at school on the different greenhouse gases in geography, to standing with 80,000 people, it truly feels like a lifelong learning for how to live and make change in this world.

The Australian School Strike for Climate (SS4C) movement is famous for its strikes having staged eight major national actions between November 2018 and May 2021. Yet it has equally engaged in a variety of other types of social change work including traditional lobbying of politicians, and intensive education and training in social change strategy. These different strategies were not hardwired into the striker's plans when they began, but rather developed iteratively as SS4C identified new spaces and activities they needed to be powerful (participant observation).

Through all this, while the movement has undoubtedly taught strikers about climate change, the learning generated has been much broader. This article focuses on how strikers have learnt to lead a movement through their involvement with SS4C. The process educated students about political life, social change and how they can make change. As one striker described:

> Honestly when I first joined SS4C I didn't even think about the fact that it would be a huge learning opportunity for me – I just wanted to help make a change and be a part of the fight for my future. However now I am most grateful for all the organising experience I have, the opportunities I have had to speak at strikes and to the media and learning about climate justice (respondent 15).

Through a combination of different strategies for engaging and supporting students in taking collective action, SS4C created a laboratory for community leadership development. This article seeks to understand how this movement has supported young people to learn about their political agency by investigating how SS4C's different types of movement building strategies have contributed to different forms of learning, that have in turn changed young people's perceptions of themselves as community leaders.

This article explores the different ways that SS4C cultivates leadership through a team of authors that includes members of the student strikers. We begin by contextualising the student striker movement as a response to crisis, and as a youth movement. We then outline our distinctive authorial team and how we approached the research. We then turn to scholarship on learning and leadership development, reviewing the key attributes of leadership identified in different traditions, including political science, community organising and social movements. We then identify three people power strategies as three distinct forms of making change, each with different

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approaches to leadership. Through a survey of school strikers, we explore if and how these different people power strategies – mobilising, organising and playing by the rules – produce different pathways to developing community leadership. Finally we review how skills and knowledge-based activity, and the experiential and reflective practices of SS4C, created opportunities for learning and leadership development. The final section draws out the implications of how the different forms of people power worked together to create different pathways for leadership in the strikers' movement.

The context of this work

This work contributes to the important task of better understanding the process of how community leaders learn to lead in social movements (Ganz & McKenna, 2018). While leadership is often seen as a static concept, we unpack the processes that show how leaders are 'made' overtime as they seek to solve the problems that they encounter (Harmon, 1990). Yet, as traditional civic organisations like unions and churches are declining (Leigh, 2010; Putnam, 2000), and while we face heightened crises around the economy, our climate and healthcare (Nissen et al., 2020), it is vital to understand how we might build strong participatory, leaderful movements to respond.

The gulf between the absence of powerful movements and the presence of manifold crises is most dramatically felt by young people (Pickard & Bessant, 2018). There is a growing literature documenting the rise of children's movements that have formed in response to this dilemma. In their definitive account of youth citizenship, Pickard and Bessant (2018) note that in the face of existential challenges young people are creating new movements that seek to fill the void. These innovations are sometimes labelled 'radical', to both categorise how their demands and substantive movement practice challenge pre-existing forms of social action (O'Brien, et al. 2018). The positionality of young people – as the people who face the consequences of climate change the most, yet contributed to it the least – makes them a distinctive political subject (Holmberg & Alvinius, 2020). It generates creativity in the demands and in the actions undertaken. As Greta Thunberg declared to the United Nations in 2018 'we can't save the world by playing by the rules, because the rules have to change' (Thunberg, 2019).

There is much that is new in the emerging climate youth movement, but there are also old social movement concepts that can also help us explore and better understand what is going on. This article looks at the question of leadership, and in particular leadership pathways that support school students to become active as citizens and community leaders. While the scholarship on the student strikes notes the place of leadership in social action – for instance identifying the horizontal flat structures and the pathways that exist for peripheral participants to become highly committed activists (Nissen et al., 2020, 272; Pickard, 2020), this topic receives less attention than analysis of strikers' demands and the forms of protest (Pickard, 2020).

To approach the question of leadership, we combine old and new thinking. We review how leadership has been understood from a social change perspective, ranging from the charismatic leader, to community organising's collective leader to the 'leaderless' participants of the Occupy movements across Europe, the Middle East, the USA and Asia through the 2010s (Castells, 2012; Kow, 2020). Building on the 'dutiful, disruptive, dangerous' youth action typology developed by O'Brien et al. (2018), we consider how different strategies for collective action create distinctive pathways to leadership. To do this, we use a new approach called people power strategies.

