Enhancement of Student Leaders

Beth Ross

Intern Project

School Counseling Specialization

Portland State University

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Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted for on-line publication before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. I am the author and take full responsibility for the project’s contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for my professional school counselor skills and demonstrates what I have done to develop and/or assess my actions directed toward serving students and schools. In other words, this is a snapshot if my work at this stage in my career.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the effects of a six-week leadership program on a group of 8th grade peer helpers. The leadership program presented was based on an experiential model where students presented team building games in their classrooms. The hope was that through the experience of using leadership skills with their peers and reflecting on their experiences, self-perception of leadership abilities would increase.

Introduction

“I regard it as the foremost task of education to ensure the survival of these qualities; an enterprising curiosity, an indefatigable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self-denial, and above all, compassion.”

Kurt Hahn

Middle school can be a time of intense questioning of self and insecurity. The middle school years are a time when students are starting to depend more on their peers for support and information rather than their parents and teachers. What a peer says and does can be very influential. When considering my research I wanted to take advantage of this developmental change. Having students lead activities with their peers could have an effect on both parties. Middle school students are also what Erickson (Sigelman & Rider, 2003) would classify as in the identity vs. role confusion stage where they are trying to figure out who they are and what they value. Giving students a chance to stand up and be leaders, to test out what their leadership style is, provides them with the environment to explore their identity.

This program is experiential in that students are given the opportunity to practice their leadership skills and then reflect on the experience. The activity alone is not what makes a program experiential. Reflection is critical to experiential learning. Reflection allows students to process what they have learned. Their new learning can then be implemented in the next
activity. The goal of this project is to find out if self-perceived leadership qualities in middle school students increase as a result of an experiential program.

**Literature Review**

Leadership taught at the middle school level has many advantages. Students in middle school are at a prime age developmentally and socially to acquire leadership skills. Leadership development can foster self-esteem, and help students form positive relationships with their peers, two much desired needs at this age. Leadership development can also enhance sense-of-self as students learn how they relate to others and discover what their strengths are (Meares & Saund, 1993). In addition, at a time when students feel awkward in social situations, helping them to “create a voice” with their peers can foster self-esteem and confidence (Schoel & Radcliffe, 1988). Although students at this age still need guidance from adults, they are seeking independence in decision making. Teaching them leadership skills can empower them in this transition to independence in a positive, healthy way (Gibbs, 2001).

Woyach and Cox (as cited in Boyd, 2000) identified 12 principles that make an effective leadership program. The research that the author is conducting is only a small piece of a larger leadership program within the school but does teach to five of the twelve principles. These are: help youth learn specific knowledge and skills related to leadership; facilitate the development of individual strengths and leadership styles; facilitate self-reflection and processing of learning both individually and cooperatively; involve youth in significant relationships with mentors, positive role models, or other nurturing adults; and involve youth in collaborative experiences, teamwork and networking with peers.

*Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together* (Gibbs, 2001) promotes small learning communities where classrooms are led by students and facilitated by teachers. Active
participation by students is encouraged. Developing social skills, peer groups, community and resiliency are part of the *Tribes* philosophy. Leadership development within a community environment can help foster all of these values. The *Enhancement of Student Leaders* curriculum provides an opportunity to address social skills such as communication, problem solving skills such as flexibility, and sense of self-esteem and power, and being goal directed. Resiliency is defined by Henderson and Milstein (2003) as

…”the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to stress that is inherent in today’s world. (p.7)

Skills that address resiliency such as social competence, problem-solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future are addressed in this curriculum. Providing opportunities for students to be leaders and actively participate enhances the schools protective factors which are seen as essential to the development of resiliency. Missing from today’s schools, says Gibbs (2001), is …the transfer of responsibility to students themselves for their own learning, and a realistic way to help each student develop his or her own unique set of intelligence and gifts, opportunities for students to use inquiry, to construct meaning and apply concepts learned as well as a process to awaken each and every child to the joy of learning. (p. 56)

In this leadership program, students are leaders in their own classroom, contributing to community and cooperation, creating a positive learning environment and learning about themselves as they lead their peers.

Experiential education is a process by which students are exposed to an experience and then reflect on that experience. By itself, the experience is not what is valuable. What is most important is the reflection on that experience. Experiential education involves an ongoing cycle called the action-reflection cycle (Joplin, 1995). It is the responsibility of the counselor to provide the safe space (emotionally, physically and socially) and the structure (the action) within
which this learning happens. The counselor also provides the space for reflection (Joplin, 1995; Proudman, 1995). In this research, after each activity, students will fill out an reflection form that asks them to look at what worked for them and what did not within each activity. The comments will be brought back to the group to be discussed. New learning can then be implemented in the next activity. This process also gives responsibility for learning to the student. Within this process and given this responsibility, the student must also be allowed to fail; protecting them from failure is taking responsibility for the activity away from the student. Value is found in the learning from the activity, the process, not the outcome. At the same time though, students need to feel some type of success to be willing to continue with the program. Setting students up for success is important. Addressing failures as learning opportunities can help reframe a challenging experience into a positive experience.

