Student Leadership Development Through General Classroom Activities

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Student leadership enhancement involves giving students opportunities to practice leadership skills in a supportive learning environment. It is contended that leadership can be systematically developed so that students are more proficient in: project planning; reflection; problem solving; team building; decision making; goal setting; time management; project management and resource allocation; effective communication and networking; conflict resolution; diversity awareness; and self-confidence. These 12 skills are also linked to the four academic enabling skills of: interpersonal relationships; motivation; study skills; and engagement. Using this framework it is argued that student leadership can be embedded within the school curriculum. Two sample lessons illustrate this procedure, which is being introduced into a Brisbane high school. Some feedback from participating teachers is outlined.

Leadership in education

Educational leadership is most often associated with the role of the school administration team, however, leadership roles can be enacted by all stakeholders within the school community, including the student population (Levin, 1998; Wallin, 2003). Student leadership enhancement involves giving students opportunities to practice a range of leadership skills in a supportive, learning and social environment where "successes" and "errors" are processed and reviewed (Bisland, 2004). Leadership is a behaviour that involves working with others and on tasks. This is based on the perspective that a leader is a person who is able to communicate well, engage in critical thinking, lead groups in problem solving and planning, and able to structure goals and objectives for the group (Feldhausen & Pleiss, 1994). To some extent, many students will have the experience of having a leadership role in their daily lives through interactions with families, peers, and community organisations.

Positive student leadership opportunities and experiences at school facilitate young adults' transition into the community and into the world of work and adult responsibility. This is because leadership is considered to be a part of life long learning and a multidimensional construct involving skills, attitudes, knowledge, experiences, and processes (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Drago-Severson, 2004). Similar to self-concept formation, an individual's leadership formation can be inferred and developed with feedback from significant others and from self-reviews (Hay, 2000). Leadership is both an outcome of and an action on behaviour, but the major influence on leadership is from personal experiences and self-evaluations. Both of these are used by individuals to achieve new levels of personal leadership (Boccia & Ackerman, 1997; Feldhausen & Pleiss, 1994).

Key student leadership skills

Leadership is a multifaceted construct involving a range of interrelated interpersonal and cognitive skills. Twelve student leadership skills have been identified based, in part, on the work of Drago-Severson (2004), Irvin and White (2004), and Wallim (2003). These skills are listed in Table 1 along with an example of each.

Table 1

Key leadership skills and an example of each

LEADERSHIP SKILL	CONCEPT	SCHOOL EXAMPLE
Project planning	Looking at the whole task, breaking it down into its system parts, allocating resources, and setting a time line.	Planning to put on a school musical
Reflection	Considering after the task the positives and negatives of the outcome and what to change.	Understanding how to rewrite an essay
Problem solving	A process involving problem identification, data collection, strategy selection, strategy implementation and review.	Working out a way to deal with school bullying.
Team building	A process involving goal setting, skilling of members, and communication.	Developing a school hockey team
Decision making	Resolving on one plan of action. Involves identifying the pros and cons of making a choice, evaluating the evidence, getting closure and selecting one option.	Students selecting subjects to study in Year 11.
Goal setting	Selecting measurable, defined and observable short term and long term goals and objectives.	Complete assignment by Monday
Time management	Seeing time as a scarce and limited resource that is prioritised and located. Involves considering the different parts of a task and how long it will take to complete.	Allocating time for homework, sport, and TV
Project management resource allocation	Fine tuning resource allocation especially effort and time over the duration of the task. Is dependent on feedback and rate of progress.	Writing a large term assignment
Effective communication networking	Using writing and speaking skills to keep people informed. Involves listening to people and valuing what they say. Networking is deciding who needs to know and how to keep them involved.	Maintaining a school newspaper
Conflict resolution	Having a process to deal with different opinions. Initially clarifying the issue, seeing the other person's perspective, identifying common ground, identify what can be changed and what can not, being rational, using a problem solving approach.	Dealing with friend angry over a lost football.
Diversity awareness	Respecting different points of views and tolerating differences associated with gender, age, cultural, social economic background, ethnic, race, and sexual orientation.	Being aware than different people like different foods
Self-confidence	Believing in one's ability, accepting challenges, being aware of one's limitations but not letting this limit choice and behaviour.	Stating an opinion in a large group

Facilitating student leadership

Often when teachers consider facilitating students' leadership development the focus is more on experiential learning and extra-curriculum activities, for example outward bound programs, school plays, or membership of sporting teams. While experiential learning has a history of fostering leadership (Lockhart & Hay, 1995) teachers may underestimate the importance of embedding student leadership development into their regular lessons. Students should be able to acquire leadership skills and knowledge through activities that complement their existing curriculum and so not require a separate student leadership curriculum (Bisland, 2004; Karnes & Stephens, 1999).

Although the main leadership skills to be developed with students often include planning, problem solving, and the ability to think critically (Bisland, 2004) all of the 12 leadership skills, listed in Table 1, need to be considered over a period of time. Furthermore, because leadership is a construct that can be learnt and practiced, Elliott's (2003) four learning components help teachers conceptualise the design of leadership related activities. Elliott's four academic components are interpersonal relationships; motivation; engagement; and study skills, which we prefer to call learning skills (see Table 2).