In focusing on 'strategy' we present an alternative approach to traditional US social movement theorists who distinguish citizen strategies based on their 'repertoires of collective action', such as their forms of protest or confrontation (Tilly, 2006). Visible action is important, but as Melucci has argued, social movement scholarship can suffer from 'myopia of the visible' ignoring how 'the visible action of contemporary movements depends upon their production of new cultural codes

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within submerged networks' (Melucci, 1989, 44, see also Bevington & Dixon, 2005). Instead of focusing just on visible action, our people power strategy approach explores the deeper processes and 'submerged networks' that help create contrasting approaches to collective action. As Vestergren et al. (2016) find, there is a powerful link between social movement strategy and leadership development that is worthy of further research.

We examine people power strategies to identify some initial connections between strategy and leadership. The phrase 'people power' comes from the anti-Marcos uprising in the Philippines (Mercado & Tatad, 1986), and is now a popular social movement refrain. We use people power strategies to define the different ways in which community leaders come together to imagine change, interpret power, engage and support leaders to enact collective action. These strategies describe how certain groups of 'people' come together in particular ways with the goal of exercising 'power'.

The concept of 'people power strategies' has been developed by drawing on a range of social change literatures including social movement studies, urban geography, citizenship literature, community organising and coalition building (Chambers, 2003; Chenowerth & Stephen, 2011; Han, 2014; McAlevey, 2016; Tattersall, 2010; Tully, 1999; Wright, 2010). We identify five different people power strategies that articulate distinctive ways in which people come together in collective action – playing by the rules, mobilising, organising, prefigurative and political platforms or parties (Tattersall & Iveson, 2021). The first three of these strategies were apparent in the work of the student strikers and are explored in more details below.

Methodology and perspective: Our authorial team

Our team of authors is one of our greatest assets in this research. Activist researchers strengthen social movement analysis, challenging old ways of thinking by applying their lived experienced of social action (Ganz & McKenna, 2018), and this has been seen as particularly useful and important for the youth climate movement (Bowman, 2019). This research was conducted by a team made up of one striker (in year 11–12 during the research period), one recent striker graduate (in first and second year university) and an adult researcher who has known and provided support to the strikers for three years preceding this research. The 'researcher', while based at a university, has also spent two decades leading large social movements in Sydney, ensuring that the authorial team combine a mix of practitioner experience and scholarly reflection. Our authorial team had experienced enormous advantages because of our positionality, but our adult researcher was very aware of potential power imbalances that arise in a team like this. A variety of strategies were used throughout the process to maximise the co-production of knowledge, and avoid tokenism or partial engagement (Liddiard, 2018, 155).

The researcher first met the strikers at a 2-day organising training at which she was a trainer, in January 2019. Over the years, relationships between the three authors grew, evolving into a formal mentoring relationship with one of the strikers. This research opportunity was initiated by the researcher and brought to the other authors in June 2020. A team of three researchers was chosen in part to maximise student voice and influence in the project. The initial abstract, the research questions and the decision to use a survey were determined together, with the greatest attempt made to co-produce the research from the outset (Liddiard, 2018, 158). After several months of deliberation via Zoom meetings, WhatsApp and face-to-face planning, the group jointly wrote and redrafted an extensive qualitative survey. An initial literature review was drafted by the researcher and circulated for comment to the strikers while the survey was distributed by the striker authors. The striker authors took responsibility for delivering sufficient survey results but also seeking diversity of participation. To do this, they used internal SS4C communication tools like Slack, email and SMS. The results of the survey were shared with the author team, and we held several zoom calls to code, interpret and identify themes. Our authorial team, with two deeply engaged student strikers, allowed us to see the data in ways that a more distant

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researcher could not, for instance identifying quotations that rang true for other strikers. The remainder of the paper was then drafted by the researcher in a google document for transparent collaboration and ease of amendment. Through the writing process, the striker authors made significant amendments and additions to the text, adding insights drawn from their participant observation.

The survey that sits at the heart of this article explores how three different types of collective action – holding strikes, training in organising, and lobbying politicians – reflect the use of different people power strategies. Its research tool is an extensive 55 question survey of 30 participants undertaken in August and September 2020. It asks students questions about the learning and leadership pathways created by three different types people power – strikes, training and lobbying.

Learning and leadership development in movements

Questions of movement leadership are more often broadly, rather than specifically, examined in social movement and social change literature. Traditionally, studies of social change often assumed that structural conditions, combined with movement participation, would generate political leadership development. They tended to overlook the granular processes by which people learn to lead. Take for instance the Marxist conceptualisation of class consciousness, and the argument that the working class will move from a 'class in itself to class of itself' (Andrew, 1983, 578). While the phrase makes a structural claim about class conflict arising from worker alienation from the means of production, it does not help us understand the more subjective leadership development processes that result in some workers (and not others) exercising agency. Alternatively, Weber's representation of the charismatic leader shaped early analysis of civic leadership, where leadership was reduced to a quality that was 'born' rather than something that could be learnt overtime (Weber, 1978). Reacting to this 'magic man' approach to change, social movement literature developed a rationalist approach to why leaders engaged in movements, emphasising the role of action (Ganz & McKenna, 2018; Snow et al., 1980, 187). Like the literature on working class leadership, early social movement theory often argued that leadership emerged based on structural conditions and the generalised mobilisation of movement resources in response to those conditions (Tarrow, 1994).

