4-26-2016

Empowering High School Students to Develop Leadership Skills and Increase Student and School Engagement

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Recommended Citation

Mays, Corlette D., "Empowering High School Students to Develop Leadership Skills and Increase Student and School Engagement" (2016). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1175.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1175

**EMPOWERING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP
SKILLS TO INCREASE STUDENT AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT**

by
Corlette D. Mays

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
March 7, 2016

Dissertation Chair: Tyrone W. McCombs, Ph.D.

Dedication

It is my heartfelt honor to dedicate this body of work to my mother, Robinette D. Jiggetts, an untiring servant, and dedicated educator who understood the joys of learning and teaching. She was my confidante and best friend who passed those joys on to me by teaching me what it means to be a lifelong learner who is not afraid to step out on faith. Throughout this undertaking, it was my wish that she would be able to see me reach this milestone in my life, but she departed this earth before I could accomplish my goal.

Both of my parents instilled upon me at an early age the importance and significance of pursuing and attaining educational achievements, so I would also like to thank my father, Charles W. Jiggetts, for his continued support and encouragement, who is anxiously waiting to see my dream fulfilled at 94 years of age.

I also dedicate this scholarly work to my loving husband, Dr. Larkey Mays III, as we began this journey together to pursue doctoral degrees in our chosen fields. The journey has had many highs and lows over the years, but he has been my rock, spiritual encourager, and role model throughout the process that has now come to an end and is complete. I am eternally grateful for the blessing he has always been as my God chosen helpmate, in my life and our families.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee that I was blessed to work with over the years. My accomplished and benevolent Chair, Dr. Tyrone McCombs, the charismatic Dr. James Coaxum, a phenomenal leader, instructor and mentor, and Dr. Donavan McCargo, who believe it or not, I taught in the 4th grade, and whose gifts and talents continue to blossom without boundaries. Their wisdom, support, and kindness allowed me the freedom to produce this scholarly work as my vision unfolded. This was indeed a heaven sent triumvirate. I salute you all!

Secondly, I would like to thank my Principal Herbert Simons, along with the staff and students of my high school, who believed in my vision and supported my efforts throughout the study. I couldn't have completed the mission without them.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the members of the first Doctoral Educational Leadership cohort in Camden, who paved the way for others to pursue their dreams.

Abstract

Corlette D. Mays
EMPOWERING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP
SKILLS TO INCREASE STUDENT AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT
2015-2016
Tyrone W. McCombs, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

This action research study explored the developmental leadership experiences of urban minority students at Aesculapian High School in New Jersey. The study involved a learning community of 20 members from the National Honor Society and five faculty members who served as mentors. The purpose of the study was to determine what leadership skills and qualities students perceived were valuable to increase student engagement. Student leadership development was integrated into the curriculum following Kouzes and Posner's (2008) model of the Student Leadership Challenge in an effort to build leadership capacity. The conceptual framework for the study utilized the model in conjunction with the theories of leadership identity, student voice and meaningful student involvement as concepts for building and developing leadership in high school students to increase student engagement.

This action research study provided insight into how the students constructed new knowledge and understandings about their leadership abilities utilizing data collected from qualitative instruments. The findings documented how student participants applied their acquired skills to become further engaged within the school environment. The study provided an understanding of how leadership skills were applied to produce actions as a result of their learning. The responsibility of initiating, planning, organizing, and achieving outcomes shifted from teachers to the students, thereby labeling them leaders.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Leadership by young adults has always existed in schools and community settings, but for many students the perception that they may be included in the category of being a leader does not always feel natural (Huang & Chang, 2004; MacGregor, 2001; Northouse, 2010; Sohn, 2003). Transformational leadership theorist James Burns (1978) asserts that "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (p. 4). Over the last decade, the study of leadership has steadily increased on college campuses and within organizations across the United States. Nearly every college and university has an expressed commitment to the development of students as leaders, as evidenced by mission statements and the increased presence of both curricular and co-curricular programs targeting college student leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan, 2006a, 2006b; Shertzer et al., 2005). The creation of these programs is consistent with research linking the collegiate involvement of the students to the developmental gains of leadership identity (Astin, 1993; Dugan, 2006a; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives & Johnson, 2009). However, most studies of student leadership research remain directed towards the development of college student outcomes and have largely ignored the pre-college or high school leadership experiences of students as a measurement of those outcomes (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives & Johnson, 2009). With the rising importance of preparing students for college in the twenty-first century, it is crucial that time and effort be devoted to building leadership capacity and developmental

identities in students during their adolescent years (Lambert, 2002; Komives & Johnson, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

Leadership development often is based on the belief that effective leadership is a function of learned behavior. Authors (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2008) state that students need consistent opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills in school learning communities that can teach students the skills needed to demonstrate confidence in their leadership abilities by accepting new responsibilities and participating in new activities. Bonstingl (2001) points out in his book *Schools of Quality,* the need to help all students discover their innate leadership ability while at the same time developing their leadership potential. The philosophy Bonstingl conveys is that students are not just future leaders, but can be leaders today if given the opportunity to lead. The research literature validates that leadership can be taught and leaders can be developed if provided with the appropriate strategies, for it is both a skill and a behavior (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Leadership is complex, which is why there is difficulty in agreeing on what leadership entails, who may or may not possess it, and what form it is displayed in, especially in adolescents (Komives et al., 2005).

In the past decades, movements in student leadership have attempted to reshape our thinking about how to lead by developing different models that stand in opposition to the traditional hierarchal models. In the 1960s and 1970s the topic of "student voice" emerged, promoting student activism and leadership through protests, sit-ins, and participation in school decision-making (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; Mitra, 2005, 2006). After the Civil Rights Movement, the advocacy of leadership for women, minorities, and

students with disabilities flourished during the 1980s and 1990s, but began to wane when the challenges of Affirmative Action quotas from individuals, businesses, and organizations rose (Antonio, 2001). With the influence of the internet during recent years, Daggett (2005) and Elmuti, Minnis, and Abebe (2005) assert that globalization and rapid technological advancements have exposed students to the many facets of leadership, both domestically and internationally, that have dramatic effects on the ways in which educators communicate and demonstrate the meaning of leadership to students.

Presently, adults and students who utilize leadership theories that are based on collaboration, ethical action, and moral purposes, (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006; Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2006) are guiding the direction of educational institutions and business organizations by transforming followers into leaders.

While leadership paradigms continue to shift, most students today still do not consider themselves leaders (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). This is compounded by the fact that often there have been few opportunities for students to actually lead, which is heightened by a perceived shortage of students willing to take on leadership roles and responsibilities in their schools or communities (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). The lack of leadership by students described in the background of the problem, was one of the perceived concerns identified at Aesculpian High School, which led to the impetus of the study.

Impetus for the Study

Aesculapian is a small, urban, public magnet high school that was founded in 1994, with a mission to prepare minority students for medical or health related careers. Presently the student population is comprised of approximately 210 students with ethnic

backgrounds of African-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American descent. Students may only apply for enrollment at the end of their eighth grade year. Applicants must reside in the city of Welby, pass an academic entrance exam, and be interviewed for possible acceptance by teams of staff members. The curriculum of the school is focused on infusing science, medical technology, math, and literature across content areas.

The concept of the school emerged from the vision of a former superintendent, who desired to capitalize on the resources of the many medical institutions in Welby, New Jersey. The objective was that the school would provide an avenue for students to become exposed to a concentration in the sciences, and a pathway to pursue further study at post secondary institutions. The goal was to prepare students for future medical careers in the city of Welby, by providing them with opportunities while in high school to build relationships among the medical community. If the school were deemed successful, it would also debunk the myth that minority students and females do not fare well in the sciences, as well as being the first magnet school in the city. However, as time has progressed, concern has arisen from the faculty that the school was straying from its original mission.

While there are students who desire to pursue careers in the health field, there are growing numbers who express an interest, but actually have other goals. For many, the students' parents wish for them to attend, because the school is considered a safe haven and superior academically to the other comprehensive high schools in the district. This perception is based on the data provided by standardized test scores and the scarcity of discipline infractions reported to the district and police.

To gain further insight about the school environment at Aesculapian, a pilot study was conducted by me in 2010 as an assignment for one of my doctoral research classes. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the perceptions of the faculty about student leadership within the school. The data from the pilot study revealed two emerging themes. The first theme indicated that many students were not developing the positive self-confidence, presentation, communication, and delivery skills necessary to effectively apply the knowledge they had learned. Secondly, the lack of motivation, commitment, accountability, and leadership skills displayed by the students often prevented them from successfully participating in many of the pre-college, community service, and internship programs offered. The expectation and perception of the faculty is that this institution is preparing and developing students to become leaders and take their place as researchers, practitioners, caregivers, and providers in the ranks of medicine or health care. However, the students must possess or have the intrinsic motivators nurtured within themselves to accept the challenges and responsibilities necessary to become successful student leaders, especially in the field of medicine.

The staff is dedicated to exposing the students to these fields of interest through scientific instruction, along with providing external opportunities for them to apply their knowledge. The issue of leadership or the lack thereof, comes to light every year when the students that have met the academic requirements of the National Honor Society at Aesculapian, are invited to submit applications for membership consideration. The students are judged on the four required tenets of the National Honor Society, which are scholarship, leadership, service, and character. The researcher/advisor of the National Honor Society has observed and listened when teachers debated about what students list

as leadership activities when reviewing National Honor Society or scholarship applications. Determining leadership is one facet of the process that both faculty and students often have difficulty assessing. It is the one aspect that keeps many students from applying to the National Honor Society, other organizations, and for scholarship opportunities. The conversation usually resulted in questions of whether leadership has truly been exhibited by the students. For those that did apply, the lack of leadership, according to the perceptions of the reviewers, was often the determining factor to reject the student for membership or a scholarship award. The question then becomes for the reviewers, if we accept the student who is perceived to have limited leadership experience, how can the staff assist in increasing their leadership capacity?

Another area impacting the issue of leadership development was the inability of students to be able to invest in the identity of their school. Due to the small student population at Aesculapian, and the lack of facilities and financial resources necessary for the students to participate in sports, vocational, and a variety of extra-curricular activities at their own school, students must participate on the teams of the other comprehensive high schools in the city if they wish to engage in athletics or vocational pursuits. This situation required that the student who wants to participate in sports or other activities, leave school early and miss classes to arrive at the other schools in time to engage in their programs. The students who do partake of this option must assume the identity of the school they have chosen to participate in for their sport, vocational interest, extra-curricular, or community activity. The students feel disengaged from both schools, because whether they excel or not in the activity or sport they are not able to receive encouragement or recognition for their efforts from their classmates or the staff, as they

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would if these events occurred at their own school. In addition, any celebratory awards associated with their accomplishments are given at the schools where they participate, thereby excluding their classmates. Even though students have the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities elsewhere, it has not been a contributing factor in increasing student engagement at Aesculapian. One of the key components of the Kouzes and Posner Student Leadership Challenge (2008) is to be able to recognize student contributions by showing appreciation for individual or team excellence and celebrating the victories of your learning community. Research indicates that influence and the encouragement of peers is one of the variables that impacts not only initial leadership involvement, but continued involvement in seeking leadership opportunities (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004).

In addition to the pilot study findings, I have observed in her role as advisor to several groups of students within the school, that those who excel academically are content with just being smart. There has been a perception expressed during conversations with students that being intelligent, well-behaved, and maintaining good attendance along with a desire to excel academically, demonstrates the characteristics of a leader. For these students, participation in extra-curricular activities, volunteerism, and community service is not deemed necessary to be a leader.

The findings from the pilot assignment provided an impetus for developing a dissertation study, with one of the objectives being to empower students and equip them with the skills needed to enhance their leadership potential. The issues presented along with the perceptions of the researcher toward student leadership at Aesculapian provided the reasoning for designing an action research study at the school. Mulick (2009)

contends that the identification and development of leadership potential in students is first perceived by adults and subsequently encouraged through opportunities that surround them daily. Understanding how the perceptions of teachers impacted what they believe leadership looks like, often determined the direction students will pursue to acquire leadership opportunities (Mulick, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental leadership experiences of urban African-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American National Honor Society high school students at Aesculapian. The study involved 20 members of the National Honor Society to determine what leadership skills and qualities along with learning and social needs students perceived are valuable, and should be developed in high school students to increase student engagement. Four faculty members also served as mentors to the study participants, along with the participant researcher. This action research study also provided insight into how the students developed new knowledge and understandings about their leadership abilities, and how they applied their skills to become further engaged and lead other students to become involved in meaningful ways within the school environment. The objective was to shift the responsibility of initiating, developing, planning, organizing, and achieving outcomes from teachers and advisors to the students, thereby labeling them a leader (Mitra, 2005). The ultimate goal is for educators to identify emerging student leaders that will feel confident enough to develop programs and opportunities that engage students in being involved in the life of the school.