Joplin (1995) defines several characteristics that distinguish experiential education. The first characteristic is that the course is student-centered versus teacher-centered. Activities need to be geared toward where the student is and go at the pace of the student. In addition, the learning is personal in nature, deciding what the student needs and teaching to those needs versus the impersonal nature of just sharing information. The value is in the process; the goal is not that the student got it “right” but “how” the student got there is the essence of the learning. In experiential education the evaluative piece is both internal and external as the course is evaluated for those on the outside (parents, administrators, etc.) but also internally. The students develop a sense of how to evaluate their own learning so they can become more self-directed and independent. In addition, direct experience is the focus of the learning that takes place in which the perceptions of the student are more important than any theory of knowledge. The emphasis here is on the individual and his/her growth. Although many times there are group components
within the course, the focus is on the individual in relation to the group and how they function within that group.

Within the individual experience each student will encounter a certain level of anxiety. The student is being asked to step outside their comfort zone and use the skills that they have in order to lead an activity. If anxiety is kept at a moderate level, the student will enter the growth zone. Here, the anxiety or stress helps the student to engage and therefore enhances learning. If pushed too far, the student will enter the panic zone and learning in the moment will decrease. Providing opportunities for students to step into the growth zone in a supportive, nurturing environment is one of the benefits of experiential education. Care always needs to be taken to avoid pushing students too far (Cain & Jolliff, 1998; Drebing, Willis & Genet, 1995). In this research, having to present in front of peers can cause anxiety. Having students work in pairs and having the classroom teacher in the room during the activity can act as a “cushion” to prevent anxiety from getting too high. It is the hope of the researcher that a moderate level of anxiety will help the students to step up and perform as leaders in their classroom.

Experiential education also teaches to the developmental level of most students. According Piaget’s theory of development, children in the sensory motor, pre-operational and concrete operational stages of development learn through concrete experiences, by experiencing things. It’s not until the formal operations stage, when children are ages 11 to 14 years of age that they start to think in the abstract and are effective in learning through cognitive constructs. Sakots (1995) suggests that much research has shown that many or even most of the children in the public school system at the middle and high school level are still functioning in the concrete operations stage. These children are not engaging effectively in the book-learning didactic style of the regular classroom. Even if these reports are overstating how many students this includes,
it makes sense for schools to contemplate including more curricula that is hands-on, concrete, and experiential.

Oregon’s Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Framework (2003) is designed to help a counseling program organize around four domains of a students development: Learning to Live (academic), Learning to Work (Career), Learning to Live (Personal/Social) and Learning to Contribute (Community Involvement). The framework provides a foundation to assess those barriers that impede a student’s ability to succeed. There are several ways a program can address issues; district policy, program philosophy, and individual planning are just a few avenues a program can take to reach all students. *Enhancement of Student Leaders* is part of the guidance curriculum component of a counseling program.

Leadership curriculum also addresses Personal/Social domain in the delivery of a comprehensive guidance curriculum. Leadership development in middle school students can help in decision-making, responsibility, interpersonal relations, communications and teamwork. These skills are used not only in the domain of personal/social development but also academic, community and career. Specifically, within the Framework’s Career Related Learning Standards, personal management, problem-solving, communication and teamwork are all addressed.

Leadership is a skill that can enhance student development in a variety of ways. This includes the development of self-confidence, communication, team building, peer relations, developing “a voice” and empowerment. Within the *Tribes* philosophy, actively engaging students in a student lead classroom is an effective way to “teach” to students. In addition, using experiential education empowers students to take responsibility for their own education and puts them into real settings where they have to use the skills they have. Feedback and reflection
allow for learning and growth. It is my hope that through this program, the school will continue with students leading classroom team building activities.

Participants and Procedures

This project worked with students in the peer helper program at ABC School in the 123 School District. The ABC school is a small neighborhood school located in an urban metro area. The 2004-2005 year was the first school year combining middle and elementary levels for the ABC School. The District chose to move the middle school into the elementary school building. There are a total of 451 students at the ABC School. Demographics include 5% Asian, 6% Latino, 11% African American, and 3% Native American students. The gender split is even at 226 males and 225 females. Twenty-nine percent of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Within the middle school (242 students), 12% are special ed. and 3% are ELL.

What is unique about this school is their concentration on environmental awareness and community building. Prior to the schools combining, the middle school was the designated environmental school. Middle school students are involved in weekly field trips to environmental sites and classroom instruction is influenced by environmental concerns and environmental topics. In addition, the school has a substantial service component. Each middle school student is required to accrue a certain number of service points each year. This is done within the school and outside in the community. The ABC school also promotes critical and independent thinking. Students are given many opportunities for leadership within the school and are involved in decision making processes when appropriate. At the middle school level students are placed in core classes that combine 6th, 7th and 8th grade levels. For math and Spanish, students are split into appropriate grade levels. Eight teachers work at the middle school level and collaborate together to provide a united teaching curriculum.
The students chosen for the project were 8th graders involved in the peer helper program. These students had already been singled out for their leadership abilities. Through an application and nomination process, they were chosen as candidates for good leadership within the school. As of the start of the program the students had already been leading weekly classroom meetings. The potential to work with these motivated students seemed a promising endeavor. I decided to focus on leadership abilities with this group using experiential practices. Would using an experiential based curriculum change how these students viewed themselves as leaders?