In the twentieth century, the success of the Russian Revolution and the spread of democratic centralism through communist parties and social democratic unions, added the role of the 'party' to an understanding of leadership development. The party was a space where senior members of a movement could debate ideology, strategy and action. The relationship between the party, leaders and the masses was complex and socially contingent, but nonetheless suggested that a space for collective strategising was critical for generating major social change (Choi, 2018). By the 1960s, the 'party' was the subject of deep intellectual and practical renewal through social forces like the 'new left' as well as liberation movements for women and Black leadership.

By the 1960s, the success of community organising and scholarship on its practice produced a different approach to the question of leadership (Ganz & McKenna, 2018). In examining the organising practices of people like Miss Ella Barker and Ed Chambers (Chambers, 2003; Payne, 1995), organising scholars focused on the question of leadership qualities and how strategies like training play a critical role in supporting people to play more independent roles in social change (Bretherton, 2015; Warren, 2001). The focus was less on ideology and more on understanding of how people develop leadership in others. The goal was to explore the learning journey that Barker described; how 'individuals bound together by a concept that benefited larger numbers of individuals and provided an opportunity for them to grow into being responsible for carrying out a program' (Ransby, 2003, 188). When it came to an analysing the role of leadership in social change, this approach represented a double shift – from seeing a leader as someone with a position

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to seeing many layers of community leaders, and, from seeing leadership qualities as predestined to capacities that were learnt by doing.

In a very different way, leadership was a key concept in the early 2000s social movements around corporate-led globalisation and later the Occupy movements of the early 2010s. Here the discussion turned to the 'anti-leader' – as movements that described themselves as 'leaderless' or 'leaderful' (Castells, 2012).' The term 'leaderless' rejected formal, hierarchical understandings of leadership. It was a rhetorical devise used to criticise politicians and the formal leaders of large institutions that prioritised a relationship with the state over a relationship with the people. Movements like the Arab Spring in Egypt, the 15M Indignados in Spain, Occupy and Hong Kong's Umbrella and 2019 Hong Kong uprisings have all been described as leaderless (Gerbaudo, 2012; Kow, 2020). These movements argued for a distributed leadership, in contrast to the positional and hierarchical leadership dominant in civil society organisations (Graeber, 2009). That said, research on these movements has identified that both leadership and authority structures operated in these horizontalist movements (Freeman 1972–73; Milkman, 2017). But through all of this, while these movements made a normative statement about the kinds of leadership they opposed, the ways in which people found pathways to leadership remained opaque.

To strengthen their understanding of leadership development, many movement-based NGOs looked to traditions beyond their own. In the 2000s, particularly following the global protests around the War in Iraq, *Purpose-Driven Church* became influential. In this book, written in the Christian evangelical tradition, Warren discusses his method for building a modern mega-church, identifying different levels of leadership development, what he calls 'circles of commitment.' Circles of commitment refer to five different layers of leadership and participation in an institution – ranging from a 'core group' to the committed, congregation, crowd and community (Warren, 1995). He then argues that training and mentoring programs create a 'ladder of engagement' that supports individuals to ascend in their leadership (cf Arnstein, 1969; Warren, 1995). This finding validated community organising's emphasis on training as a strategy for leadership development. However, the approach wasn't without its limits. It implied that leadership was a staged process – where some external force 'develops you' by pulling you up a ladder – underplaying the role and interests of the leader in their own development. It also implies that leadership skills are possessed by the trainer and bestowed. Regardless, it became a popular framework. In Australia it was widely used by NGOs following a popular piece of writing that sought to interpret the strategy used by Warren and translate it to a social movement context (Moraitis, 2010). Social movements frequently combined the ladder of engagement concept with the digital tracking of movement leader activity, such as signing a petition or attending an event. In doing so, some slippage of meaning emerged, where 'activity' became a measure of leadership development. But despite the deployment of increasingly large databases, it was never clear how participation in different movement activities necessarily led people to learn the different kinds of leadership qualities necessary to build powerful movements.