Researchers (Astin & Astin, 2000; Covey, 2008; Kotter, 1996; Kouzes & Posner,

2008) argue that everyone in an academic community is a potential leader who can contribute to the transformation of educational institutions so that student development and learning is enhanced, new knowledge is generated, the community is served, and students are empowered to become positive change agents in the context of a larger society. Miles and Louis (1990) cite in their research on improving urban high schools, that leaders must have "the will and skill" for change. The challenge is how to empower students with the will, motivation, interest, and action to apply their knowledge, thereby increasing their leadership potential and engagement in learning and school activities. What happens in the social context of high schools may well be one of the most significant aspects in shaping students' perspectives of who they are and what they can accomplish, which is critical to their development as leaders (Covey, 2008; Jacobs, 2006).

Research Questions

This action research study proposed the following research questions:

1. What qualities, values, or skills do high school students perceive necessary for leadership development?

2. How has the leadership learning experience of high school students in the National Honor Society affected student/school engagement?

3. What impact will the leadership learning experience have on enhancing "student voice" at the high school?

4. How has the mentoring experience of the faculty mentors with the National Honor Society students affected student/school engagement?

5. How has my leadership contributed to the development of leadership skills for

National Honor Society students to increase their student/school engagement?

Significance of the Study

One area most often overlooked throughout the educational career of a student is the development of leadership skills (Huang & Chang, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Yukl (2010) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p. 8). Leadership development for adolescents must be based on meaningful experiences that respect the process of discovering "who one has to be in order to fulfill one's destiny" (Covey, 2008; Starratt, 2007). Student leadership development is the process of providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their talents, skills, and interests so they can lead, while continuing to develop new skills both in and beyond the classroom. Leaders are thought to possess attributes that set them apart, and studies indicate that when leadership development strategies are embedded in the curriculums of our schools, an increase in academic performance and student engagement occurs within the group of individuals participating in the process (Covey, 2008; Starratt, 2007). In most schools, the development of student leadership skills is not obtained through academic pursuits but through participation in extra-curricular activities and is viewed as part of the non-instructional pursuits of the student through their involvement in sports, clubs, and organizations.

Student leadership has also been described as intrinsic to student engagement especially during the high school years where students are encouraged to discover their full potential through academics, athletics, political involvement, volunteerism,

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community service, and technology, but are often thrown into roles without any guidance of how to handle the responsibility (Cothran & Ennis, 2000; Komives & Johnson, 2009; Whitehead, 2009). Effective leadership learning programs are not those built around one leader or style, but those that teach students how to work together, that uncover the leadership skills within each individual and that help meld the different leadership styles of individuals together to work effectively (Hickman, 1994). However, leadership development programs are not well integrated into formal high school curriculums, and those programs that are available, often do not adequately reflect the needs of the students (Starratt, 2007), thereby making it a continuing area for future development and research.

Additionally, research indicates that students actually desire more ownership of the programs they attend and belong to by utilizing their "student voice" (Lambert, 2002; Mitra, 2006). The term, student voice, describes one of the ways in which students might have the opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers (Mitra, 2005). The importance of learning from student voice stems from the belief that students themselves are often neglected sources of useful information and often can offer a unique perspective about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate (Mitra, 2006). A review of the literature indicates that studies on student voice, a topic once popular in the 1960s and 1970s, had its roots in the political perspectives of civil rights and civic engagement (Cook-Sather, 2006; Levin, 2000) and evolved into a social perspective for student development in the 1990s and 2000s where it was framed around school reform efforts. Student voice has now re-emerged in a political era where everyone wants their voice to be heard, especially on issues concerning our schools (Mitra, 2008). School leaders that create a culture that welcomes and values the opinions

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of students as partners in the educational process and reform efforts will find themselves moving toward greater engagement (Fletcher, 2003; Kuh et al., 2005; Morrison, Rha, & Helfman, 2003).

The work of Senge (1990) and Kouzes and Posner (2008) emphasize the importance of nurturing and celebrating the work of individuals and of supporting the collective engagement of staff and students in such activities as vision development, learning, problem identification, and resolution. The value of shared leadership is that it benefits the group by allowing each member to construct meaning towards a shared purpose (Lambert, 2002). Advisors, faculty, and the administration must assist student groups in high school in developing an understanding that part of their responsibility is to set an example by partaking in opportunities for leadership development and inspire others to do the same amongst their peers. The everyday activities that occur in schools of a group planning an event, or holding a meeting, potentially serve as opportunities for leadership development for all students. Therefore, implementing a model of shared leadership for students to participate in a school environment would be beneficial in recognizing the ways that many different leadership styles can exist within a group, and that all members can contribute to the leadership of the group (Lindahl, 2008).

From the research of Yazzie-Mintz (2010) in reference to student engagement, he states that "Talking to students, surveying students, and creating focus groups can help schools avoid the mismatch between the perceptions of adults and the perceptions of students" (p. 56). The trend in many schools now is to focus on student engagement, by creating programs and practices that connect students to school and their communities, especially in terms of leadership. The literature explores how strong school engagement

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can be measured by behaviors that support learning and achievement, and emotional connectedness that increase student motivation and identification with school (Fletcher, 2003; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Tackling student engagement means taking the time to understand what high school students find engaging, and placing student voice at the center of the definition (Sodha & Guglielmi, 2009). Bridging the gap between students and adults is a great challenge for school leaders, but it is vital to strengthening student engagement and the connection between students and schools. One of the goals of this study was to provide leadership development strategies that will empower students, build their self-confidence, and motivate them to increase their level of engagement in the tasks and activities of the school.

Most significant for this research was the exploration of leadership development and student engagement in high school students who are potential young leaders willing to take on more responsible leadership roles. For those who may be leaders, but have not yet recognized their own potential because of limited opportunities to exhibit their talents and skills, leadership development learning offered a pathway for them to become more engaged. Research supports that when students believe they are valued, engaged, and feel supported in their school environment, they are more likely to use strategies that support their learning and building leadership capacity (Walker & Greene, 2009). While there is limited empirical research devoted to involving high school students in leadership development and the impact it has on student engagement (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007), there is a sense of urgency to understand the dynamics of student leadership given the growing demands for leaders within organizations.

Conclusion

The findings resulting from this study assisted in understanding how leadership skills can be effectively developed and enhanced in high school honor students. Schools that invest in building leadership capacity among students realize that learning and leading cannot be separated (Lambert, 2003). The transformational theories, models, and practices of current researchers focused on leadership as a process and provide a foundation for becoming an effective leader. These include students successfully fulfilling their responsibilities and commitments, involving others to understand and agree upon a common goal or plan, and working to accomplish collective and individual objectives. The ultimate goal was for educational institutions and community organizations to initiate steps to cultivate the desired student candidate that possesses the leadership skills that universities and employers are seeking in the twenty-first century.

Definition of Terms

Shared or distributed leadership suggests that leadership is an equitable partnership and reflects the concepts of people sharing power and joining forces to move toward the accomplishment of a shared goal (Lambert, 2002).

Student voice is the active opportunity for students to express their opinions and make decisions regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning experiences (Mitra, 2005).

Student engagement refers to a student's willingness, need, and desire to participate in the learning process along with meaningful student involvement in their schools (Fletcher, 2003).

Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students in facets of

the educational process for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy (Fletcher, 2003).

Learning communities are recognized as an effective form of student engagement consisting of a group of students assembled for the intentions of increasing learning experiences through shared experiences (Mitra, 2004).

Student leadership is the process of involving students in meaningful ways both in and beyond the school community, along with providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their talents, skills, and interests while continuing to develop new skills (Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

Action learning is the experimentation with new behaviors, ideas, processes, and structures by individuals and assesses them in realistic situations (Morrison et al., 2003).

Reflective learning is gaining useful insight from the analysis of applying new knowledge to daily pursuits to better understand the meaning and effect of actions (Lambert, 2003; Van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

In the following section of this study, Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature that supports the concepts and theories of student leadership development which included the areas of leadership identity, student voice, shared leadership, and mentoring. Student and school engagement will also be addressed, delineating the need for this study and future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

"The quest for understanding leadership seems justifiable, for the ideals of leadership have the capacity to shape society" (Bedell, Hunter, Angie, & Vert, 2006, p. 54). The question of who emerges into leadership is an important topic amongst high school students. To understand the development process, it is necessary to determine how natural leaders emerge from their peer groups. This study examined the literature on how students can enhance their leadership skills as part of the development process for increased student and school engagement, and how those efforts played a vital role in the ongoing journey to improve the environment of their schools.

Historical Perspectives of Leadership

Two paradigms of theory emerge from the literature to inform current research, which are known as industrial and post-industrial leadership (Rogers, 1996; Rost, 1993). The industrial paradigm covers leadership theories that dominated the literature during the twentieth century and has become known as the "myths" of leadership. These theories express the philosophy that leadership is singular and aligned with the attributes of power, control, and authority (Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 1998; Rogers, 1996). These beliefs on leadership over the last century have evolved from examining "great men" theories which believe that leaders are born not made, to leadership trait theory where both the attributes of leadership and the delivery processes that provide effective outcomes are defined, to the leadership style categories which vary in accordance with the situation presented (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Komives et al., 2006; Shertzer et al., 2005). However, perspectives on leadership began to shift over the last

century from these traditional approaches of individual centered theory to process or relationship theories involving the influence between leaders and followers. Leaders were now increasingly being held accountable for transforming environments and developing followers into leaders (Burns, 1978).

The post industrial paradigms of leadership theory assume that leadership has transitioned from the traditional approaches, to a transformational process that involves many stakeholders and is based on building relationships and creating change (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 1998, 2007; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Rogers, 1996). The theories involve being collaborative, relational, and ethical, as the root construct that guides the involvement of an individual in the development of leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2006). Senge (1990) indicates that these contemporary theories of leadership require leaders "to possess new skills as thinkers and learners with the ability to build shared vision, challenge prevailing mental models, and foster more systemic patterns of thinking" (p. 9). Present literature suggests what impacts genuine leadership development is generated at multiple levels of analysis, and questions how leaders perceive, decide, behave, and take action in their organizations or institutions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

Leadership Development

Leadership development has been a challenge at the high school level for educational institutions, despite the growing perception that leadership is an important component in preparing students for a college education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Komives & Johnson, 2007; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). The research of these authors supports the need to examine the ways students construct meaning from their

experiences while holding leadership positions or participating in leadership development programs. Researchers in the field of leadership development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006; Harris, 2005; Komives et al., 2006) have also noted that merely providing information about leaders and leadership to students does not mean that they feel like a leader, or will even desire the responsibility of a leadership role. Often, students do not recognize the qualities or characteristics they possess within themselves to become a leader, and frequently need the nurturing interventions of teachers, advisors, coaches and mentors for them to realize their leadership potential (Cook-Sather, 2006; Van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

Rost (1993) argues that learning about leadership and being a leader are not necessarily synonymous. He suggests that traits and practices are characteristics of leaders and collaborators, but leadership is the process that includes both. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) and Fletcher (2003) advocate the supportive practice of leadership skills in an environment of safety, feedback, and experimentation where students can effectively apply their skills for leadership opportunities. These researchers propose a leadership action driven program that focuses on action learning concepts tailored to the leadership development needs of the individual. Involving students in the learning process can add an important perspective to schools and research and therefore help inform how problems in education can be defined and solutions conceived.

Jacob (2006) argues that an effective leadership development program offers methods that will uncover and clarify the values students feel are needed to become successful leaders. Data from a study conducted by Harris (2005) suggest that students valued leadership development activities that offered them real responsibility along with

a voice in selecting them. In a qualitative study by Shertzer and Schuh (2004) and a similar one by Armino et al. (2000) involving minorities, researchers found that students initially get involved in leadership opportunities through their peer group and that student leaders believed that if they took advantage of one leadership opportunity that others would follow. However, students who were not involved in leadership roles believed they were not given the opportunity to lead, and subsequently did not feel they had the capability to be a leader. Providing opportunities for students to recognize their leadership potential through interactions with different people and participation in different activities and learning experiences will ultimately enhance student and school engagement (Huang & Chang, 2004; Sohn, 2003; Van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

The research of Maurer and Lippstreu (2005) focuses on understanding what constitutes the level of developmental readiness of an individual or the capacity of motivational orientation to develop to one's full potential. These authors have defined the developmental readiness of a student as being made up of components such as one's goal orientation and motivation to develop leadership skills (Maurer & Lippstreu, 2005). Students who are more motivated to learn at the outset and who have a higher motivation to lead will more likely participate in activities that stimulate their thinking about their own development and use the knowledge as an opportunity to improve their leadership effectiveness, which is relative to this study where increased student engagement is the desired outcome as outlined in the conceptual framework.