The program ran for six weeks and consisted of students learning team building games and then leading them in their classrooms with their peers. After each week of presenting a game the students would reflect on their experience and what they had learned. The program required only 30 minutes each week to implement; with an additional 5-10 minutes for each student to fill out the feedback sheet each week. Fifteen minutes was spent each Monday morning during their peer helper meeting teaching the students a team building activity. At this time, students received a handout detailing the activity to help them remember the directions when they presented the activity. Two out of the three games were taken from Tribes (2003) with the exception of the last game which came from the author’s experience. The instructions for the games played can be found in Appendix A. Each individual (“leader”) was paired with another student (“helper”) to provide support and assistance when presenting the activity in class. Teachers were given the freedom to do the game whenever it fit into their weekly schedule. In addition, teachers were asked to remain in their classrooms to observe and supervise. After the activity the students filled out a feedback sheet and handed it in for review (feedback sheet can be found in Appendix B). During the next peer helper meeting the students discussed what went well and what did not go well during their activity. Focused attention was paid to their
leadership experience. Activities were presented every other week with discussions on the even weeks. A total of three games were presented.

Research focused on self-perceived changes in leadership abilities from the beginning to the end of the project as well as feedback given by teachers as they observed the classroom games. Students were asked to rate themselves on a Likert Scale (1-10) on statements that related to leadership qualities. The questions were drawn from Meares and Sanders (1993), Lessons to Enhance Achievement and Develop Student Leaders and California Healthy Kids Survey (2003). Example questions are: Ability to take charge in a group of peers: Do you fell capable of leading a group of peers?; Public Speaking: How comfortable am I speaking in front of large groups? And Versatility: How flexible am I? (Survey can be found in Appendix C).

Prior to the start of the project a Human Subjects Review (HSR) was submitted for both Portland State University and the 123 School District. Each review panel required an overview of the project and submission of forms being used (i.e. consent forms, feedback form, survey). Rights and confidentiality of students were protected by removing all names from the surveys and collecting consent forms from parents, students and teachers. Specific attention was paid to the specifications for each review board as both required different formats and information. Initially, I submitted the same HSR to both panels. 123 School District follows a different format than Portland State University so my paper was sent back without approval. The 123 School District was very helpful in answering questions that I had. After revising my paper according to their rubric with additions of additional information, my proposal was accepted. The review process after submission of my proposal took eight weeks. The Portland State University Human Subjects Review can be found in Appendix E. 123 School District Research Proposal can be found in Appendix F.
Results

Research provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Results from the pre and post surveys provided quantitative data. Change was measured by subtracting post test responses from pre-test responses. Charts for change can be found in Appendix D. Looking at the results it is not surprising, since the project focused on students leading groups of their peers, to see that the most students reported change in response to the question #6, ability to take charge in a group of your peers and #9, ability to run meetings. In addition, more than half the students reported change in question #7, ability to manage time effectively and #4, level of leadership ability. Half the students reported change in question #1, on self confidence, question #2, on clarity in expressing thoughts and question #3, understanding how others feel. At the same time for these same questions #1, #2 and #3 half the students reported no change or negative change.

In terms of either “no change” or “negative change results”, question #5, on versatility and question #8, on public speaking received the most negative or no change responses with 8 students reporting no change or negative change. Question #10, always attempting to do your best also had 7 students report no change or negative change but only 12 students in total answered this question. Reflecting on the student responses it seems that the questions that directly related to the project itself received the most change. Encouragingly, many students also reported an increase in self-confidence, self-perception of leadership ability and better time management.

Qualitative data comes from the reflection sessions that occurred every other week and from teacher feedback. Reflection time was based on two questions, what went well during the leading of the game and what did not go well or what would you have changed for the next time. During one reflective session the students commented on how hard it was to get everyone’s
attention and to keep their attention. The group had an insightful discussion on the different tactics to hold a group’s attention. Different ideas were “talk louder”, “make the game harder”, “talk about why we are doing this” and “cheerleading” or being upbeat when addressing the group. Students were inspired to discover their own style in this leadership skill.

In one classroom presentation the leaders had such a hard time controlling the class that they stopped playing the game, circled the group and processed what was going on. The teacher gave them the space to discuss the group’s dynamics and why the game was not working in the class. After the group processed the experience, they were able to play the game. The whole session took about an hour. The teacher commented that this was a great opportunity for the students and that she was stepping back and letting them lead the discussion. During the reflection on this experience the students expressed pride in controlling the situation and facilitating the discussion and the eventual success of the game.

Students gave feedback that the games were easier for them to lead if the instructions were simple. Game #2 (I Like My Neighbor) was much less complex than game #1 (Electricity) and so was easier for the students to lead. Not wanting the students to be challenged by directions or by complicated instructions, I made sure the last game was as simple as the second game. Having more complicated games may have been possible if the project went longer than six weeks.