Recent movement scholarship recognises that social movements work in a variety of ways, suggesting that there is not one path to community leadership. In the 2010s a collection of writers argued that there were stark differences between social change groups that 'mobilise' large numbers of people into rallies, and those who 'organise' smaller but deeper networks of leaders into organisations and alliances (Engler, 2016; Han, 2014; McAlevey, 2016; Tattersall, 2010). Following the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, a wave of social movements formed political parties, particularly in cities in Europe and South America, reviving the idea of a party as a space for community leadership while defying the modern separation between movements and formal political parties (McAdam & Tarrow, 2013). The 2011 Arab Spring and Occupy occupations embraced prefigurative leadership strategies where political demands for 'real democracy' were enacted in intensely participatory processes in town squares (Graeber, 2009). All the while, citizens sought to confront the state individually and together by playing by the rules, lobbying and petitioning, to change decision makers' minds.

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The question arises, do these different strategies for building collective action – or what we call 'people power strategies' – help us better understand the different ways in which people learn to become community leaders? If leaders are made not born, then what are the pathways by which people learn, develop and transform overtime? To explore this, we will now review the three forms of people power strategy that are relevant to the practice of SS4C. The purpose is to compare how each of these strategies conceptualise how people learn to lead, so we can test how these different strategies might shape leadership development.

Three people power strategies and their approach to leadership development

Mobilising is the most visible people power strategy, and can include anything from a large strike, march or stunt, which is frequently staged at a symbolic place to attract media attention (Castells, 2012). Mobilising sees people power and community leadership quantitatively – with an event's impact measured by the number of participants (Chenowerth & Stephen, 2011), often combined with the amount of media coverage. Mobilising often uses both digital and face-to-face communication (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

When it comes to leadership, mobilising's focus on the quantity of leaders rather than the qualities posessed by those individual leaders means that it tends to not focus explicitly on the process of leadership development. That said, learning and leadership development occur in the process of designing public action, where people experiment, test and trial new skills as they quickly bring people together to respond to a threat. This involves undertaking important tasks like booking a venue, liaising with police, undertaking publicity and turning people out to events. These roles often require logistical skills, which are exchanged between movement participants. But more than just imparting skills, being part of a mobilisation creates a deep sense of ownership over collective action. Mobilising has an emotional or expressive quality associated with the gathering of large numbers of people (Klandermans, 2004). This affect comes in part from concern about the 'threat' to which the movement is responding, but equally from the hope and joy that arise from being part of a movement that might create an alternative future (Bowman, 2019). This emotional dynamic can shape leadership engagement, generating feelings about peoples' sense of power and what is possible (Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019).

Organising is a people power strategy that builds the relationships, knowledge and skills of leaders so they can take public action for the common good through their involvement in institutions and alliances (Chambers, 2003; Han, 2014; McAlevey, 2016). Organising often focuses on training and connects leaders by strengthening institutions to enrich associational democracy (Wright, 2010). There are a variety of different forms of organising, ranging from a focus on individual leadership development to the alliance-based focus of broad-based community organising (Atlas, 2010; Chambers, 2003). Organisers argue leaders are not born, but made through their experience, relationships, action, support and learning. Consequently, organising is deeply focused on the process of leadership development. The pace and process of public action create space for emerging leaders to lead, captured by the concept of the iron rule – 'don't do for others what they can do for themselves' (IAF, 1990). Organisers focus on how change occurs; not just what change is won.

Leadership development in the organising tradition focuses on knowledge generation and exchange. Organising training seeks to unpack core concepts like relationships, power, leadership, action and institutions to show how these building blocks help us understand public life (Gecan, 1999). The intention is to 'teach someone to fish' so they can act for themselves forever, as the saying goes. Moreover, leaders in the organising tradition recognise that their role is to develop the leadership capacity of others.

Playing by the rules is where people together or individually use the opportunities available to them in a democratic state to try to influence decision-making processes, for instance by

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lobbying a politician. Citizens who 'play the rules' do more than accept their constitutional rights as citizens, they play a more substantive role in the decision making of the polity (Holston & Appadurai, 1999, 4–5). This form of power draws authority from the state in democratic contexts, and it is the state that sets the rules of the game (Tully, 1999). The purpose of playing by the rules is to change the decisions made by the state. In this approach to people power, community leaders are game players (Arendt, 1958). Learning comes from the experience of playing – by 'doing it.' The types of activities include signing petitions, lobbying politicians and engaging in consultations.

From a leadership perspective, playing by the rules sees people as equal. It assumes that people know how to take up the available opportunities for participation and consultation and that they have the resources to do so. In this way, 'the rules' disguise real inequalities and they can exclude people who fall outside a narrow, white, middle class male identity, including the young who aren't recognised formally as citizens (Holston & Appadurai, 1999). That said, as writers on active and engaged citizenship acknowledge, the process of advocacy can grow leadership capacity, particularly in specific movements or places (Gilbert, 2005; Gill, 2013).