Leadership Development Model

Kouzes and Posner's (2008) research in the field of student leadership indicates that everyone has the capacity to lead and help drive change, if provided with the

opportunity to hone, strengthen, and enhance the skills needed to be an effective leader

through practice, feedback, and coaching. They state that "Leadership is the art of

mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003,

p. 30) and have developed a model to increase student leadership capacity entitled "The

Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership-Student Leadership Challenge
Model

Kouzes and Posner (2008) wanted to discover what people did when they were at

their personal best when leading others. The five practices are:

- *Model the Way* where students are encouraged to find their voice and set the
  example by aligning their actions with the shared values of others.

- *Inspire a Shared Vision* by imagining the possibilities and enlisting others
  to share in common aspirations.

- *Challenge the Process* by seeking ways and opportunities to change, grow
  and improve as a leader. Experiment and take risks, but learn from mistakes.

- *Enable Others to Act* by fostering collaboration and building trust with

others towards common goals.

☐ *Encourage the Heart* by recognizing contributions and showing appreciation for excellence and innovation. Celebrate the values and victories of your learning community by acknowledging small wins.

These practices are designed to help students feel more empowered, stir their motivation, increase their willingness to accept challenges, and strengthen their desire to become more engaged at school or in the community (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Kouzes and Posner's (2008) transformational leadership model is based on decades of empirical research whereby thousands of interviews and case studies have been conducted of students. The model approaches leadership as a measurable, learnable, teachable set of behaviors that must be possessed and practiced, so that one can become a good leader that is able to facilitate improvement and change (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Their research has been validated by millions of survey respondents utilizing their quantitative instrument, the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SPLI) that measures the outcomes of the five practices.

In a study by Posner (2012) the Student Leadership Practices Inventory was given to 4,819 high school students who were identified as student leaders out of a total population of 17,210 students that participated in the study. In addition, 60,177 observers of these student leaders completed the SPLI instrument. The results indicated that the more student leaders reported having both opportunities to be leaders and to develop their leadership skills, the more they engaged in each of the five leadership practices. From the perspective of their observers, the more frequently student leaders were perceived as engaging in the five leadership practices, the more positive were their observers' comments about their organizations, leaders, and effectiveness, affirming for

both groups that leadership does matter.

In another example, a research study by Shirley (2007) with 203 ninth grade high school students, suggests that significant changes were reported by students participating in the Leadership Challenge program at their school in all five leadership practices. The students felt being involved in leadership development provided them with an opportunity to utilize their voices and address issues involving their school and community much more frequently than before enrolling in leadership development classes. At this high school, the Student Leadership Challenge has been utilized for the past five years as part of their leadership education curriculum. Data collected from the students at this high school, examined how their experiences in the program have increased their levels of confidence and empowered them to train others in building leadership capacity, thereby *enabling others to act*. The data suggest the*y model the way* by reaching out to other students with the message that everyone has the potential to lead and *inspire them* to lead activities. The researcher states the students are not afraid to *challenge the process*, but realize they must walk their talk if they are to continue to *model the way*.

However, these studies are the exception, for throughout the literature (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Elmuti et al., 2005; Komives & Johnson, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Shertzer et al., 2005), research indicates that studies are still focused on the experiences of college students at post-secondary institutions with a common missing piece being the inclusion of high school students in leadership development studies. With scholarly interest in student leadership increasing, observing and understanding leadership through the eyes of high school students is an opportunity to bridge the gap for

further research development (Cook-Sather, 2006; Mitra, 2004). Educating students about leadership and developing them into leaders has become an objective that the public expects from institutions of higher learning (Cress et al., 2001; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Educational institutions will need to increasingly pursue ways to seek positive leadership development outcomes, as searches for leaders accelerate in schools and the workplace.

Gender and Ethnicity Factors of Student Leadership

Factors related to gender and ethnicity, are crucial to understanding how leadership is developed. Traditional leadership development has often encompassed a range of biases, including exclusivity, gender, social class, and ethnic discrimination due to its hierarchical and male focused structure as the core ideals of leadership (Bedell, Hunter, Angie, & Vert, 2006; Dugan & Komives, 2007). With the emergence of females and various ethnic groups participating in leadership roles in our schools, it is necessary to understand the social and cultural knowledge that impacts their leadership development.

Posner (2014) conducted a four year study collecting data from 47,150 students, 25 percent of which were high school students. He utilized the Student Leadership Practices Inventory, a quantitative instrument, to examine if there were any gender or ethnicity factors that affect the role of leaders. His findings indicate that females engage in the 5 leadership practices of the Student Leadership Challenge model more than males and both groups in this order utilize Kouzes and Posner's (2008) practices of Enable Others to Act, Encourage the Heart, Model the Way, Inspire Visions and Challenge the Process to demonstrate their leadership. African American and Hispanic students employ the practices of Enable Others to Act and Challenge the Process most frequently,

while Caucasian students Model the Way, Inspire Visions more frequently than minority students. Asian students are reported as using all of the practices less frequently than other ethnic groups.

In another study by Dugan and Komives (2007), 50,378 male and female college students were administered the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership instrument which is designed to gather the experiences of students about leadership both prior and during college. The data from this quantitative survey revealed that women measured significantly higher than men in seven of the eight social change model of leadership development values, yet men measured significantly higher than women in their leadership self-efficacy. The findings seem to indicate that women have developed more leadership skills than men, but men feel more confident in their ability to be leaders. Whitehead (2009) asserts that female leaders are more closely aligned with building relationships, seek more collaboration among followers, and are willing to share information and power more than their male counterparts, while males are more inclined towards volunteerism and competitive activities. The author suggests that women possess an advantage with regard to leadership experiences, which is based on the focus women construct about relationships, their process orientation, and their inclination toward rewarding their followers. In a study involving gender differences it was found that diverse approaches and skills are needed when addressing student leadership development, such as self- confidence building exercises for females and feedback generating mechanisms should be employed for males (Whitehead, 2009). This difference may point to the need for increased leadership training and exploration for college men. Whitehead (2009) suggests that providing leadership training opportunities

focused on gender interaction may be a way to capitalize on the leadership advantage of women.

In a quantitative study by Kezar and Moriaty (2000) which addressed the need for diversity in leadership development, almost 10,000 college students revealed that men, regardless of race tended to rate themselves higher than women in terms of leadership ability. Research also indicates that women tend to perceive leadership in a more non-traditional way (Kezar & Moriaty, 2000) and that similar differences exist amongst minorities. Holding an elected position was the strongest predictor of leadership ability for Caucasian males, while African American men tended to gravitate towards volunteer work. They suggested that varying opportunities for leadership involvement are clearly important for leadership development among all groups of students, and that different types of involvement opportunities are helpful in developing leadership for various ethnic groups.

Research conducted by Antonio (2001) and Armino et al. (2000) reveal that involvement in student leadership creates opportunities for minority students to work with diverse groups of people and provides a heightened sense of self-confidence and awareness along with enhanced planning and organizational skills. Minorities often view leadership as non-hierarchal and tend to describe it in terms of being collective, collaborative, empowerment based, process oriented, facilitative, and team oriented (Armino et al., 2000; Kezar & Moriaty, 2000). Antonio (2001) suggests that leadership ability appears to be enhanced by socializing and studying with students of a different race or ethnicity, and those that build close interracial relationships experienced larger gains in leadership ability, than those that did not. A diverse learning environment and the interconnection with leadership ability is an important outcome to producing students

capable of leading in a diverse student body and society (Antonio, 2001; Armino et al., 2000). Antonio (2001) concludes that interracial interaction has a significant and positive correlation with leadership ability. The data suggest that the experiences of urban youth are negatively impacted when they do not have the opportunity to interact on a regular basis with students who are not of color to gain leadership experience, which is also an implication for future research.

Mentoring Impact on Leadership Development and Student Engagement

The culture of mentoring helps to enhance the process of leadership development in groups promoting shared leadership and has proven to provide benefits to youth in schools (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & Dubois, 2008). These authors suggest that programs that are highly practical, and use techniques such as coaching, listening and reflection, assist in improving self-confidence, developing interpersonal skills and relationships, student decision-making skills, peer relationships, student engagement, and academic achievement (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006; Eby et al., 2008; Holt, Bry & Johnson, 2008). Through interactions with their mentors and other highly motivated students, research indicates that students typically aspire to maximize their leadership potential in all aspects of their lives (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006). Successful mentors serve as leaders to their protégées and model the type of leadership qualities that their students wish to possess (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006). Through the mentoring relationship, the mentor shares information, provides regular feedback, challenges the mentee with responsibility, and acts as a supportive role model in an attempt to build leadership capacity (Komives, Casper, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2004; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). While there has been research conducted on the benefits

of mentoring in general, mentoring has received its biggest support from studies dealing specifically with African American students (Hall, 2006). Hall (2006) argues that school-based mentoring can be an approach that is more beneficial to African American students. Having less responsibility and time commitment outside of school on the part of the mentor increases the possibility for group-mentoring opportunities that can lead to more students having access to a mentor. Although research on mentoring has shown positive outcomes occur, regardless of race or gender, only when students and their mentors meet regularly with a solid infrastructure in place will the mentoring relationship begin to develop (Malone, 2006; Eby et al., 2008).

Whether schools seek outside leadership development programs for their students or develop their own with mentoring components, mentoring works best when the quality of the relationship with the mentee and the building of trust are principle concerns of the program. Programs of this caliber allow mentees to feel a sense of security and accomplishment as they progress through the leadership development process (Eby et al., 2008). Formal assessments measuring the academic and social growth of mentored students should be focused on building leadership capacity and collaborations to increase student engagement (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2006; Holt, Bry & Johnson, 2008).

Shared Leadership-A Contemporary Approach to Increased Student Engagement

Although a number of authors (Fletcher, 2003; Harris, 2005; Lambert, 2002; Lindahl, 2008; Pearce & Conger, 2003) have discussed the idea of shared leadership, it has only gained attention in the academic leadership literature recently, and relatively few studies have tried to measure students having a prominent and positive role in the leadership culture of schools (Avolio et al., 2009).

The terms shared leadership, distributed leadership, collective leadership, and connective leadership are used interchangeably in leadership literature, but for the purposes of this study, this type of leadership will be described as shared. The concept of shared leadership refers to the distribution of responsibilities and activities across multiple roles and participants through collaborative efforts (Mitra, 2005) and differs from more traditional, hierarchical models of leadership. A review of the literature suggests that shared leadership is one theory or model that has been adapted to respond to the special challenges facing schools in the twenty- first century (Lambert, 2002; Mitra, 2005, 2006, 2008). Shared leadership depends on the capacity of individuals to work together collaboratively to sustain productive learning environments and function as part of a team (Lindahl, 2008). Shared leadership is based on a commitment to dignity, equality, democracy, and the transformation of those involved in the process (Lambert 2002). The research pertaining to this theory indicates that schools desire leaders who possess the capacity for nurturing and empowering others, and who are capable of bringing out their best talents (Lambert, 2002). Leaders that follow this theory foster high degrees of trust by encouraging and welcoming different viewpoints, while still upholding their own core values and principles that portray the strengths and abilities associated with transformational leaders (Whitehead, 2009).

Several authors (Lambert, 2002; Lindahl, 2008; Pearce & Conger, 2003) discuss shared leadership theory and generally view it as a process, versus one person engaging multiple members of a group or team. The most widely cited definition of shared leadership is that of Pearce and Conger (2003), who describe it as "a dynamic, interactive, influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to

lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (p. 1). The need for shared leadership in organizations is increasing as hierarchical levels are eliminated and team- based structures are developed. Pearce and Conger (2003) cite the rise of cross-functional teams in recent years, as well as the need for speed and relevant information throughout educational organizations, as compelling reasons for a new way of thinking about leadership. A shared view of leadership incorporates the activities of many individuals in a school who work at engaging and mobilizing others to create a common culture of expectations around mutual support and trust (Harris, 2005). Authors Lambert (2002) and Harris (2005) assert that shared leadership is about learning together, inquiry, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively, which stresses that everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader. Collaboration comes with an expectation of students sharing the responsibility for the vision of the group, the activities planned, and the group process that facilitates students gaining the opportunity to transform schools so they can gain the necessary skills to lead.