Helpful feedback was provided by teachers during the project and afterwards on the feedback forms (Appendix E). During the project teachers would come up to me and tell me how much fun their class had in playing that week’s game. Sometimes they would report that the class played the game for half an hour or more. One teacher appreciated not having to plan for
the activity and that the students seemed well prepared to take control of the class. Positive comments included:

“They seemed to become more aware of the actual skills involved in leadership. They were more than just games”

“It made the kids who lead them think about how to direct a group toward some sort of goal”

“Excellent, fun cooperative [games] – gave the kid a chance to interact in a positive, relaxed way. Lots of laughing”

“I did see the class begin to respond to them [the leaders] in a more respectful, positive way because they appreciated/liked the games. The leaders gained confidence – had to step up to the plate and take charge”

“I heard students say encouraging, inclusive things to students that tend not to actively participate”

“Kids really took leadership and the class loved the games. They talked during the game about strategies with team members”

“It definitely helped the camaraderie and sense of community in the class”

In response to the question: Did you notice any changes in the students who presented the activities, one teacher responded: “Yes, they had a lot more understanding and compassion for teachers. They repeatedly commented on how frustrating non-listeners were”. Another teacher responded “Yes – they became better leaders. They took their jobs seriously and followed through. They had to enforce rules like no talking”. Overall many of the teachers commented on the positive community building and laughing that occurred during the games and that they enjoyed seeing the peer helpers have an impact in this way.

The teachers also provided some insightful constructive criticism. Three teachers commented that they saw no change in the leadership abilities of these students because they were already leaders in their classes. One suggestion was to do this activity with seventh graders who could be possible peer helpers for next year. Other constructive feedback included making the first game logistically easier. “Electricity” can be a hard game to organize in the confined
space of a classroom. The suggestions made could easily be implemented into this curriculum the next time.

Discussion/Limitations

There are several limitations that I would like to address in terms of this research project. The focus of the project was on enhancing students’ self-perception as leaders. Although many of the students did perceive a change in leadership ability, the scope of leadership skills addressed in this project was narrow. Although being able to lead a group of people in an activity can be part of being a leader, it is not all of what a leader does. If I were to use this program with students who were only beginning to develop or had not developed leadership abilities, the program would be more inclusive and longer, discussing broader ideas of being a leader as well as specific skills. This particular group of students was chosen for their leadership abilities in the beginning, so the brevity of the program was appropriate. At one point during a reflection discussion I asked the group what they thought being a leader in the community meant to them. The general theme of responses was that a leader is someone who is a good role model, has integrity and high morals. More discussion of this topic could have been valuable. For me it is important to recognize the limited scope of the research and to not misrepresent what being a leader involves.

In addition, out of 28 peer helpers only 14 were able to be completely involved in the research project. Twenty out of 28 students returned their consent forms. Only 14 of those 20 had both pre and post test data. Additional data from the missing students, particularly the ones that had consent forms but had not completed surveys, may have added depth to the data analysis.
Another limitation in this project was the demographics of the students. There was very little diversity within the group of students with only one Asian American student and one African American student. Although I could not have changed this for my project (the peer helpers had already been chosen), I found this good information to reflect on and possibly change for the next time. More representation of diverse groups would help the peer helpers to connect with a variety of students.

Lastly, the changes in the students’ responses on the survey may not be a direct result of the program itself. Many things can change in a middle school-age student over the course of six weeks, even day-to-day, that may leave them feeling either more positive or more negative about themselves. For example, at this time the students were also giving their 8th grade speeches to the entire middle school class. These speeches were given just before our sessions together. As I look at the survey answers I see that over half the peer helpers had no change in their self-perceived ability to speak in front of large groups. I realize that their 8th grade speeches probably made more of an impact on this question than anything I did in the program. To say that the answers were directly affected by my program would be misleading. Although the surveys are informative, teacher feedback and student comments throughout the program and at the end are more directly related to the effect of the curriculum.

Conclusion

I enjoyed working with students in this capacity. I feel the project was most successful because the students were engaged in having fun. Their investment came from wanting to lead fun activities in class. They were asked to step up and take charge in the classroom in a way that was non-threatening and relaxed. The students in the classroom were cooperative, for the most
part, because they wanted to have fun as well. The teachers appreciated it because they did not have to organize the students or lead the group. They were also given tools they could use again.

In the school I worked in these students were already leaders in their classes and throughout the school. This group of students has the potential to affect the school community in a powerful way. Helping to give them direction and skills to be role models can empower them to be positive leaders in their school community. Without direction there is the possibility that students will choose to lead in negative ways.