Taken together these different people power strategies have distinct approaches to the process of community leadership development. Their varying emphasis on knowledge, skills, experience, and mindset create different pathways for leaders to learn and grow. We will now explore how these ideas play out in the work of the SS4C.

Survey results: SS4C, people power strategies and pathways to leadership

We surveyed students who were or had been active members of SS4C, with 60% identifying as currently active, and 38% saying they had been active within the last year. Demographically, the surveyed students reflected the dominant attributes of the movement as a whole. They were mostly between 16 and 18 years old, mostly female, from a mix of public and private schools and, while urban-centred, they were spread across cities and regions. The survey asked open-ended questions about how students joined the movement, and then explored how they engaged in three different movement strategies – strikes, training and lobbying politicians. To interpret their answers, our research team coded their responses, identifying key themes and relevant quotes that explored the interconnection between the themes.

In drafting the survey, we sought to build on Melucci's insight that movements rely on submerged networks (Melucci, 1989). These networks – and the debates and conversations within them – drove SS4C's strategy. SS4C began with a strike in November 2018, then moved into organising training and political lobbying in January 2019. Different students were attracted to different strategies, but many, including the most active, were involved in all three. What we wanted to understand was how planning and executing these different kinds of work taught students to learn different leadership skills and qualities. In particular we wanted to explore the kinds of skills, knowledge and mindset shifts that students developed in each of these spaces.

1. Mobilising people power – learning to lead through strikes

In August 2018, the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg began a protest outside the Swedish Parliament every day for over a month, holding a sign that when translated read 'School Strike for Climate' (Crouch, 2018). Through the radical act of refusing to attend school, Thunberg thought she could raise awareness about the climate crisis (Holmberg & Alvinius, 2020; Pickard et al., 2020). News of the strikes quickly travelled, and school students in the regional Victorian town of Castlemaine decided to organise a student strike on 30 November 2018 (Cox, 2018). What began as a local initiative soon scaled the country, with individual students and a number of

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national climate groups supporting the movement, leading to a walk out of over 15,000 students across Australia.

Over the following 2 years, the Australian movement SS4C organised eight national actions. In doing so it formed a network of regional and local groups across the country, that, at their peak, in September 2019, staged simultaneous national demonstrations of over 300,000 people, featuring many of Australia's major civil society groups (Henriques-Gomes et al., 2019).

Student leaders became part of SS4C through the strikes, but they took different pathways. About 80% of the surveyed students found the movement through a strike, with participation commonly taking one of three different routes. Some just showed up at a strike with no pre-established connection, others made a connection to organisers through social media in the lead up to a strike, and the final group had a friend or adult invite them to a strike. But these dynamics frequently overlapped. The strike, as a moment of public drama, became an anchor for movement connection, conversation and engagement.

Students joined the movement because they were worried about climate change, but more critically, that interest was greatest when it had both emotional and rational qualities (Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). Motivation was connected to scientific evidence and fear. Strikers believed that emotionally and practically that collective action could allow them to be powerful and strategic (Bowman, 2019). As one student described:

> I've always felt significant sympathy towards nature and the environment . . . but it wasn't until I realised the repercussions climate change would have on our survival as humans, and how the government isn't treating climate change like the crisis it is, that I began my activism (respondent 10).

Political agency did not occur simply because of urgent structural conditions but because students believed they needed to make a difference.

The strikes gave rise to a network of submerged activities to deploy the complex logistical tasks required to make the strikes happen. In a digitised adaptation of the meetings organised during New York's Occupy or by the Spanish Indignados, Zoom, Slack, Facebook Messenger and Discord became the new 'Town Squares' of SS4C, and anyone in the country could get involved planning the strikes. From survey respondents, over 70% were involved in digital planning. Beyond planning, most played a role in galvanising turnout and recruitment, with 90% recruiting others and the same number playing a role at the event. As participants, we observed the development of leadership skills overtime by all, irrespective of their identity, social or class difference. There were a variety of pathways to leadership. Some engaged in what might be considered a traditional ladder of engagement – moving from low barrier roles to high barrier activity. Yet others rose in leadership rapidly, taking on challenging tasks despite their apparent newness to action, like police liaison, media or speaking at large strikes.

The strike strategy called for distinctive activity, which generated skill-based learning. Most of the time the learning was a product of making tasks happen, with new skills and insights learnt in the lead up to major strikes. These insights were somewhat circumscribed by the forms of work required to hold a strike. Regardless these skills were new and stimulating, as one student described:

> So much to list, some (not all): how to speak to media, speaking in front of a large crowd, budgeting, submitting permits, legalities, what voices need to be prioritised, outreach, setting up a bank account, what is truly important in friendships, so much more than school has ever taught me (respondent 16).