The research of Pearce and Conger (2003), Lambert (2002), and Lindahl (2008), attributes this type of leadership to have mainly evolved around the instructional practices and leadership of teachers and administrators, but this model can be used to galvanize students towards developing the leadership skills of not only themselves, but their peers, by valuing the importance of teamwork and shared responsibility. Future research indicates the need to have students actively participating in this model as a part of any school reform or improvement effort (Harris, 2005)

According to authors Day, Gronn, and Salas (2004), shared leadership capacity is a dynamic that develops throughout the lifespan of a group and varies based on the

inputs, processes, and outcomes of the group. Research states it is often difficult for people to conceptualize and apply shared leadership, especially in terms of student development (Lindahl, 2008). The qualities normally associated with leadership emphasize command functions, decision-making skills, or possessing charisma, while the qualities of shared leadership involve nurturing, valuing the opinions of others, and mediation of conflict (Lindahl, 2008). Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) propose that future research examine how groups or teams function when using shared leadership, and the environment that enables shared purpose, social support, and student voice to prosper.

Promoting a shared model of leadership requires a significant change in school culture since it is not a natural process in hierarchical institutions. Other barriers associated with this theory have been noted for the possibility of having too many differing visions and values coming forth, along with the concern that no one is really accountable, since everyone is sharing responsibility in the process (Lindahl, 2008; Locke, 2003). Another area of controversy within the shared leadership domain is identifying what core tasks should be retained by the leader, if any. This debate is sometimes framed as the vertical vs. the horizontal leadership models when determining what direction an organization should follow (Lindahl, 2008; Locke, 2003). Locke (2003) advocates an integrated model of top down and shared leadership that supplements but does not replace hierarchical leadership within the organization.

To enable students to assume leadership, adult leaders have to be willing to relinquish their authority, which is even more difficult when students are used to having an adult in charge. Building shared leadership requires intentional efforts to develop skills for improving student engagement and participation of both adults and students

(Mitra, 2005). In a study by Kaba (2001), researchers explored student perceptions and feelings about their participation in the shared decision-making responsibilities with the adults of their school council. The findings revealed that students who spoke well or had previous relationships with the adults on the council, had greater opportunities of being heard, but could not provide examples of having any influence over policy decisions. This indicates that future research should also address how adults can provide support for adolescent leaders while creating platforms for students to voice, assume, and sustain meaningful leadership roles and responsibilities that are shared with adults (Cook-Sather, 2007; Harris, 2005; Mitra, 2005).

Student Voice That Increases Engagement

The re-emergence of student voice in recent years has not focused on civil rights and empowerment as it has in the past, instead it focuses on the benefits of student participation and engagement in schools (Mitra, 2006). Student voice provides an opportunity for students to express their ideas and beliefs and be heard through democratic processes, which helps develop student learning and leadership (Lambert, 2003). In turn, this leads to thoughtful choices by the students in and out of the classroom, as well as development of leadership identity (Lambert, 2003).

Fletcher (2003) defines student voice as "the unique perspective of students working in partnerships with adults to plan, teach, evaluate and lead schools" (p. 4). Allowing students to voice their opinions and providing avenues for them to participate in the decision-making process of school operations or school change efforts, often ignites student interest, which improves self-confidence, self-worth, academic achievement, and can create meaningful connections between students and teachers

(Cook-Sather, 2007; Fletcher, 2003; Mitra, 2004).

Student Voice Model

The pyramid of student voice developed by Mitra (2005) illustrates how leadership development opportunities become possible as student voice and listening increases in schools. At the base of the pyramid (see Figure 2), the most common and basic form of student voice "being heard" starts when adults begin to listen to students, to learn about their experiences in school. Collaborating with adults is the next level that describes ways in which students work with adults to identify problems and find solutions needed to make changes in the school. Recent research studies have mainly focused on this level of the pyramid to make academic improvements in schools (Cook-Sather, 2006; Mitra, 2006). The top level of the pyramid focuses on enabling students to share in the leadership and decision-making of their schools, which research has shown improves positive leadership development outcomes and engagement (Angus, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2002; Mitra, 2008). It is the least common form of student voice utilized, but research predicts that when implemented, it offers a way to engage students in the school community effectively (Mitra, 2008).
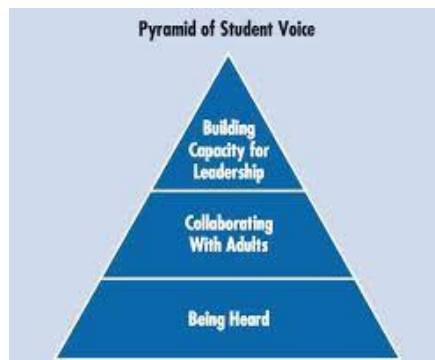
Figure 2. Pyramid of Student Voice

The current concept of student voice describes the many ways in which students have opportunities to share in school decisions that will shape their lives and their peers (Mitra, 2008), which is categorically different from the traditional roles students have in schools. The positive effects of honoring the voices of students and involving them in integral, meaningful, ways in their school experience cannot be ignored, especially in secondary schools where ongoing reform can create ways to integrate a range of student voices into school improvement efforts and leadership development (Mitra, 2003). Student voice initiatives suggest that school reform will be more successful if student leaders also serve as catalysts for change in schools as part of the reform process (Mitra, 2005). Research seeking student input on educational change efforts indicates that giving students a voice on educational issues reminds school personnel that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their school that adults cannot fully replicate without this partnership (Angus, 2006; Mitra, 2008).

The role of adults in fostering student leadership will continue to be a vital component of understanding how student voice can become an avenue for school improvement and the development of student leaders (Mitra, 2005). When adults have the opportunity to participate in leadership development learning, their perspective about students who can learn and lead expands (Starratt, 2007). Most research on student voice focuses on the benefits to students in terms of empowerment and learning (Mitra, 2004), however, without the support of the administration to promote a culture where students feel comfortable expressing their concerns or ideas, student voice will be a difficult endeavor (Brown, 2010; Campbell, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2007; Mitra, 2007). The literature suggests that future research needs to address in greater detail how administrators and

teachers can create conditions to engage and foster student voice to exist in meaningful

ways in our schools.

Student and School Engagement

The concept of student engagement has emerged in the literature over the past

several decades and has been intrinsically linked to learning and leadership in educational

research. Many students do not inherently know how to be meaningfully involved in their

schools, and conversely educators struggle to figure out how to meaningfully involve

students (Yazzie-Mintz, 2009, 2010). Student engagement has long been recognized as

the core of effective schooling, but the definition of student engagement in the research

literature is not an easily articulated construct (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Fredericks et

al. (2004) propose a definition of engagement consisting of behavioral, emotional, and

cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement as discussed by Fredericks et al. (2004)

indicates how students are meaningfully involved in academic, social, and school related

activities and how they apply those skills in a real-world context. Emotional engagement

attests to the degree to which students realize the value of what they are doing in school

and how it contributes to the community through self-reflection (Fredericks et al., 2004).

To increase student engagement, Zhao and Kuh (2004), Brown (2010), and DeFur

and Korinek (2010) assert that educators must help students feel they are valued members

of a learning community and that they are active participants in learning. By giving

students a measure of control over their environment and allowing them to make

meaningful choices in the learning process, educators increase student involvement in

school activities (Campbell, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2006; Joselowsky, 2007). Almost every

high school in the U.S. offers some type of extracurricular activity, no matter how limited

it may be, and these activities offer opportunities for students to learn the values of teamwork, individual and group responsibility, leadership, competition, diversity, and a sense of culture and community (Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). While public schools encourage students to participate in extra-curricular and community service activities, schools tend to fall short on preparing students to develop and lead such activities. Schools tend to teach students to be passive participants and follow rather than become leaders (Carson et al., 2007). Research indicates that encouraging urban students to voice their opinions promotes community awareness, a sense of belonging, and increased student engagement, and has been deemed important to keep them engaged and successful in learning and leading (Antonio, 2001; DeFur & Korinek, 2010). Involving students in dialogue increases their sense of self-worth, efficacy, and student engagement (DeFur & Korinek, 2010). One of the goals for this study was for students to develop or create a platform to voice their opinions and increase engagement within the school.

Meaningful Student Involvement and Engagement Model

Promoting meaningful student involvement is a strategy that gives students and educators the means to establish a powerful foundation upon which to build relationships. Fletcher (2003) suggests that participation in extracurricular activities through meaningful student involvement may increase student engagement or attachment to their school and for many students will increase their opportunity to become leaders and share accountability with adults. Fletcher (2003, 2005) presents a "Ladder of Student Involvement in Schools" that is comprised of eight levels of student participation (Figure 3).

The first three rungs of the ladder describe degrees of non-participation that include "manipulation, decoration and tokenism." Through these stages students appear to be given a voice, but they have little choice about how they participate in their schools. The next five rungs describe ascending degrees of participation for meaningful student involvement. These rungs include "student informed about and assigned action," "students consulted and informed about action," "adult initiated shared decision-making with students," "student initiated and directed action," and "student initiated shared decisions with teachers."
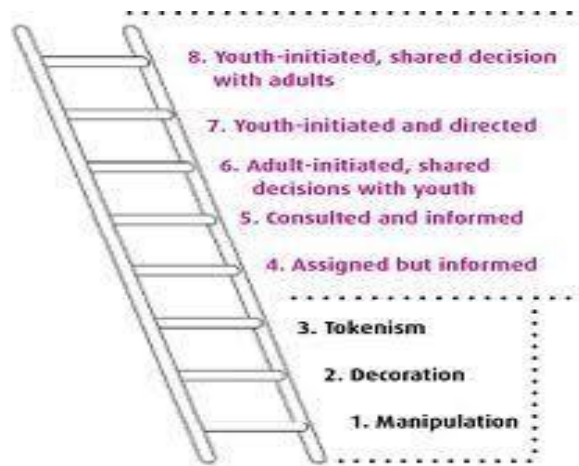
Figure 3. Ladder of Meaningful Student Involvement

These stages of involvement espouse the principles, policies, and guidelines that promote the empowerment of students as leaders, with the highest rungs representing the transformative practices of student voice and student engagement (Fletcher, 2003, 2005).

Studies by Fletcher (2003, 2005) addressing meaningful student involvement have shown that extracurricular involvement in high school provides students with a focused action to learn leadership skills and engages students in all the facets of the educational

process for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to academics, community, and the global society. The trend in many schools now is to focus on student engagement, by creating programs and practices that connect students to school and their communities, especially in terms of leadership. The literature explores how strong school engagement can be measured by behaviors that support learning and achievement, and emotional connectedness that increase student motivation and identification with school (Fletcher, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Research indicates that students who have been meaningfully involved when they are young, are most likely to be informed citizens who are engaged in their communities as adults (Fletcher, 2005). Research has also identified several barriers to student participation and school engagement, ranging from family or work responsibilities, limited financial resources for sports participation or other club expenses, transportation difficulties, and social concerns, such as lack of interest in or alienation from school and its activities (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010;Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012).

However, scholars have found that students who apply learned leadership skills through meaningful student involvement contribute to the development of their leadership identity, which serves as a vital asset to the growth of our educational institutions (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Fletcher, 2003; Fullan, 2007).

Recognition of Leadership Identity

An analysis of the literature related to leadership identity indicates that there is an identifiable gap in how students understand, experience, and interpret leadership in different situations (Dial, 2006; Komives et al., 2006). Komives et al. (2005) and Popper (2005) suggest that successful leadership begins with the discovery of an individual's

potential through self-exploration and understanding. Dial (2006) and Komives et al., (2005, 2006) argue that one way to understand student leadership is from the processes a person experiences through a six stage leadership identity development model. Komives et al., (2006) discuss the development of a leadership identity as a process that is closely tied to establishing personal values, by which the student can increase self-awareness, build self-confidence, reflect on life experiences, and apply new skills.

The model demonstrates how one develops from the first stage of *Awareness,* where youth emulate parents or adults that embody leadership qualities, then moves to the *Exploration and Engagement* stage where students begin getting involved in activities, developing skills, building confidence and realizing that they may have leadership potential. In the transition stage of *Leadership Identified*, students initially view themselves as positional leaders as they take on more responsibilities that are meaningful to them and rely on advisors and mentors to guide them. Then in the *Leadership Differentiated* stage there is a shift in consciousness where students recognize that leadership is a relational process that involves needing others to become an effective leader, as well as understanding that one does not have to hold a title to be labeled a leader. As students add responsibilities to their leadership experiences, the need to collaborate with others and work on teams which allows one to begin constructing meaning about their leadership experiences. In the *Generativity* stage students embark on a path to find their passions and causes of organizations to support. They seek to develop leadership in others and sustain relationships with peers and adults. During the last stage of *Integration and Synthesis*, leadership becomes part of one's authentic framework as the student realizes that they are a role model to others and possess the influence to affect

change (Komives et al., 2006). See Figure 4.