Reflecting on the experience, I think peer helpers can be a valuable asset to the school in many ways. Peer helpers can help build community as they did in this project. They can also help to address issues of bullying, gossiping and relational aggression. Many schools face these issues. Peer helpers can be role models of non-bullying behaviors and help redirect or stop bullying behavior. Within the ABC School bullying and relational aggression issues did exist. Although addressing these issues calls for a comprehensive plan, peer helpers can be a useful tool as part of that plan. Knowing how powerful and effective peer helpers can be, I am excited to implement changes in the program to make it better and continue to use Enhancement of Student Leaders to help future middle schooler’s develop the leader within.
Appendix A

Enhancement of Student Leaders
April 2005

Peer Helper Game #1
Electricity

Directions (or Briefing phase)
1. Get everyone's attention.
2. Tell them that the Peer Helpers are starting a new leadership curriculum where you are facilitating games in the classroom every other week. This is the first week of games.
3. Introduce the game
4. Tell them the logistics: need to make a space for two lines to sit on the floor back-to-back. You should be directive with this part.
5. Get everyone into two straight lines with each person's back touching another person's back from the opposite team. Each person needs to hold hands with the person next to them. The game is more fun if you lean gently against the person who is opposite you on the other team.
6. From the flip of a coin decide if the squeeze is going to start on "heads" or "tails". Ex. Coin will be flipped, if heads then the squeeze will start with the first person. The squeeze is passed down the line from person to person.
7. When the team member at the end gets the squeeze, they pick up the object at the end and raise it in the air.
8. Whoever raises their hand first gets up and goes to the beginning of the line.
9. The team that wins is the team whose #1 person arrives back at their original spot first.

Play the Game

Debriefing (questions to ask at the end)

what made this game fun/not fun?
what could make your team go faster?
what did your team do well?
Directions:

1. Have class seated in chairs in a big, even circle.
2. Make sure that there is one less chair than there are people. The person in the middle is “it”.
3. The person in the middle makes a statement like “I like my neighbors, especially those who are wearing running shoes” (can use: have a birthday in April, play a sport, are 14 etc.). All those people who the statement applies to must get up and find another seat. The person who is left in the middle is the new “it” person. They then make a new statement with “I like my neighbors…."
4. Risk with this game is people getting out of hand and pushing. Remind students that the game will stop if people are pushing and getting out of hand. One option is to have students keep their hands behind their backs.

Some debriefing questions:
What was fun about this game?
How was it different than the last game?
Is there anything we can do to make it better the next time?
Peer Helper Game #3
Jedi Mind Trick

1. Have everyone seated in chairs in a circle
2. Make sure there is one less chair than there are people
3. The goal of the people in the chairs is to switch seats with someone else, not next to them, without the person in the middle knowing.
4. The person in the middle tries to catch someone out of their seat and take that seat.
5. Players cannot talk to each other. They have to use subtle eye and body language to communicate their desire to switch with someone
6. Players cannot just vacate chairs hoping that someone else will be doing the same thing at the same time. They need to have “communicated” using “jedi-powers”.
7. When person in the middle gets a seat there is a new person “it”.

Debriefing questions:
How was this game different than the last game in terms of playing (besides the rules!)
How well did communicating without talking work?
How did people communicate without talking?
Appendix B

Peer Helper Debriefing Worksheet

Please fill out within 24 hours of facilitating the game and hand in to Beth or Kathy in the counseling office. If you wait too much longer, you may not remember what went well and what did not go as well as clearly.

Name_________________________________________________

What went well in the facilitation of the game?

What did not go well in the facilitation of the game?

What would you do differently next time?
Appendix C

Student Survey

Name_____________________________    Date________

This inventory is designed to help student leaders look at how they perceive themselves as leaders in their community. It is a survey of qualities that impact on leadership style.

Please answer these questions honestly and thoughtfully. There are no right or wrong answers to your questions. Only Beth and your counselor will be able to identify how individuals answered. Your survey will be given a numeric identification and your name will be removed. Feel free to skip any question you do not want to answer.

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2. Clarity in expressing my thoughts - How well do I express myself?

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3. Understanding - How well do I try to understand how others feel?

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4. Level of leadership ability: How much potential do I have?

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5. Versatility - How flexible am I?

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6. Ability to take charge in a group of your peers: Do I feel capable of leading a group of my peers?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A lot of ability</td>
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7. Ability to manage your time effectively - How well do I manage my time?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unable to manage time</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Great ability to manage time</td>
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8. Public Speaking: How comfortable am I speaking in front of large groups?

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very uncomfortable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
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9. Ability to run meetings: How well do I run meetings?

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not very well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very well</td>
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10. Attempt to do your best: Do you try to do your best?

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for taking the time to do this survey! Your honest answers are much appreciated!

Surveys adapted from: Meares & Saunders, Lessons to Enhance Achievement and Develop Student Leaders, 1993 and California Healthy Kids Survey, 2003
Teacher Feedback Form

Hello Middle School Teachers!
Thank you for your participation in my leadership project! Since the program has now ended, I am in the process of gathering some feedback to present in my action research paper. Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions. All comments are welcome! Participation in this is optional.
Please put your filled out sheet into the counselor’s box.

How did these activities benefit/not benefit your class?

Did you see any changes in the students who presented the activities?

Would you like to see it done again?

Additional comments:
Appendix F

Human Subjects Research Committee
Portland State University
Application Proposal

I. Project Title and Prospectus: Enhancement of Student Leaders
ABC is a school where students are encouraged to be leaders and to actively participate in the development of community. Part of the vision of the school is to have students “contribute to a positive school climate that supports social, physical, developmental and academic needs of all members”.