The new skills were not exclusively task based. They also included enhanced communications skills like how to talk with people who had different perspectives, team building, as well as

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exposure to ideas like climate justice (that is, recognising the intersection of climate change with other justice issues like the rights of First Nations people). For students, they saw these opportunities creating new leadership strengths that stretched from personal skills (like 'I am a better public speaker'), to collective leadership qualities such as planning, mass communication using social media (Boullianne et al., 2020), to even broader mindset shifts where some students believed that they had become a more powerful person.

When asked to explain the kind of activities that helped them learn, most frequently students described peer-to-peer learning. Most commonly, students said that another student would 'walk them through' a task to teach them. Many students referred to a formal program of 'on boarding' where more experienced students were given responsibility to orientate new students to the SS4C movement. Other students described a process of 'learning by doing,' learning from reflecting on mistakes made along the way. When describing the process of learning how to do these logistical skills, students far less frequently identified formal training, reading materials or an adult supporter as a source of support (even though all of those supports existed).

When they were asked to examine the cumulative effect of sustained strike participation, students argued that it changed their sense of themselves as political agents. Many said that being strikers gave them confidence, enhancing their belief in their own capabilities and gaining a better understanding of government, power and politics. This was particularly important, as the students were mostly too young to vote. But more than this, the radical nature of the strike action was about disrupting the system as it is in order to build a society that responded to climate change (Pickard et al., 2020) Finding an alternative form of political influence was particularly important. The strikes themselves were emotional, creating 'feelings of power' for many of the students. The combination of skills and these feelings led students to reappraise their agency. As one described:

> Yes, it made me a lot more comfortable and confident in who I am and I feel like I've learnt a lot, not just skills but also just lots about how the world works generally (respondent 23).

For many, taking action around climate reduced their anxiety about the future. That said, climate action wasn't without its stressors, and some noted that the process of organising the strikes and tensions between different strikers generated its own anxiety.

Mobilising mass-based collective action was a gateway for new people to learn leadership skills, especially those focused on the organisation and deployment of the strike. In turn, these logistical skills transitioned into a reappraisal of students' sense of power in the experience of the strike on the day.

2. **Organising people power through summits and training**

In addition to holding two to three major strikes per year, SS4C also held national summits and convened groups of strikers to participate in training and education sessions about social change strategy. These events were supported by adult movement-building organisations like Tipping Point and the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, where experienced trainers and social movement strategists worked with students to run trainings about movement building and organising, as well as providing an opportunity for face-to-face decision making and relationship building. Within the time period of the survey, the most important Summit was held in Sydney in January 2020, staged under a canopy of smoke from the summer's disastrous bushfires. Most of the students surveyed attended that Summit, and almost all (87%) attended some form of training across the two years between 2018 and 2020.

These training spaces offered a range of opportunities for student leadership development. While attending provided its own form of content-based learning, there were other leadership roles on offer (taken up by 60% of people surveyed). These included helping to plan or organise the training, recruiting people to attend, being a small group leader, playing a role as a trainer, or

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running logistics on the day. In contrast to the strikes and their skill-based learning, students identified that they gained more knowledge-based learning at the trainings. Student leaders played an active role in selecting the content for these events, and most sessions involved student trainers who were provided with support and time to rehearse. They learnt how social movements work and the history of how they organise, about particular strategies for building movements, and about climate justice and intersectionality. These were new useful concepts for almost all the students, as one described 'the focus was on more theoretical work which isn't learnt through organising strikes' (respondent 3).

Organising training provided students with an opportunity to take their practical strike experience and interpret it through the lens of more abstract social change concepts.

During these summits and trainings, keys issues such as accessibility and support became real, for instance the disparities in access to resources for those in major cities compared to rural and regional areas. Discussing and understanding these disparities helped students understand how to can create sustainable activism. These experiences shaped their perception of what climate justice looks like. Additionally, in the trainings terms like power and climate justice could be unpacked, and students immediate experience could be compared with other social movements locally and internationally. Students were able to learn through reflection. In addition to new knowledge, students learnt new skills about how to work together, including in relationship building and conversational skills. Many students argued that the trainings helped them gain perspective on the role they could play in a bigger movement (and indeed the relationship between SS4C and other movements). A majority of students said that it was in these reflective and debriefing spaces – such as in small groups inside of a larger training space – that helped them learn and contemplate new ways of working. That said, there was a wide range in how students evaluated the training. Five of the 30 surveyed students found no value in the training, yet at the other extreme one student declared it 'was one of the best experiences of my life.' Students argued that the best training was highly interactive, presented clear concepts and didn't have too much information. In terms of participation, small group discussion was the most helpful format.