Another researcher Popper (2005) suggests that leaders emerge from a process of self-efficacy and exploration before their full potential can be recognized as illustrated in his five stage Leadership Identity Model. The unique figure 8 shape of the model, which symbolizes infinity, emphasizes the fluidity of the process to becoming a leader. Popper (2005) implies that the actions of a leader evolve throughout the life span of an individual ranging from the Potential stage, which is the beginning of moving into leadership roles, to the Synthesis stage where one begins to add to one's perspective of what leadership entails and the belief in one's own ability to lead.
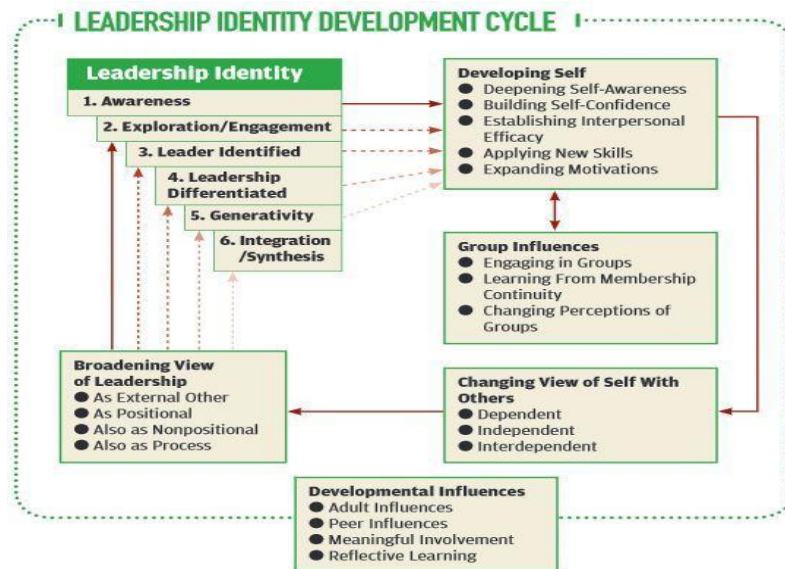
Figure 4. Leadership Identity Model (Komives et al., 2006)

Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, and Hogg (2004) agree with Popper (2005) and Komives et al. (2006) that the awareness one possesses about one's leadership identity is paramount to becoming an effective leader. The authors argue that it

is imperative that one examines how the self- concept of a leader and/or identity is formed, changed, and influences the behavior of oneself and others. They suggest that without self-awareness of one's leadership abilities, self-identity as a leader does not form (Komives et al., 2006; Popper, 2005; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Komives et al. (2006), Popper (2005), and Van Knippenberg et al. (2004), agree that the focus of future research must continue to explore how students conceptualize themselves as leaders and build their leadership identities especially during the adolescent years. Understanding the process of how leadership identity is created by individuals is essential to designing and developing leadership development programs (Kouzes & Posner, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

Through this conceptual framework, the researcher connected the concepts of leadership development with student voice, student engagement and leadership identity. The framework illustrates how the concepts act as conduits to promote increased student and school engagement through the establishment of a leadership identity. The literature guided the development of the framework and offers a theoretical perspective of social constructivism where the student needed to be actively engaged in creating understanding and meaning about their learning (Jonassen, 1991; Lambert, 2003). From a theoretical perspective, constructivism emphasizes the active and participatory role of the learner by seeking to find meaning in their experiences. The leadership framework that was utilized for this study is one that teaches students how to work together to uncover the leadership skills within each individual, and that helps mesh the different leadership styles of individuals together to work effectively. Increased student engagement serves as the resulting outcome of building leadership capacity in this framework, which then leads to

change and possible school reform. See Figure 5.

The beginnings of the conceptual framework are structured around the five practices of exemplary leadership by Kouzes & Posner (2008), and serve as the foundation for developing student leaders. They are: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. The model also embodies the approach of a "teen-led with adult direction" philosophy that is in alignment with the framework for meaningful student involvement. Each of the four components in this framework, which are illustrated in Figure 5, demonstrates a logical progression of building leadership capacity among students.
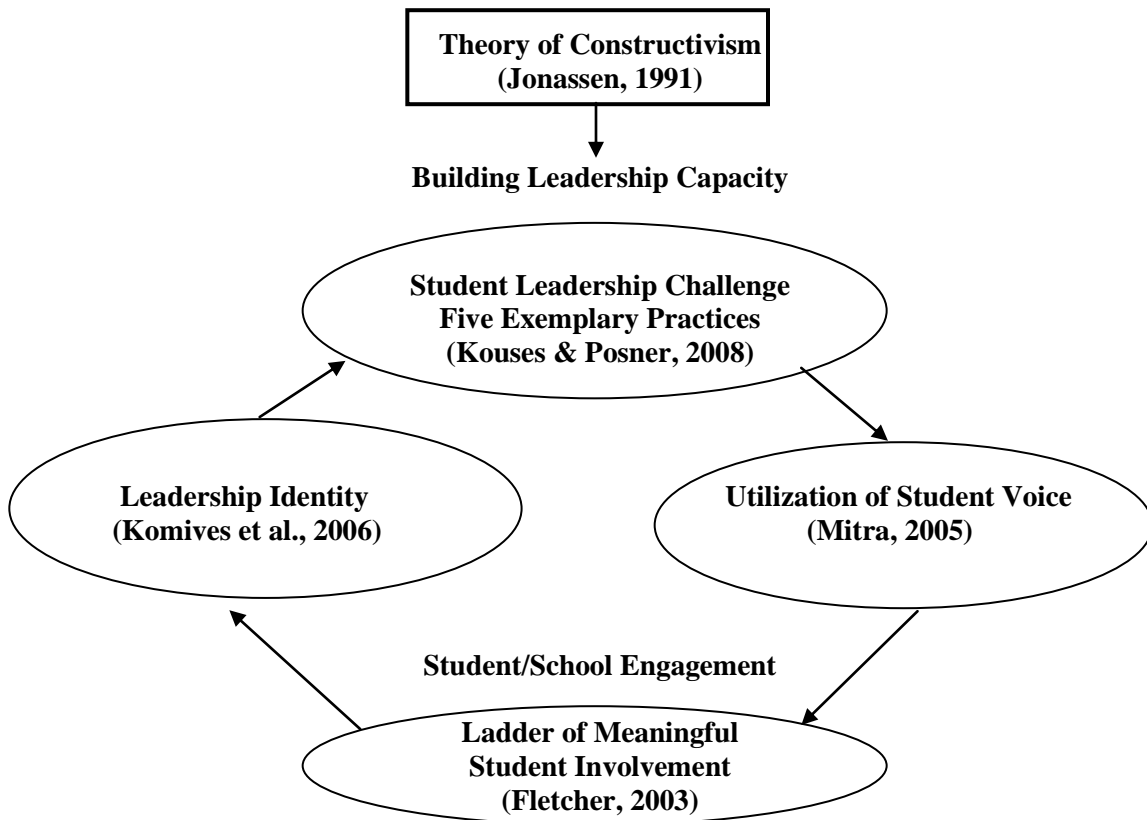
Figure 5. Conceptual Framework

Results of the research by Kouzes and Posner (2008) indicate that in the *model the way* stage, student participants experienced self-discovery learning as an effective way to acquire knowledge about leadership. Through feedback and discussion, as well as reflecting upon their own skills and values that make them leaders, they were able to set the example for others. The next stage involved students being able to motivate and *inspire* others so they are able to follow and participate in the vision presented. During this stage, students became engaged in leadership development lessons, explored group dynamics and building consensus decision-making skills for they truly believed a difference could be achieved and were willing to engage others in seeing the possibilities for the future. Students *enabled others to act* when given the opportunity to share and participate in transforming their educational experience and become active leaders among their peers. Students learned that collaboration and making others feel connected to a goal is a skill that enables groups and classes to function effectively. *Challenging the process* is a difficult stage that required the acquisition and application of skills that students can utilize to impact their environments. For those students who were willing to step out of their comfort zone to address or suggest improvements or solutions that could result in change were commended for their efforts. Lastly, by *encouraging the heart*, students were able to recognize and appreciate the value of the work accomplished by their peers, celebrating in whatever format was appropriate for the effort.

Utilizing the principles identified in Mitra's (2005) pyramid of student voice outlined earlier in this chapter, high schools must create systems and structures in which all students can have a voice and contribute to its governance and community. As students built leadership capacity and applied the skills acquired through the leadership

development process, their ability to express opinions, and explore ideas of how to improve or change the culture and climate of their school and communities increased.

Research has shown that involvement in real life leadership activities are the ones that students develop their abilities and identities around the most, allowing for greater student engagement during the learning process (Morisson et al., 2003). A model entitled "Meaningful Student Involvement" by Fletcher (2003) is designed to improve the quality of schools through inclusive, purposeful, and active student engagement. Meaningful student involvement encourages every student to have personal responsibility and shared accountability with adults. Within this model, teachers and students encourage others to lead, learn to work collaboratively and become capable team members. The research of Fletcher (2003) and Lambert (2003) indicate that the attitudes of students are most affected when they are engaged as significant contributors to learning communities within their schools. This model is designed to:

- ☐ Teach students leadership principles and then work with them to identify their individual strengths through role playing and modeling.
- ☐ Help develop confidence in their own abilities, and the abilities of other members.
- ☐ Build effective interpersonal communication and creative problem solving skills.
- ☐ Develop and then practice skills for arriving at consensus.
- ☐ Encourage members to develop and focus their individual strengths in conjunction with the mission for the National Honor Society, and increase their student engagement at school and in the community.

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The underlying philosophy of this framework (Fletcher, 2003; Komives et al., 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Mitra, 2005) revolved around the perception that leadership is shared power, group action, and the involvement of others.

Conclusion

The literature review outlined in this chapter examined and explored the areas that emerged from researching the leadership development of students. The components describe how leadership development and identity, student voice, along with meaningful student involvement that produces change could potentially enhance the leadership capacity and engagement of the National Honor Society students of Aesculapian High School. The goal of the study was to have continuous meaningful student involvement which would result in change being initiated and implemented. Fletcher (2003) and Lambert (2003) contend that meaningful engagement depends on a sustainable structure of support to build the capacity of educators and administrators in schools and to involve students in meaningful opportunities in leadership, learning, and decision-making.

Chapter 3

Methodological Approach

This study was designed to explore the developmental leadership experiences of 20 urban African-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American students at Aesculapian High School that were members of the National Honor Society, along with the experiences of their faculty mentors. Action research was chosen as the foundational methodology for this study due to the interactive inquiry process that balances problem solving actions with data-driven collaborative analysis and research in an effort to comprehend underlying causes for future organizational change (Craig, 2009). Action research has the potential to generate genuine and sustained improvements in schools. It gives educators new opportunities to reflect on and assess their pedagogy; to explore and test new ideas, methods, and materials; to assess how effective the new approaches were; to share feedback with fellow team members; and to make decisions about which new approaches to implement (Craig, 2009). Stringer (2007) states "Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (p. 1). Creswell (2011) defines it as a form of self-reflective problem solving that enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings.

The qualitative methods of action research tend to provide an understanding of a focused phenomenon within a specific context, which defines how the study will be executed and the data collected (Creswell, 2011). Qualitative research within an action research study has specific parameters that outline the process to be followed when implementing research and collecting data (Creswell 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark,

2011). These data collection strategies allowed the researcher to examine how the action research cycles overlap, merge, clarify, enhance, differ, or enrich the understanding of the practices or conditions identified within the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Research Design

Action research design is usually grounded in qualitative research paradigms and the knowledge that generalized solutions are not applicable in most circumstances, due to the specific nature of the methodology (Craig, 2009; Creswell, 2007). The objective of the qualitative strand of action research is to gain greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue that concentrates on how things are happening within the study as opposed to the *what* that happens in a quantitative strand (Creswell, 2007; Stringer, 2007). This understanding was achieved by focusing on the experiences of the participants and stakeholders, analyzing their interpretations and perceptions of acts and activities, and by incorporating the meaning people make of the events in their lives. What makes action research unique is that the researcher is both an active participant and observer within the study (Craig, 2009).

Utilizing an action research design offered greater insight and a more complete understanding of the influence leadership development had on student and school engagement. Craig (2009) proposes implementing action research cycles of inquiry that include fact finding, planning, taking the first action step, evaluating, amending the plan, and then trying another action step to explore the methodology of this approach. The literature indicates that action research designs are not the normal approach used in leadership studies (Seifert, Goodman, King, & Magolda, 2010). However, action research was deemed appropriate in this study since I was attempting to develop a greater

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understanding and make a positive correlation between leadership development

experiences and the learning outcomes of urban high school students who are members of

the National Honor Society, and how those variables influenced a change in student and

school engagement.

The data from the action research cycles were collected, analyzed, synthesized,

and interpreted, to develop new knowledge and understanding of how the National Honor

Society students at Aesculapian high school could develop better skills of leadership

resulting in an increase of meaningful student involvement. The research questions were

developed to assist in the gathering of information for data collection.