Peer helpers at ABC are especially encouraged to take on leadership roles as they are representative of the student body as a whole. One of the tasks of peer helpers is to run class meetings each week on Wednesday mornings. To encourage even more community building and provide an opportunity to practice leading a group of peers, I am going to implement a program of Enhancement of Student Leaders. This program involves teaching the peer helpers team building activities during their meetings. Peer helper members will act as participants during this time. Activities will be led by myself Beth Ross, counseling intern. Students will then lead these activities themselves with their classmates later in the week during their class meetings or whenever their teachers deem appropriate.

Significance
Leadership taught at the middle school level has many advantages. Students in middle school are at a prime age developmentally and socially to acquire leadership skills. Leadership development can foster self-esteem, and help students form positive relationships with their peers, two much desired needs at this age. Leadership development can also enhance sense-of-self as students learn how they relate to others and what their strengths are (Meares & Sauber, 1993). At a time when students feel awkward in social situations, helping them to “create a voice” with their peers can foster self-esteem and confidence (Schoel & Radcliffe, 1988). Students are also seeking independence in making their own decisions although still need the guidance of adults. Teaching them leadership skills can empower them in this transition to independence in a positive, healthy way (Gibbs, 2001)

Experiential education is a process by which students are exposed to an experience and then reflect on that experience. By itself, the experience is not what is valuable but the reflection on that experience that is. Experiential education involves an ongoing cycle called the action-reflection cycle (Joplin, 1995). It is the responsibility of the educator (or counselor) to provide the safe space (emotionally, physically and socially) and the structure (the action) within which this learning happens. The educator (counselor) also provides the space for reflection (Joplin, 1995; Proudman, 1995) In this research, after each activity, students will fill out an reflection form that asks them to look at what worked for them and what did not within each activity. The comments will be brought back to the group to be discussed. New learning can then be implemented in the next activity. This process also gives responsibility for learning to the student.
Research Design
Quantitative data will be collected as pre-test and post-test results are compared. Data will be analyzed for changes in perceptions of self as a leader. In addition, space will be left at the end of the post-test for additional comments to be made by students. This qualitative data will be used to support quantitative data collected. I realize that not having a control group introduces weaknesses into the research. By providing a space for qualitative feedback, it is my hope that this will strengthen the quantitative data. In addition, qualitative feedback from teachers will also be gathered after the program for additional evaluation.

Hypothesis
The purpose of the research is to identify if exposure to leading a group of peers and practicing leadership skills changes individual perceptions of leadership abilities. The desired outcome or hypothesis in this research is that through experiential learning and direct application of leadership skills by students to peers, perceptions of self as a leader will be enhanced. Through experience and reflection upon experience, students will grow as leaders and begin to form their own sense of self as a leader.

II. Expedited Review
Researcher is requesting an Expedited Review. Surveys will be used to collect data on changes in leadership perception of students and teacher comments. Confidentiality will be used in all data collection.

III. Subject Recruitment
The subjects of this action research are preselected as they are peer helpers at ABC School. The group involves 6th, 7th and 8th grade students, male and female of varying ethnic backgrounds, predominantly white. The group is made up of about 20-25 students.

IV. Informed Consent:
Informed consent will be received in written format from parents/guardians and students before the onset of the research. Please see consent form in appendix. All communications with parents will be on ABC/123 School letterhead. Consent will also be provided from the teachers whose classes will be involved in the research project (see appendix)

V. First Person Scenario
“I was told by my counselor and her intern that I would be doing some team building activities with my classmates during our class meetings on Wednesdays. I received an informed consent form from the counseling intern asking me to be part of a research project that would measure my perceptions of myself as a leader. I took the letter home, had my parent sign it and signed it myself. At the next peer helper meeting I filled out a survey that measured my self perception as a leader. I was told that I would be taking the survey again after we were done.”
VI. **Potential Risks and Safeguards**
Steps will be taken to ensure that all participants names will be kept confidential.

Parents may be inconvenienced by having to fill out paperwork in order for their student to participate.

Student reflection during survey may lead them to believe that they not good leaders. Helping to protect the self-concept of each student is of upmost importance to this project. During the selection process for the peer helper program at the beginning of the school year, the students were told that they were selected for their natural leadership abilities. This curriculum is designed to work with those who are already leaders but would like to grow in this capacity. Both myself and the school counselor will be monitoring the surveys. If it appears that a student’s perception-of-self as a leader is poor or is declining, we will address the issue with that student. Additionally, before giving the survey students will be reminded why they were chosen for this group and that this is an opportunity for them to grow and learn as leaders.

VII. **Potential Benefits**
Potential benefits include increased confidence for leadership students in working with groups of peers. In addition, students may increase own personal knowledge of how they are the most effective leaders when it comes to small and large group facilitation. Knowledge of general leadership may be gained. The community learning environment within the classroom may be enhanced due to increased teamwork.

VIII. **Records and Distribution**
All information will be kept in file in a locked and secured area in the ABC School counseling office. Access to these files is only given to counseling staff and administrators. Data will be kept for three years after the completion of the study. All subjects will be given numerical codes that will replace their name after taking the pre and post surveys.