Table 2

Elliott's (2003) academic enabling skills linked to leadership skills

ENABLING SKILLS	LEADERSHIP SKILLS
Interpersonal skills	Social skills and interpersonal skills of the leader
Motivation	Student's approach, persistence, and level of interest with a task or subject
Study (Learning) skills	Learning skills that enable the student to independently practice, recall, plan, review, and organise information
Engagement skills	Time on task, attention and participation in the learning

Embedded leadership and sample lessons

The argument we put forward is that students should be given opportunities to practice leadership skills that are integrated within the regular curriculum (Bisland, 2004; Feldhausen & Pleiss, 1994). Two curriculum lesson plans are included here to illustrate this process. These were used when the procedure of embedding leadership classroom lessons was introduced to teachers at a Brisbane high school. The participating teachers were encouraged to consider the 12 leadership skills and the 4 academic enablers when designing classroom lessons or activities for their students.

Referring to the two sample lessons (see appendix), in Lesson 1 the main embedded leadership skills are planning and reflection, while in Lesson 2 the main skills are team building and conflict resolution. Both of these lessons contain elements of discussion, reviewing, and feedback. The assertion is that supportive feedback helps to energise and improve students' understanding of the task (Ashman & Conway, 1997). Verbalisation and reflection have also been shown to increase students' level of self-confidence and problem solving abilities (Hay, Byrne, & Butler, 2000).

Teacher's feedback

Initial feedback from the high school teachers using the embedded student leadership procedure has been positive. The teachers have found the leadership skills (Table 1) and the academic enablers (Table 2) a useful template and framework. As one of the teachers noted, this procedure provides for all of her students to participate in leadership roles, rather than just those able to access extra-curriculum activities, or those in designated school leadership roles, such as class captain. Another teacher reported that the focus on leadership as an integrated skill had assisted her to re-conceptualise how she taught some of her content and why she was teaching that content. A third teacher reported that he felt that the embedded leadership procedure had highlighted for him the need to perceive his students as young people, who would need leadership skills to cope with life's challenges.

Conclusion

Facilitating students' leadership development directly and indirectly helps communities, societies, families, and industries that these future adults will inhabit. Student leadership has to be nurtured and should be a goal of a progressive education system. The expectation is that teachers and parents can build a foundation for student leadership that is skills based and complementary to the existing preschool, primary, and secondary school curriculum by using a range of embedded classroom leadership experiences.

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Appendix 1

Sample Lesson / Activity Plan 1

Details student leadership domain: planning, reflection		
Class: Year 9-10	Topic: Surveys	
Objectives:		**Academic Enabler**
Provide students with the opportunity: • to collect, interpret and present information about controversial topics • to increase awareness of current topics and to convert information into a display • to practice skills associated with leadership - planning, refection, and problem solving		Engagement Study Skills (independent learning) Interpersonal Relationships Motivation
Resources:		**D.O.L**
▪ Tape recorders and blank tapes if recording ▪ Paper and pencils ▪ Samples of surveys		Attitude & Perceptions Acquiring & Integrating Knowledge Extending & Refining Knowledge Using Knowledge meaningfully
Sequence / Process: (Teaching strategy)		
1. Discuss the meaning of surveys and polls:- why and how they are conducted. 2. Review example of surveys to consider topics investigated and the kinds of questions asked. 3. Students write down the plan and steps they would use to conduct a survey. 4. Review the steps used in conducting the survey by comparing responses 5. Have the students reflect on some of the problems associated with designing and conducting a survey. 6. Students to select a topic they wish to investigate. 7. Discuss issue of bias in questioning and sampling and why this is a problem. 8. Design five yes no responses and five open ended questions 9. Reflect on what they expect will be the difference in terms of responses writing down. 10. Have students consider how it will be conducted, with who, when, where, and how. 11. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of having the student collect the information and the advantages and disadvantages of tape recording or writing down responses. 12. Students review their individual plans and steps for conducting a survey. 13. Conduct the survey 14. Review problems and how the different students resolved the problems when doing the survey.		

15. When students found there was a problem why did some keep going and what were the consequences.
16. Consider how to display the results, compare different methods
17. Convert responses to %
18. Think about how to handle open ended responses and how to organise information.
19. Students review their plan and steps for conducting surveys.
20. Do presentation to class/group about survey results.
21. Students reflect in their own words what have learnt about designing surveys, what would they do differently, what have you learnt about asking people questions, how has it affected your confidence with writing, talking, designing and reviewing plans.

Leadership Focus:
Planning, Reflection, Problem Solving, and Project Management

Extension Activities:
Results can be written up as an article in a school or community paper.
Repeat the survey working from the student's plans and reviewing plans in the light of responses.