Overall, students identified that the training space helped them learn how to digest and interpret the experience of holding large strikes. They learnt how to work together better and understand the bigger context of the SS4C movement and how it could work to achieve the change it desired. These were important, but different lessons compared to what they learned from the strikes, and different again to what they learnt when they lobbied politicians

3. **People Power that plays by the rules to lobby politicians**

Beyond the strikes and trainings, SS4C sought to actively change the minds of elected political decision makers. Between 2018 and 2020, most of the students (80%) engaged in a lobbying meeting with a politician, and 38% did so more than five times.

These lobbying meetings were educational, teaching students about the political process as well as about themselves. For many, politicians lost their 'sheen' once students began having real life meetings (Hinchliffe, 2021). Many described having negative experiences – seeing the politician as providing only 'lip service', 'controlling the conversation' and 'arrogant'. That said, some students also identified that under the right circumstances, politicians could be allies. The process demystified politics for students. Instead of seeing politicians from the perspective of a field trip to Parliament House in Canberra or a school visit from a local political representative, the strikers saw the cut and thrust of political conflict – like they sometimes watched on television. It helped students understand why politicians were failing to deal with climate change, but also how students could influence politics. Politics became accessible – it 'wasn't as hard as I thought', and through repeated meetings and well-structured debriefs of those meetings, students improved their strategies for 'pinning' decision makers and being assertive.

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Learning in this space came most readily when students were supported and coached by people who had done it before, and when strikers committed to doing multiple lobbying meetings. Many of the students were mentored by experienced adults who helped them prepare for these meetings, others had access to training. But many students argued that the best strategy for learning was 'practice makes you perfect' and the more times that they undertook lobbying meetings, the better they got. Students identified that they provided their peers with far less support when lobbying, compared to when they organised the strikes, noting that this people power strategy didn't lend itself to ad hoc peer-to-peer guidance. That said, some commented that they did help their peers overtime.

When it came to lobbying, the learning was very practical. The very act of 'playing by the rules' and confronting those with power taught students about political life in ways that was very different to how its presented in textbook. They experienced the system of government and explored their own political agency in that system. Yet lobbying was a polarising activity, and a small group of students 'really hated' these meetings because of the confrontation and anxiety involved.

Discussion and conclusion: Leadership development and people power

Between 2018 and 2020, SS4C used three very different strategies to engage people in collective action and exercise political influence. Each of these strategies had the effect of supporting young people to learn how to play stronger leadership roles in the climate movement. Even though the movement has found it difficult to win specific national policy victories (noting some policy wins at a state level), its lasting success was the transformation of the Australian climate movement, that is now larger, more diverse and better connected than it ever has been (Goddard & Myers, 2018).

The SS4C movement came to life using three distinct strategies for building people power – mobilising strikes, organising through training and playing the game to lobby politicians. Our review of student reflections suggests that each of the people power strategies played quite a distinctive role in helping these young leaders learn new ways to lead – mobilising cultivated different leadership qualities compared to organising and playing by the rules. Equally, the pathways that sparked leadership development were equally different (while also complementary) in each strategy

The three different people power strategies helped students engage in different forms of learning. This survey and our own participant observation of the SS4C movement gave us a distinctive vantage point for examining the less visible networks that run underneath this social movement space (Melucci, 1989). We sought to contribute to a gap around questions of leadership and participatory dynamics that is often obscured in the broader movement literature (Bevington & Dixon, 2005), while increasingly observed by those researching climate activism (Nissen et al., 2020; Pickard et al., 2020; Wahlström et al., 2019). Our aim was to identify the most important catalysing processes that led to learning and leadership development across the loose horizontal and fluid participatory networks that categorise SS4C.

We found several different pathways for leadership development, with evidence that the different people power strategies had specific and distinctive strengths. Mobilising the strikes allowed students to learn new skills, anything from meme generation to police liaison. The method of learning was most frequently through unstructured peer-to-peer learning, where someone with a little more experience explained how something was done. This echoes the findings in other climate leadership research that highlights the role of direct social contact in the youth climate movements (Wahlström et al., 2019). Contrast this with the learning in the organising people power space, where organising training helped students learn knowledge about how social movements build power and strategies for success. This required an intentional space, more like a school, where concepts could be explored together. As has been identified elsewhere, these

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concepts were most powerfully interpreted, applied and explored in small group discussion with lots of interaction (Friere, 1972). In these spaces, the students also learnt to take time to relate, connect and strengthen their networks outside of the drama, intensity and often tactical focus required to prepare a strike. Finally, we can also see different forms of learning arising from playing by the rules, where students engaged in experiential learning staged in the halls of power confronting politicians. This was a form of applied learning through their participation in the political system. Meetings were learning moments that could be debriefed, where students could unpack what happened and how it could have been done differently. Across all these strategies, but most particularly in their mobilising work, students said they developed a new mindset over time, with their experience leading them to feel more powerful and capable as a community leader.