Research Questions

1. What qualities, values, or skills do high school students perceive necessary

   for leadership development?

2. How has the leadership learning experience of high school students in the

   National Honor Society affected student/school engagement?

3. What impact will the leadership learning experience have on enhancing

   "student voice" at the high school?

4. How has the mentoring experience of the faculty mentors with the National

   Honor Society students affected student/school engagement?

5. How has my leadership contributed to the development of leadership skills for

   National Honor Society students to increase their student/school engagement?

Data Sources

Authors Dial (2006), Dempster and Lizzio (2007), Kouzes and Posner (2008), and

Komives and Johnson (2009) indicate that much of the literature on student leadership is

quantitative in nature and investigates the relationship between one or more variables as they relate to leadership identity, skills, or development programs and the experiences of college students. Kouzes and Posner (2008) have developed a proven, reliable, and valid quantitative instrument for measuring leadership development entitled the Student Leadership Practices Inventory, which measures leadership behaviors, growth, and outcomes, but the instrument was not utilized in this study so the living experiences of the students and mentors could be reflected in the data. There are limited empirical studies on student leadership through a qualitative action research approach, thereby creating a gap in the literature and a need for future investigation, especially as it applies to high school students.

The qualitative strand of action research is instrumental in this study because it involved a reflective process that allowed for inquiry and discussion as its core components. In qualitative research, the participants provide their views and perceptions, often through broad open-ended questions evidenced in reflections, lesson assessments, surveys, and focus group interviews (Creswell, 2007). This allowed me as the researcher, to begin to identify notable themes and outcomes emanating from the study through the eyes of students, which is an area missing in leadership research. The qualitative strand was designed to assess the experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of leadership development learning for the urban high school National Honor Society students at Aesculapian and their faculty mentors. Data were collected utilizing qualitative instruments, including a leadership perception survey, a semi-structured interview protocol developed for student and mentor focus groups, field notes and artifacts, observations of leadership development classes, and reflective journals. The qualitative

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paradigm of the study determined what skills and qualities along with learning, social, and motivational needs students perceived are valuable, and should be developed in high school students to increase student and school engagement in relation to extracurricular interest and community involvement. The conceptual framework outlined in Figure 5 guided the design of the study and projected changes that occurred at the school.

Setting and Research Context

The study took place at a small, public, urban, magnet high school where the curriculum is heavily focused on the sciences and math. The population of the school consisted of approximately 210 students of African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American descent. While this high school is small, it is located in a large urban district consisting of 12,000 students. At Aesculapian high school, students may only enroll in the 9th grade and each student must successfully pass academic testing and an interview prior to acceptance. Within the daily norm of activities at the school, students are exposed to numerous professionals in medical and health related careers through outside speakers, visitations to hospitals, and internship programs. It is the mission of the school to prepare students for a postsecondary education in the sciences with the hopes of eventually entering a medical, nursing, or health related profession.

The students represented in this study and within the district are identified as at-risk and underserved, due to the low socioeconomic status of the city and its inhabitants. The school district's continual failure to make adequate yearly progress on standardized tests that measure student achievement in most of the elementary, middle, and high schools, adds to the marginalization of the students. As a result, many of the schools are consistently embroiled in a restructuring phase in accordance with state imposed

legislation. Increasing academic student achievement is at the core of all the reform efforts of the district, which is evidenced by the numerous educational initiatives, professional development mandates, and external resources provided to staff and students. The magnet schools within the district, however, have managed to flourish despite the odds, in terms of student achievement.

The principal of the school was informed of my intentions as the researcher for the proposed study and has provided a letter of consent to conduct the study at the specified site, along with approval from the board of education to conduct the study. In addition, staff members who served as mentors and/or instructors to the students participating in the study were informed of the purpose of the study before the project began. I reviewed the Informed Consent form (Appendix A) with all the participants with the assurance of their anonymity in the study. Any student who participated in the study, and was considered to be a minor under the age of 18, also obtained the informed consent of their parents to participate as part of the IRB approval process.

The study was conducted by me as the researcher who served in the capacity as leader participant, observer, and mentor, along with a group of teachers who served in the capacity of mentors or instructors. Throughout the cycles of this study, leadership development learning occurred and several qualitative research instruments were administered to the participants for the purpose of data collection. Data collection occurred in a setting familiar to all the participants, which added relevance and validity of the study. The qualitative instruments utilized were reviewed and approved as part of the IRB process.

Population Sampling

The participants of this study included male and female African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American, high school students of the National Honor Society who were enrolled in grades 11 and 12. The 20 participants have been purposefully sampled from the population of the school because of the uniqueness of their group, and the requirements needed to remain viable members of the National Honor Society. National Honor Society students are those deemed to possess the qualities and characteristics of scholarship, leadership, good character, and service to others, which are the tenets of the organization.

A purposeful sampling of five faculty members from this high school served as mentors to the students, including myself as the participant researcher. The faculty mentors were also purposefully sampled due to their job or extra-curricular responsibilities at the school and their regular interaction with students. The mentors were also included in the qualitative strand of the action research study. They included the Site Manager, who is our Exposures Program Coordinator; a Computer teacher, who serves as one of the Club Advisors; and a Science and a Social Studies teacher, who also act as the Advisors to the Junior and Senior Class.

Change Framework

As we move forward in the twenty-first century, organizations will face more change rather than less, and the pace of change will quicken even more for schools. If an organization is to survive, it must respond positively to changes in its environment, where all the members of the organization are considered change agents and the organization is truly "change ready" (Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1996). Kotter (1996) states that good leaders

realize early in the process that facilitating change cannot be done in isolation or through

vision alone. Advocates have acknowledged that educators must come to an intimate

understanding of the process of change in order for implementation to be successful and

for the promises of new practices to be realized (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Good leaders

offer their staff and students the opportunity to brainstorm ideas, offer suggestions,

perform research, and voice their thoughts and concerns, so that a plan can be developed

with their input, thereby making implementation a much smoother transition (Kotter,

1996).

Data and research must drive the decisions for change and improvements with a

thorough examination of everything from scheduling, curriculum, teacher quality and

placement, professional development, programs and initiatives, professional learning

communities to facilities (Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1996). A study of student leadership and

school change initiatives finds that students are often asked to take on school leadership

roles in student related activities and participate in school and community projects, but

are rarely part of a discussion regarding change or the restructuring of their schools,

especially in urban areas (Antonio, 2001; Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012). Involving

students in the process can often assist in determining where changes can and should be

made to improve achievement and engagement in the culture of the school (Antonio,

2001; Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012)

Step 1 & 2: Establishing a sense of urgency and building a guided coalition.

Utilizing the eight step change theory and organizational principles of Kotter (1996)

presented in the conceptual framework and methodology of this study, I outlined plans

for improvements at this high school through the eyes of the student participants involved

in the action research study at this high school. See Figure 6. During a 2010 pilot study

initiated by me as the researcher, qualitative interviews were conducted of teachers

concerning student leadership at Aesculapian High School. From the data obtained, a

recurring theme emerged from the perception of the teachers. The results from the

interviews indicated a need for students to have more opportunities to develop and

demonstrate leadership through increased participation in school activities and

community service, thereby enhancing their portfolios for post secondary pursuits.

Figure 6. Eight Step Change Model

There is a sense of urgency to address the concern raised by the lack of

leadership among the students of this high school, given the growing demands for student

leaders within school and community organizations.

The findings of the pilot study were presented to the Administration of the school,

with the suggestion that I embark on an action research study to provide leadership

development learning to the National Honor Society students through the curriculum of

the Exposures program at Aesculapian. I addressed how a learning community was

established for the students of the National Honor Society at Aesculapian high school for

the purposes of leadership development. As part of this study, I defined and described

what is being called the learning community, and what happens when a school works, plans, and takes action collectively to assist students in utilizing their voice towards engagement in the life of the school.

Within this action research study, I analyzed the leadership experiences of students and their mentors in the National Honor Society utilizing interview focus groups for data collection, along with facilitating leadership development opportunities with the National Honor Society members, and assessed their outcomes to increase student engagement within the school and community. Qualitative data were collected through National Honor Society applications, a leadership perception survey, observations of the leadership classes, lesson assessments, focus group interviews, along with the reflective journals of the students and mentors.

Kotter (1996) advocates finding teachers who are interested in doing things differently, who have "some real commitment and passion to do it," and get them talking to each other. All stakeholders agreed offering leadership development classes would be beneficial to the students, school, and community. Research has indicated how learning communities are one example of how both students and teachers benefit in attaining academic and organizational goals (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Kotter, 1996).

Step 3 & 4: Share and communicate the vision. A leader must share and communicate a vision that focuses on solutions and not just problems by empowering people "to do what they do best" through shared leadership. Shaping a leadership program to fit the needs of the students participating in the study required that all stakeholders and learners, question, investigate, and seek solutions for change in the hopes of increasing student engagement within the school. Members of the group must

view the work of the group itself, as a leadership learning community. The idea of a learning community "where students continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1990, p. 3) is the foundation for successful change. A school that is focused on respecting, celebrating, and building on the characteristics and abilities of the students are key elements to establishing learning communities within the environment.

Step 5: Empowering others to act on the vision. A core component of the learning community focused on leadership development with the members of National Honor Society. These students formed a learning community with their advisor and other selected faculty members who served as mentors to these students. The mentors established relationships that supported the voice of each student and their potential for leadership acquisition. All members of the learning community were asked to participate in all facets of development through continuous engagement in an ongoing process of dialogue, learning, and self-analysis of their leadership experiences. Research suggests that schools that implement learning communities for students as well as adults have the potential to reach real reform (Putnam, Gunning-Moton, & Sharp, 2009). By building leadership capacity, the students were able to apply the skills developed and enlisted others to share their vision. It was the belief of the researcher that all participants within the learning community possessed the capacity and responsibility to contribute towards the productiveness of the school and thereby empowered to act upon the vision.

Step 6, 7, & 8: Improvements that will produce change. The five practices of exemplary leadership previously discussed were incorporated into the Students in Action

program that was implemented at the school as part of Student Council. The Students in Action program is designed to improve the quality of schools through inclusive, purposeful, and active student engagement and is a continuation of the leadership learning experience. The program encourages every student to have personal responsibility and shared accountability with adults and aligned with the conceptual framework and the proposed outcomes of the model entitled Meaningful Student Involvement by Fletcher (2003). The objective of the program is to engage students in the seven goals of the program to enhance engagement and learning through leadership over a period of time. Within the program, teachers and students encourage others to lead, learn, and work collaboratively through the use of recognition and rewards utilizing Kouzes and Posner's Student Leadership Challenge as the framework for student leaders to develop the five practices of exemplary leadership. The practices are purported "to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risk into rewards" (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 1).

Research demonstrates that the attitudes of students are most affected when students are engaged as significant contributors to learning communities and leadership acquisition becomes an activity that can be shared amongst the members of the group (DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Fletcher, 2003). The most significant contribution student leaders can make is not just to the issues of today, but to the long-term goals of developing people, schools, and communities so they can adapt and grow (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Consequently, leadership means taking the steps to make a positive change in schools and the lives of others as well as oneself. After the leadership development learning had been completed, it was the goal of the researcher that as an organization, the National Honor Society members would practice the leadership skills

they have acquired, apply their knowledge towards greater student and school engagement, function more cohesively as a unit, and be empowered to achieve their goals to an even greater extent. This framework is part of a transformative cycle that was continually re-examined, redeveloped, and reconceived within the learning community as it evolved over time to assess meaningful student involvement with new participants and change initiatives.

Action Research Cycles

Hinchey (2008) defines action research as a process of systematic inquiry that is cyclical in nature and has problem solving as the core of its design. Action research thrives on confronting the policies, procedures, routines, norms, and values of an organization in order to implement change or reform in our schools (Campbell, 2009). As the researcher began the process of proposing solutions for the proposed problem identified in the study, and collecting data to justify the actions taken, Stringer (2007) proposes that the cycles of inquiry delineated by action research follow the model of "Look, Think, and Act." In Stringer's model, the "Look" cycle is characterized by the gathering of relevant baseline information that builds a picture of how things are presently happening. The "Think" cycles involve exploring, discussing, interviewing, and analyzing the data to better understand how and why things are happening. The "Act" cycle calls for the implementation of the change along with the recommendations discovered from the "Think" cycles.