IX. **Appendix**
Parent/Guardian and Student Consent Form
Student survey (Appendix C)
Teacher consent form
Teacher feedback form (Appendix E)
Dear Parents and Guardians,

Hello! My name is Beth Ross and I am a counseling intern from Portland State University. I will be working with the counselor for the rest of the school year, 3 days a week. I am in the second a final year of my program and am very excited about this opportunity I have at ABC School.

As part of my requirements to become licensed as a school counselor I will be conducting an action research project. My project is on Enhancement of Student Leaders. I will be working with peer helpers bringing team building activities into the classroom. Activities will be taught to peer helpers during their meetings and presented to their core classes on Wednesdays during class meetings. Each activity will take fifteen minutes to conduct. The entire project will last 6 weeks and will start just after spring break.

In order to conduct research on this project I am going to be conducting a survey, at both the beginning and the end. The survey is a self-assessment of leadership qualities. It is my hope that the answers to the questions will be affected by the students’ taking a leadership role in these activities. Participation in this survey is voluntary and there will be no repercussions if your student chooses not to do the survey. Also, your student may withdraw participation in the survey at any time. Students’ names will remain confidential and will not be identified on any reports or publications. All surveys will be kept in a lock, secured area in the counseling office.

Included are two forms for consent. In order for your child to be part of the research, I need for you to sign the permission slip below and have your child return one copy to me as soon as possible. Please keep the other for your records. I appreciate your help. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at ABC (XXX)XXX-XXXX. In addition, further questions can be directed to the Human Subjects Research and Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University. (503)725 - 4288. I look forward to working with your child.

Sincerely,

Beth Ross
Student Name:

______Yes, I agree to allow my child to be part the research on Enhancement of Student Leaders as part of an action research project conducted by Beth Ross.

______No, I do not wish my child to participate in the action research project.

________________________________    _________________
Parent or Guardian Signature      Date

Student Consent

My parent(s) (guardian) have given permission for me to participate in a project on Enhancement of Student Leaders. If I choose to participate I will be asked to do a pre-assessment, activity assessments and a post assessment. Being part of the survey is voluntary and I understand that there will be no repercussions if I do not take the survey. If I have any questions, I can direct them to my counselor or Beth Ross, counseling intern.

By signing below, I am choosing to try to participate. If I choose not to, I will let Beth or my counselor know.

________________________________________________________________________
Student Signature       Date
Dear Teachers,

As you know I have been working with the counselor as a counseling intern from Portland State University since the beginning of the school year.

As part of my requirements to become licensed as a school counselor I will be conducting an action research project. My project is on Enhancement of Student Leaders. I will be working with peer helpers bringing team building activities into the classroom. Activities will be taught to peer helpers during their meetings and presented to their core classes on Wednesdays during class meetings. Each activity will take fifteen minutes to conduct. The entire project will last 6 weeks and will start just after spring break.

In order to conduct research on this project I am going to be conducting a survey, at both the beginning and the end. The survey is a self-assessment of leadership qualities. It is my hope that the answers to the questions will be affected by the students’ taking a leadership role in these activities. Participation in this survey is voluntary and there will be no repercussions if your student chooses not to do the survey. Also, your student may withdraw participation in the survey at any time. Students’ names will remain confidential and will not be identified on any reports or publications. All surveys will be kept in a lock, secured area in the counseling office and help for three years.

As part of my research I would be interested in any feedback you have on how the program went and if you saw any changes in your students. For those who choose to participate, I will put a feedback form in your box at the beginning of the program and at the end so that you can write any feedback you may have about the program. Participating in giving feedback is optional and you can withdraw at any time. Your responses may be included in my research but your names will be held confidential. All feedback forms will be kept in a locked and secured area in the counseling office.
By signing below, you agree to participate in the research. At the same time, you may at any time decide that you do not want to participate. Please sign one copy and give it to myself or the counselor. Please keep the other for your records. If you have any questions, feel free to contact myself or the counselor. In addition, further questions can be directed to Human Subjects Research and Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University. (503)725 - 4288.

I look forward to working with you and your students!

Sincerely,

Beth Ross

Teacher Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
Appendix G

Human Subjects Research Committee/ ABC School in the 123 School District  
Application Proposal: Enhancement of Student Leaders  
Beth Ross

ABC is a school where students are encouraged to be leaders and to actively participate in the development of community. Part of the vision of the school is to have students “contribute to a positive school climate that supports social, physical, developmental and academic needs of all members”.

Scope
Peer helpers at ABC School are especially encouraged to take on leadership roles as they are representative of the student body as a whole. One of the tasks of peer helpers is to run class meetings each week on Wednesday mornings. To encourage even more community building and provide an opportunity to practice leading a group of peers, I am going to implement a program of Enhancement of Student Leaders. This program involves teaching the peer helpers team building activities during their meetings. Peer helpers will act as participants during this time. Activities will be led by myself Beth Ross, counseling intern. Students will then lead these activities themselves with their classmates later in the week during their class meetings or whenever the teacher deems appropriate.