These discrete forms of learning emerged in different ways, best understood by adapting Ganz's learning pedagogy of the 'head, heart, hands' (Ganz, 2011). Ganz uses this expression to talk about the full body process of learning, where leadership and transformation is not simply cerebral (head), emotional (heart) or practical (hands) but emerges through the intertwined interaction of all these three practices. In mobilising, the skills-based, learning through doing ('hand') was underpinned by the emotional ('heart') experience of participating in mass demonstrations. The organising training was more cognitive ('head'), where students put the pieces together in their mind about how things worked while interpreting their experience through concepts like power. Organising was also a 'heart' space for engaging in relationships and public narrative. In playing by the rules, lessons emerged from a direct confrontation with power ('hand'); but the learning was not as much in the 'action but in the reaction', when students reflected on what had occurred in debriefs (Graf, 2020). Across the years of student engagement, it was the interconnection of different forms of doing and being that allowed students to grow and develop the range of grounded capacities needed to lead powerful social change.

The different people power strategies had distinctive strengths. Mobilising was a gateway for new students to find and explore pathways for leadership; with students getting involved via social media, direct relationships or by just showing up. It also created a space for people to develop overtime, providing a complex web of skills exchange that helped students become more able to act. Organising helped students interpret the world – it was where strikers could explore how the system worked, to question the role they wanted to play, and imagine how they could do things for themselves. Playing by the rules rooted students in the world as it is, grounding their energy and excitement in the realities of what needed to be changed.

Each of the strategies had limits as well, and SS4C demonstrated that these limits aren't necessarily identified in the literature on community leadership. The fast-paced energy of a strike mobilisation rarely provided enough time for students to consider knowledge questions like a deep understanding of climate justice. Similarly, the pace of organising repeated strikes didn't provide students with much reflective time for them to evaluate whether this tactic was continuing to be sufficently strategic. In this way 'skill learning' would have benefited from more 'knowledge learning' – a quality often overlooked in the mass-based quantitative leadership work (Chenoweth & Stephen, 2011). At the same time, while organising scholars like McAlevey and Han recognise this limitation, they tend to overlook the limits of organising on its own (Han, 2014; McAlevey, 2016). For SS4C, organising and knowledge-based learning was polarising, frustrating some people who wanted to 'do' instead of 'reflect. Organising is more selective in its identification of leaders (McAlevey, 2020). While that has advantages, it also comes with a cost that is not often discussed, which is that it can struggle for scale and size – the kind that is achieved through mobilising large strikes. For playing by the rules to be truly powerful, it requires support. Adult coaches and access to training shaped whether a lobbying meeting was an effective or a negative experience. As the students documented, confronting power without the space to interpret the experience is likely to simply frustrate people, rather that generate learning.

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We found that different people power strategies are complementary in how they support leadership development. Unlike the arguments made against mobilising and for organising (or vice versa) (McAlevey, 2016), overtime SS4C identified that a mobilised movement can embrace organising practices too. There were tensions between these strategies, and arguably in SS4C a mobilising culture was dominant. But when a conscious decision was made to complement the rapid pace of strike action with other people power strategies like organising training, it had positive consequences for the movement.

In the literature on youth climate movements and in the language of young climate activists, there is frequently a call to be radical. Advocates argue that systemic climate crisis and political paralysis requires the radical transformation of the system through radical demands and radical tactics (Pickard et al., 2020). Fifty years ago, at a very different time and place, community organisers also spoke about radicalism. Saul Alinsky's book *Rules for Radicals,* one of the most well-read social change books on the planet (Alinsky, 1971). Alinsky's successor Ed Chambers argued that the one-to-one meeting – the relational meeting – is the most radical thing that an organiser does (Chambers, 2003). By meeting people one to one, face-to-face, and by seeing who they are and exploring their potential to lead, radical leadership development is possible. Chambers argued that radicalism is not always about 'big' demands or protests, but can exist in the radical way that we see each other's potential and support each other's leadership (Tattersall, 2021).

In this article we have looked at the question of leadership at this intimate – radical – level, and asked, what pathways have SS4C used to develop a powerful movement of young leaders. With our team of authors, rich with lived experience in this movement, combined with a detailed survey of leadership engagement and learning across SS4C – we have uncovered a cross-stitching of learning journeys that is more knowable if we distinguish the different forms of people power that generated them. We explored the different learning that arose from mass radical action, intimate organising training and the experience of political lobbying. What we found is that SS4C's great strength is that it has combined a rich variety of people power strategies, which in turn has facilitated learning through 'heads, hands and heart.' With a clear understanding of the very granular and submerged leadership qualities in SS4C we can more clearly see the sources of its leadership and its strength. In turn, we hope these insights support the development of radical leadership in youth climate movements and social movements across the world.

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