Other models used in action research utilize a five step process with different terminology addressed in each, but each process outlines a spiraling process of cycles that links the actions of problem identification, planning, observing, reflecting, collecting,

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analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating data in a systematic format (Calhoun, 1994; Kemmis & McTaggert, 1990; Sagor, 1992). The Sagor (1992) model has data collection as the heart of the research process with the triangulation of data being the focal point that allows the researcher to look for trends or patterns and draw conclusions about the identified problem. Reflection and planning are the key components of Kemmis and McTaggert's (2000) model in an effort to produce sustainable change or problem resolution. Calhoun (1994) viewed action research as a vehicle to facilitate change through shared decision-making within a school setting.

The action research model used in this study represented a combination of all these models as defined in Figure 7. These cycles were not linear in function. As I reviewed and reported the findings, the stakeholders involved reflected upon the data and guided the actions needed as I continued to seek, refine, revise, or enhance solutions before moving on to the next cycle.

Data Collection Strategies

A number of data collection strategies were employed by me as the researcher, in alignment with action research methodology. The researcher gathered baseline data, qualitative data, evaluation and assessment information from the student participants and staff mentors throughout the various cycles of this study. The voices of the participants themselves were heard through the utilization of traditional qualitative evaluation instruments such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, field notes, and reflective journals. Data were collected from National Honor Society applications, which established a baseline of information about where the participants were in terms of leadership and engagement within the school and community. A qualitative leadership

perception survey was administered to assess how participants view leadership

concerning themselves and others within their school community.
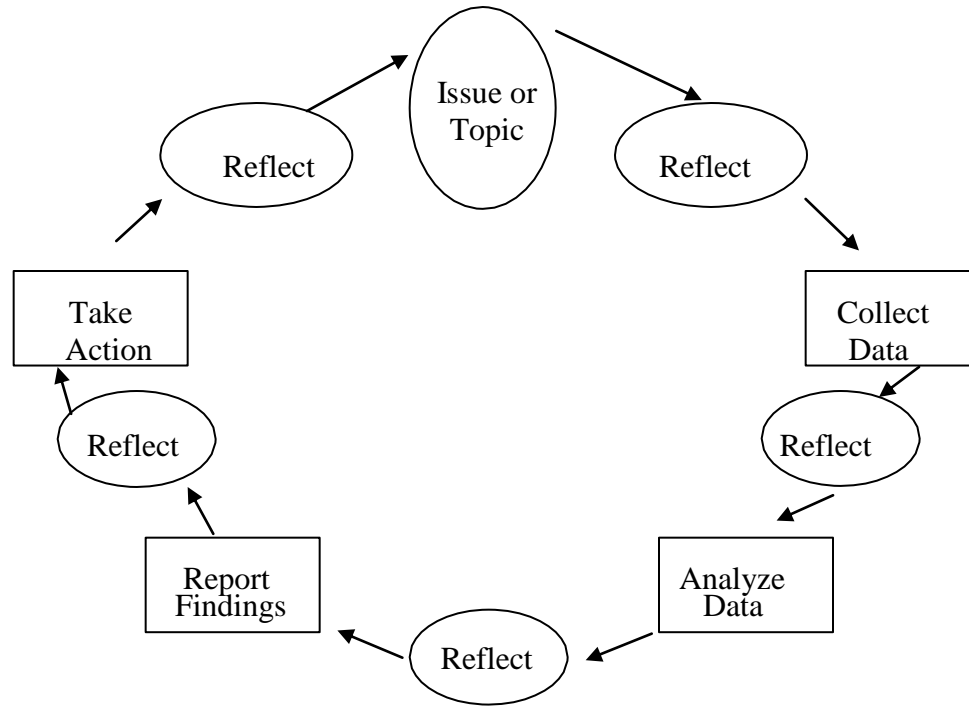
Figure 7. Four Action Research Cycles

Leadership development learning was provided over a 10-week period that

offered the participants the opportunity to assess and acquire new skills and

understandings about leadership. Jacob (2006) argues that an effective leadership

development program teaches students "how to hone their skills through an internal

process where they develop their own beliefs, values, and practices" (p. 11). The

participant researcher and mentors presented instructional lessons during on site

Exposure classes that emphasized leadership development, establishing leadership

identities, team collaboration, values assessment, skill building, and the development of

communication strategies.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to guide the discussions of the focus groups of students and mentors. The value of the focus groups was that it promoted shared leadership by allowing each member to construct meaning towards the purpose of increasing student engagement (Lambert, 2002). Reflective journals were utilized to offer personal insight into the thoughts and feelings of the participants and their mentors concerning leadership development and opportunities to lead and facilitate change. As culminating documentation, students developed action plans that outlined and described new clubs or activities that demonstrated how the participants have become more engaged in their community. As I moved forward with the action research process and data collection, actions resulting in change evolved as progression through the cycles occurred.

Cycle 1. I began gathering baseline data by reviewing the National Honor Society applications submitted when the student participants applied for membership to gain insight as to what they listed in the Leadership section of their applications. The applications were reviewed and coded into categories to determine what the group listed as leadership responsibilities for building leadership capacity and active student engagement. The participants formed a learning community that was focused on developing leadership skills and engaging their school community in volunteer efforts or a reform process that will produce change.

I also administered a qualitative leadership survey (Appendix B) to the National Honor Society participants, for the purpose of obtaining their perceptions of what leadership means to them. The survey served as a pre-assessment, and the data collected from the survey were coded and analyzed as part of the findings of the study to aid in answering the first research question, which asks "What skills, qualities or learning needs

do high school students perceive necessary for leadership development?" The data were also reviewed with the students for the purposes of feedback and discussion to determine the focus of their leadership development classes and focus group activities, with the assurance of confidentially to all participants.

      Cycle 2. As this cycle began, students participated in leadership development learning based on the five practices of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) framework twice a week for 10 weeks. I facilitated the implementation of leadership development learning as part of the Exposures program with the National Honor Society participants of the high school. The instruction was provided as a collaborative effort between the researcher, site manager, student participants, and mentors, utilizing shared leadership and decision making principles.

      The leadership learning lessons offered a variety of learning strategies that utilized lecture, peer- to-peer interactions, small and large group exercises, and the use of reflective journals and exercises. The students learned and acquired interpersonal skills which empowered them to become further engaged in the school and increased their levels of participation in extra-curricular activities. Students also were provided with the opportunity to lead during the leadership classes to apply relevance and validity to the change initiative.

      The role of the mentors was to support and encourage the students as they participated in activities during the leadership development cycle. Since the mentors were already heavily engaged in the culture and climate of the school, their responsibility was to "model the way" as they attempted to have students invest in their school and community. Students and mentors maintained reflective journals about their experiences

throughout the leadership development process to provide supplemental information in the form of field notes, observations, and reflections which could not be provided by other data collection tools. Through education, experience, training, and mentoring, students will learn how to identify their leadership capabilities, build communication skills, plan effectively, and begin to inspire others to become leaders. The leadership instruction received by the students during this cycle of inquiry laid the foundation for the researcher to gather data to answer the second and third research questions proposed in the study.

Cycle 3. With the leadership development sessions completed, I conducted several focus groups of purposeful samplings as part of the qualitative strand of action research that included the National Honor Society participants and the mentors of the students. An interview protocol was developed to guide the discussions of the focus group participants (Appendices C & D). The participants of the student focus groups described how their leadership learning experiences impacted their development and perceptions as leaders, their involvement in the activities of the school, and their understanding of how they expressed their voices to enhance student engagement. The data collected from the focus group interviews supplemented information obtained from the Leadership Perception Survey and leadership lessons conducted during the study and provided further detail to answer research questions number two and three. The focus group session of the mentors was designed to discuss their perceptions of how the mentoring experience and leadership training motivated the participants to express and exhibit increased levels of student/school engagement as reflected in research question number four.

The focus group discussions were recorded, coded, and transcribed for analysis and interpretation. The researcher used the focus group data to measure growth of leadership and volunteer capacity from the perception of the students and mentors as recurring themes and patterns emanated from the findings. The results highlighted the impact of the participants' leadership development experiences in the initiation, planning, participation, and implementation of activities that impacted meaningful student involvement in the school and community. The focus group interviews documented how student voice and student engagement were enhanced as a result of the leadership learning of the participants. The students, mentors, and administration discussed the analyzed data from the focus groups and determined actions to be taken to move forward with the study.

Cycle 4. During this cycle, students were encouraged to think about opportunities for them to lead so they could apply the knowledge obtained through the leadership development learning and determine how student voice could be utilized to initiate and implement change in the school environment. The student participants focused on the goals of the Students in Action program of New Jersey for the purposes of discussing and applying acquired leadership skills and strategies to increase student engagement. There are seven goals included in the Students in Action program, but the learning community established for this study only focused on attaining the first three goals which were engaging the school community, establishing an effective leadership team, and expanding volunteer capacity. These efforts hopefully allowed the students to demonstrate their leadership skills by modeling the way, enabling others to act, and taking action to enhance student voice within the school to increase engagement as it pertains to

extracurricular, service, or academic activities in the school or community.

Students worked in purposeful groups to outline the actions they have taken to develop a school activity, club, or service project to implement with a focus of being student- centered and student led. The development of action plans by the student participants (Appendix E) highlighted new activities or projects that were initiated as a result of their leadership learning experience and skills acquired. The action plans were used as outcome evidence towards increased utilization of student voice, student engagement, and meaningful involvement by the participants in the school or community. The leadership role of the researcher was reflected in all cycles of inquiry during the study and was espoused upon in future chapters of the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A review of the literature indicates that leadership studies of this type normally utilize a constant comparative method of analysis with the intent of constructing a grounded theory model for future studies (Eich, 2008). It is a qualitative way of inductively developing theory from the ground up through a systematic process of comparative method analysis (Eich, 2008). However, since this was an action research study, the objective was to corroborate, compare, and contrast the data collected that were specific to a certain situation, thereby providing more depth and insight from the perspective of the participants.

An analysis of the data began by organizing what had been observed and written by me as the researcher, mentors, and student participants during the study. Data analysis and interpretation involved looking at the qualitative findings and assessing how the data addressed the research questions, which Teddlie and Tashakorri (2009) call drawing

inferences. The data obtained from the qualitative instruments utilized in the study were organized and coded into categories of information as the researcher looked for recurring themes and patterns to emerge. When discussing the notable themes and outcomes from the data collected, I addressed how the research questions were answered from the findings through comparisons in the literature and similar studies.

In action research, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) indicate that there should be an overlap of information obtained from the observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and journals emanating from each cycle of inquiry that should serve to strengthen the results. As the researcher, I synthesized the data to move beyond descriptions provided by the participants to document action plans that were implemented to initiate change in the school or community environment. This process assisted in generating greater understanding of the topic, issues, or problems that impact student leadership development and engagement in high schools for possible future research.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability concepts in action research are addressed utilizing a triangulation approach with qualitative or quantitative data. Triangulation occurred by obtaining data from more than one perspective and source of information. By triangulating the data from several sources, at different times within the study, I determined if enough data had been collected and that the results accurately reflected the circumstances of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Validity in action research is achieved through an analysis of the research process which involved determining whether or not enough data have been collected to answer the research questions thoroughly (Creswell, 2011). The information obtained from sources such as surveys, focus groups,

and interviews are analyzed to determine areas of agreement or dissent and then compared to see if similar findings are found in the research literature, thereby adding validity and depth to the study (Sagor, 2000).

Creswell (2011) recommends member checking as a way of increasing the validity of data collection. In this process I took into account, descriptions and themes that emerged from the qualitative findings and brought the data back to the participants to verify if what had been documented was accurate and reflected what was actually written or spoken. I asked members to check whether descriptions were complete and reflected their intentions so the data could be included in the study.

Traditional reliability is measured by the extent to which similar results can be duplicated in similar samples within populations studied at different times and settings (Creswell, 2011). Kouzes and Posner's (2008) quantitative instrument, the Student Leadership Practices Inventory, demonstrates this concept and has been shown through research to have both validity and reliability. However, the instrument was not utilized in this study due to the emphasis of obtaining qualitative outcomes from the research. The rationale being that action research findings are normally used to offer a greater understanding of specific problems and situations and therefore cannot be readily or reliably replicated to other circumstances and studies. The findings should act as evidence that will offer greater insight of the problem or issue, as well as strengthen the conclusions the researcher was able to draw upon as change occurred during the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the conceptual and theoretical reasoning for selecting action research methodology for this study and the impact four cycles of inquiry would have on the learning community at Aesculapian High School. My decision to explore research and data from a qualitative perspective complimented my desire to gather rich descriptions from the findings of the participants concerning the development of their leadership at the school. The ultimate goal of action research is to gain greater clarity and understanding of a problem and produce change which is what I felt was needed at Aesculapian High School to obtain the desired outcome of developing student leaders to increase their engagement and others in the life of the school.