This program will run six weeks and require only 30 minutes each week to implement; with an additional 10-15 minutes for each student to fill out the feedback sheet each week. 15 minutes will be spent each Monday morning during their Peer Helper meeting time teaching the students a new team building activity. Students will receive a handout detailing the activity to remind themselves of instructions while running the activity. Each individual will be paired with another student to provide support and assistance. Each Wednesday, the students will lead the activity with their classmates. Teachers will remain in the classroom to supervise. After the activity the students will fill out the feedback sheet and hand it in to me for review. During the next peer helper meeting issues raised on the sheets will be discussed and suggestions for the next week’s activity made. Activities will be presented every other week with discussions on the even weeks. A total of three games will be presented.

Significance
Leadership taught at the middle school level has many advantages. Students in middle school are at a prime age developmentally and socially to acquire leadership skills. Leadership development can foster self-esteem, and help students form positive relationships with their peers, two much desired needs at this age. Leadership development can also enhance sense-of-self as students learn how they relate to others and what their strengths are (Meares & Saunder, 1993). At a time when students feel awkward in social situations, helping them to
“create a voice” with their peers can foster self-esteem and confidence (Schoel & Radcliffe, 1988). Students are also seeking independence in making their own decisions although still need the guidance of adults. Teaching them leadership skills can empower them in this transition to independence in a positive, healthy way (Gibbs, 2001)

Experiential education is a process by which students are exposed to an experience and then reflect on that experience. By itself, the experience is not what is valuable but the reflection on that experience that is. Experiential education involves an ongoing cycle called the action-reflection cycle (Joplin, 1995). It is the responsibility of the educator (or counselor) to provide the safe space (emotionally, physically and socially) and the structure (the action) within which this learning happens. The educator (counselor) also provides the space for reflection (Joplin, 1995; Proudman, 1995) In this research, after each activity, students will fill out an reflection form that asks them to look at what worked for them and what did not within each activity. The comments will be brought back to the group to be discussed. New learning can then be implemented in the next activity. This process also gives responsibility for learning to the student.

Data Requirements and Collection

Quantitative data will be collected as pre-test and post-test results are compared. Surveys will be given prior to the start of the curriculum and after the sixth week of activities. Data will be analyzed for changes in perceptions of self as a leader. Numerical changes in student’s perceptions of selves will be compared. In addition, space will be left at the end of the post-test for additional comments to be made by students. This qualitative data will be used to support quantitative data collected. I realize that not having a control group introduces weaknesses into the research. By providing a space for qualitative feedback, it is my hope that this will strengthen the quantitative data.

Teachers will be given a feedback form at the end of the sixth week that includes qualitative data on their perception of the activities and their students running their activities. Qualitative data will be expressed in the research paper.

Hypothesis

The purpose of the research is to identify if exposure to leading a group of peers and practicing leadership skills changes individual perceptions of leadership abilities. The desired outcome or hypothesis in this research is that through experiential learning and direct application of leadership skills by students to peers, perceptions of self as a leader will be enhanced. Through experience and reflection upon experience, students will grow as leaders and begin to form their own sense of self as a leader.
Subject Recruitment
The subjects of this action research are pre-selected as they are members of the peer helper program at ABC School. The group involves 6th, 7th and 8th grade students, male and female of varying ethnic backgrounds, predominantly white. The group is made up of about 20-25 students.

Informed Consent:
Informed consent will be received in written format from parents/guardians and students before the onset of the research. Please see consent form in appendix. All communications with parents will be on ABC/123 School letterhead. Consent will also be provided from the teachers whose classes will be involved in the research project (see appendix).

Potential Risks and Safeguards
Steps will be taken to ensure that all participant’s names will be kept confidential. Parents may be inconvenienced by having to fill out paperwork in order for their student to participate. Student reflection during survey may lead them to believe that they not good leaders. Helping to protect the self-concept of each student is of utmost importance to this project. During the selection process for the peer helper program at the beginning of the school year, the students were told that they were selected for their natural leadership abilities. This curriculum is designed to work with those who are already leaders but would like to grow in this capacity. Both the counselor and I will be monitoring the surveys. If it appears that a student’s perception-of-self as a leader is poor or is declining, we will address the issue with that student. Additionally, before giving the survey students will be reminded why they were chosen for this group and that this is an opportunity for them to grow and learn as leaders.

Potential Benefits
Potential benefits include increased confidence for leadership students in working with groups of peers. In addition, students may increase own personal knowledge of how they are the most effective leaders when it comes to small and large group facilitation. Knowledge of general leadership may be gained. The community learning environment within the classroom may be enhanced due to increased teamwork.

Records and Distribution
All information will be kept in file in a locked and secured area in the ABC School counseling office. Access to these files is only given to counseling staff and administrators. Data will be kept for three years after the completion of the study. All subjects will be given numerical codes that will replace their name after taking the pre and post surveys.
Appendix

Parent/Guardian and Student Consent Form (As seen in PSU Human Subjects Review)
Student survey (Appendix C)
Teacher consent form (As seen in PSU Human Subjects Review)
Teacher feedback form (Appendix E)
References