ICTs Components

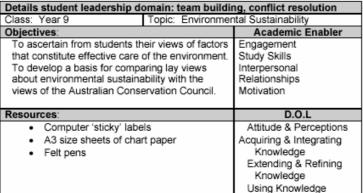IT: use Excel for data and power point for display

Other Notes:
Some students can be less verbal and others need to be encouraged not to talk for them. Consider working in pairs and reporting in a smaller group, use round the group responses. Focus on the notion that there are no right or wrong answers, everyone should respond and verbalise. Verbalisation is the pathway to memory storage, reviewing, confidence, behaviour and attitude change. It is the revisiting of the steps in the plan that is the issue, not that there is a right or wrong plan. A change is the number of steps in a plan is expected as the student becomes more expert with the task and has more independent control with the task.

Evaluation: (Outcomes)

Evaluate how the plans have changed over time (deep thinking)	Timing:	Appropriate Too Long Too Short
Consider final display for evaluation	Difficulty:	Appropriate Too Easy Too Hard
Review the changes in conducting surveys the second time.	Response:	High Medium Low

Appendix 2

Lesson / Activity Plan -2

Details student leadership domain: team building, conflict resolution

Class: Year 9	Topic: Environmental Sustainability

Objectives:	Academic Enabler
To ascertain from students their views of factors that constitute effective care of the environment. To develop a basis for comparing lay views about environmental sustainability with the views of the Australian Conservation Council.	Engagement Study Skills Interpersonal Relationships Motivation

Resources:	D.O.L
• Computer 'sticky' labels • A3 size sheets of chart paper • Felt pens	Attitude & Perceptions Acquiring & Integrating Knowledge Extending & Refining Knowledge Using Knowledge meaningfully

Sequence / Process: (Teaching strategy)

- Introduce the strategy by its title to the class indicating the purpose of the lesson, namely, to have the students identify factors, which they believe are important in environmental care by using a 'Pyramid Strategy'.
- Hand out three computer 'sticky' labels to every student and ask them to write three separate answers to the following question – one on each label (clearly and legibly using only a few words).

What should people be doing if they are to play their part in taking care of the earth's environment?

- Allow about five minutes for silent work by each individual. Emphasise where necessary, the need for the three separate responses to be individual work – no conversations should be allowed to ensure all have a set of responses to bring to the next step in the Pyramid Strategy.
- When this has been done, form the class into groups of six or seven and have the group nominate a chair, a scribe, a 'sticky label collector' and a timekeeper. See that each group has a copy of the Pyramid diagram on the A3 sheet.
- When groups have completed these preliminaries, ask them to attend to you, the teacher, for instructions on the next step of the strategy. These are:

- You are addressing the question of *what people should be doing if they are playing their part in caring for the environment'*. To begin the discussion, the Chair should call on one member of the group at random to tell the others the first response.
- Questions for clarification, if necessary, should follow from any group member, controlled by the Chair.
- When it is clear what is being said, other members of the group who have a similar idea should say so and add any further explanation, before the 'Sticky' label collector gathers all similar labels. These are then stuck onto the first row of the pyramid, which is given a 'cover term', which best describes what the responses are about.

- The Chair then moves to another person in the group for the next response, doing the same as for the first until the collection of labels of similar responses is stuck to the Pyramid's second row by the Sticky' label collector.
- The process proceeds under the control of the Chair until all labels are attached to the Pyramid. *Note*: Where ideas stand alone they should be included on the Pyramid to indicate this.
- When all labels are attached, the Chair restates the question asking the group to produce an answer in a single sentence using the 'cover terms' attached to each row or cluster of responses. This sentence should be written at the peak of the Pyramid in the place provided.
- It should be noted by the Chair and the timekeeper that there is a 30 minute time limit for steps (a) to (g). Timekeepers should assist the Chair by reminding him or her of the time left for completion of the tasks.

- At the end of the time allowed, draw the class back together for a plenary session, asking each of the scribes to read out the question, the cover terms the group used and the single sentence produced.
- You should collect all sentences and indicate to the students that the following lesson will employ access to the web-site of the Australian Conservation Council in order to compare their collective views with those of the Council. Post the web site for perusal for those who want to follow up before the next lesson.
- Subsequent reflection on this activity might include some debriefing on the processes used in the Pyramid Strategy, what leadership foci were embedded in the processes, and how well or otherwise they were managed.

Leadership Focus:

Team building, Decision Making, Communication, Conflict Resolution

Extension Activities:

Students look at environmental issues in their local community and what list what action they could do to help the situation

ICTs Components			
Use the internet to explore local environmental organisations			

Other Notes:			
Need to give the students time to debrief and reflect. Not necessary to complete the task if student groups are involved in a lot of discussion about process. Some groups will finish faster, have them do an extension activity such as considering other environmental issues not already discussed.			

Evaluation: (Outcomes)			
Discuss with groups as to what they learnt about team work and co-operation. Have the students review how they decided to resolve the conflict in the process.	Timing:	Appropriate Too Long Too Short	
	Difficulty:	Appropriate Too Easy Too Hard	
	Response:	High Medium Low	