The participants were purposefully sampled due to the uniqueness of the student group and the job responsibilities of the mentors, along with their implied desire to participate and help make change happen within the school. Obtaining data from the participants utilizing different types of qualitative instruments and triangulating it at different times during the study added validity and reliability to the study. It was my hope that these methodologies provided evidence that leadership can be taught through education, training, and experiences, with successful outcomes for increased student/school engagement in extracurricular activities and community service.

The next chapter describes how the qualitative instruments were utilized during the various cycles of inquiry, the data that emerged from the participants and the resulting outcomes.

Chapter 4

Data Collection and Analysis

Studying leadership is a journey that requires the learner to examine beliefs, values, and skills in the hopes of self-discovery. The high school student who is given the opportunity to apply, practice, and implement acquired leadership skills in school settings or within community organizations will experience stronger personal growth and development and greater student engagement, which is one of the goals of this study (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012).

In this chapter I have documented the actions that occurred during four cycles of proposed inquiry, and how specific data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted from the qualitative strand of action research. I have also presented the final actions of the participants that resulted in change occurring in the environment. The data collected are presented in the forms of tables, narrative accounts, and emerging themes related to leadership development, student voice, engagement and leadership identity.

I met with the members of the National Honor Society and their four faculty mentors to inform them of the purpose and potential significance of the dissertation study I wanted to undertake. I explained that participation in the study was purely voluntary, but it was my hope that the students would take advantage of an opportunity to increase their leadership capacity, and that the ultimate goal was to increase student engagement within the school. Out of the 25 members of National Honor Society, 20 agreed to participate and were given Informed Consent forms to sign. If they were under the age of 18, then the parents or legal guardian of the students were also required to sign the consent form. The demographics of the 20 members of the National Honor Society who agreed to participate are represented in Table 1, with pseudonym names

assigned to protect the privacy of the participants.

Table 1

Student Participant Demographics

Gender	Pseudonym	Grade	Ethnicity	Mentor
1 (F)	Theresa	12	Asian-American	Dr. Finch
2 (F)	Terri	12	African-American	Ms. Mays
3 (F)	Sybil	12	African-American	Ms. Jenkins
4 (F)	Anna	12	African-American	Ms. Mays
5 (F)	Kim	12	Asian-American	Ms. Kee
6 (F)	Faith	12	African-American	Ms. Mays
7 (F)	Mary	12	Hispanic-	Ms. Jenkins
8 (F)	Verna	12	Hispanic-	Ms. Jenkins
9 (F)	Nancy	12	Asian-American	Ms. Jenkins
10 (F)	Sarah	12	African-American	Ms. Mays
11 (F)	Amy	11	African-American	Ms. Bow
12 (M)	Andy	11	African-American	Ms. Bow
13 (F)	Charlotte	11	African-American	Dr. Finch
14 (F)	Kiki	11	African-American	Dr. Finch
15 (M)	Chris	11	Hispanic-	Ms. Kee
16 (F)	Kay	11	African-American	Dr. Finch
17 (M)	Jack	11	African-American	Ms. Bow
18 (F)	Wendy	11	African-American	Ms. Bow
19 (F)	Ally	11	Hispanic-	Ms. Kee
20 (F)	Donna	11	African-American	Ms. Kee

The role of the mentors was explained to the student participants and how they would interact with the group. The mentors also signed Informed Consent forms to participate in the study. The mentors for the study were chosen because of the frequent contact they have with various groups and grade levels in the school due to their job and extra-curricular responsibilities. Each mentor and mentee had the opportunity to decide who they wanted to collaborate with, and it was determined that each mentor would have four student mentees throughout the duration of the study. The demographics of the mentors are represented in Table 2 with pseudonym names assigned to protect their privacy.

Table 2

Mentor Participant Demographics

Mentor	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Position Held
1 (M)	Dr. Finch	White	Site Manager/Exposures
2 (F)	Ms. Kee	African-American	Science Teacher/ Junior Class Advisor
3 (F)	Ms. Bow	White	Social Studies Teacher/ Senior Class Advisor
4 (F)	Ms. Jenkins	African-American	Computer Teacher Club Advisor
5 (F)	Ms. Mays	African-American	Teacher in Charge Club Advisor Participant Researcher

Data Analysis Methods

Saldana (2013) recommends several coding methods suitable for qualitative data analysis that could be utilized in an action research study. The data collected from all the protocols were coded manually by the participant researcher. Based on Saldana's recommendations, the following coding methods were used during data analysis. First, attribute codes were assigned, which standardized each participant's demographic information. Secondly, values coding was utilized which considered the perceptions of each participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs and the impact these characteristics had on their leadership development. Structural coding acted as a labeling index to categorize relevant data in relation to the research questions. Most importantly, invivo coding was utilized to note the literal or actual words used by the participants from the survey protocol in Cycle 1, the leadership development lessons in Cycle 2, and the face-to-face focus group interviews found in Cycle 3.

Peer review and member checking have been described as the main ingredient for establishing credibility within qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach of establishing credibility included presenting the findings to the participants that allowed participants to correct, restate their perceptions, or insert missing information if necessary. This process ensured the accuracy and honesty of the researcher while collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data for participant review. Survey results and classroom assessments were shared, along with transcribed focus group interviews, which were emailed to each participant to member check for errors to validate the data. Students and mentors maintained reflective journals about their experiences throughout the leadership development process, which provided supplemental information in the form of field notes, observations, and reflections that are not provided by other data

collection tools.

In this chapter I have documented the activities that occurred during the four action research cycles of the study. The information is provided in the form of narrative text, quotes from participants, journal reflections, observations, survey results, interview statements from the focus groups of students and mentors, and tables and common themes that emerged from the learning community.

Cycle 1: Leadership Pre-Assessment

This action research study was designed to build leadership development capacity among National Honor Society students of Aesculapian High School with the hopes of increasing student engagement. As the participant researcher, observer, and advisor to the National Honor Society, I was able to review the applications of the students and code data that revealed the leadership skills and extracurricular experiences of the participants at the time of their submission in 10th grade. The information listed in Table 3 describes the predominant categories of leadership extracted from the National Honor Society applications of the students. These data were compared to data collected from the participants who completed the Leadership Perception Survey. It was also explained to the participants that they would be given a survey to complete to ascertain their present perceptions about student leadership. During one of the National Honor Society meeting times during the first week of February, the Leadership Perception Survey (Appendix B) was distributed to the student participants for them to complete at the beginning of the cycle. The 10 qualitative questions on the survey were designed to add to the baseline information gathered from the National Honor Society applications along with the two questions asked of the mentors by the participant researcher.

Table 3

Leadership Categories

Leadership Categories	# of Student Responses
Class Officers	7
Community Service Activities	10
Community Service Leader	6
Internships	3
Church Activities/Youth Leader	5
School Clubs,/Tutoring,/ Pre-College Programs	12
Sports/Band/Cheerleading	14
Sports/Band/Cheerleading Captain	10

The surveys administered were kept confidential and pseudonym names were assigned to protect the privacy and identity of the students and mentors. The students had three days to complete the survey. Table 4 indicates the themes and subthemes which emerged from data of the 20 student participants that took the Leadership Perception Survey. The Leadership Perception Survey served as a pre assessment instrument that generated six themes for discussion: Identifying as a leader, Skills of student leaders, Skills of student leaders needing development, Volunteerism, Mentor perceptions of student as leaders, and Student expectations of the learning community.

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes Emerging From the Data

Themes	Sub Themes	No. of participants mentioning the theme
Identifying as a leader	Positive	18
	Negative	2
	Role model to follow	8
	Has a voice	4
	Can affect change	4
	Possesses self-awareness	3
Leadership skills possessed and desired	Confidence	5
	Sets a good example/Role Model	7
	Accepting of others	4
	Positive attitude	4
	Honesty	8
	Inspire/ guide others	7
	Determination	5
Leadership skills needing development	Communication and public	8
	Working in teams	5
	Patience	6
Volunteerism	Awareness walks	10
	Volunteering-Tutoring	4
	Class officers	7
	Sports teams	14
	Church groups	5
	Community service	11
	Internships	3
	Utilizing their voice to affect	3
Learning community expectations	Work better in teams	3
	Improve communication and skills	4
	Gain greater self-confidence	4
	Increase leadership skills	17
	Important to give back	18
Mentor perceptions of student leaders	Academically excellent	18
	Determined to succeed	8
	Works well with others	4
	Possesses leadership skills	4
	Accepts constructive criticism	4
Mentor perceptions of needed student leadership development	Speaking up more	3
	Building greater self-confidence	4

Theme 1: Identifying as a leader. Questions 1, 3, 6, and 9 of the survey were designed to gather the perceptions of all the learning community participants about student leaders both intrinsically and extrinsically. In response to question #1 of the survey all answered positively to the question "Do *you* perceive yourself to be a student leader?" with varying descriptions of their self-perception, except two students. Included is a sampling of the responses the students provided and their self-perceptions. Anna expressed her thoughts as:

> A leader is an individual that leads and commands a group to do better and be better. A leader has to have all the necessary qualities to motivate and inspire others through confidence, commitment and communication skills. I possess all of these attributes. I am a leader.

> Ally said, "I see myself as a leader because I have a passion for serving and putting others before myself." Charlotte stated, "I do perceive myself to be a student leader. For one, I feel as though I am a role model for other students by motivating them to pursue their goals, rather than give up." Sybil declared, "I do perceive myself to be a student leader due to the fact that I can provide structure and take charge when need be. My motto is 'As a leader their problems are your problems'." Kim said, "I perceive myself to be a student leader because I inspire and guide others to do better."

Jack declared:

> I'm a leader by example. I believe if people see me showing up to practice every day, working hard on the field, and not playing around, plus getting good grades, they tend to follow because they see how much success comes from doing the right things.

Terri stated:

> I am a natural born leader. I step up to the plate in all areas of my life. If there is an option to be a group leader, I am the first one with a raised hand. I have always had self-confidence.

MacGregor (2001) corroborates this notion by suggesting that as a student develops greater self-confidence in their leadership, the ability to make a difference in the school and community and the attractiveness of being a leader increases.

In question #3 students were asked to describe "What does it mean to *you* to be a student leader?" A sampling of their responses includes a statement from Terri who said, "To be a student leader means to show those following you to walk down the right path. It also means to have a voice to be able to influence followers in a positive way." Faith stated, "To me a student leader is one who would like to see a change or make things happen. Wendy indicated, "A student leader is someone who can ask others for their opinion, but still be able to keep their own." Donna said, "To me being a student leader is being that peer role model who other students look up to and come to for guidance." Andy believed, "A student leader is someone who takes initiative, stands out from others and wants to make a change. A leader is not afraid to stand up and want their voice to be heard." Amy felt that "An effective student leader is one who knows them self, has a strong vision for the future, knows what values are important, is knowledgeable about issues, encourages themselves and others, is honest, straightforward and trusts their followers."

Question #9 reflected the desire of the student to be a leader by asking, "Are there leadership opportunities *you* have pursued or would like to pursue?" Eighteen participants responded positively and their pursuits were consistent with the leadership categories they listed on their National Honor Society applications, which were outlined in Table 3. They included four students running for class office positions, four for captain of their sports team, three as leaders of their church group, two obtained internships

within the community, six became leaders of a community organization they were affiliated with, and two listed not pursuing any leadership opportunities.

The data from questions 1, 3, and 9 suggested that the students have made a connection between what their perception and expectation of a leader is and their perception of themselves as leaders. This is indicated by their responses to how student leaders should act. This is corroborated by the research of Shertzer and Schuh (2004), who performed a study on how college students perceived leadership and found their empowering beliefs revolved around receiving support from others, being provided leadership opportunities, and the background and environment of the students, while their constraining beliefs focused on a lack of capabilities, confidence, and opportunities.

Question #6 asked "What is *your* perception of student leadership at Aesculapian High School? After the surveys were completed I realized that this was not a good question for the student participants. They did not understand the concept of what was being asked, as indicated by their answers. Their responses only reflected their opinions about leadership in general and not how they felt about the type of leadership they were experiencing from the individuals who were leading their classes or organizations presently at Aesculapian High School. When I attempted to discuss the question with them afterwards, they did not want to make statements about individuals who were their peers, so I eliminated this question from the data collected.

Theme 2: Skills of student leaders. Questions 2, 4, and 5 of the survey gathered data about the perceptions of the students concerning which leadership skills they possess and are needed to be an effective leader, and which ones they would like to develop further. Question #2 asked, "What qualities, values or skills do *you* feel *you* possess as a

leader?" The qualities the students felt were necessary to become a leader are reflected in these responses from the participants. Of the many qualities, values, and skills that the students identified, the top three listed by the participants and reflected in Table 4 were in this order: confidence, sets a good example, and honesty, followed by, being a team player, able to inspire others and affect change. Sarah shared that, "As a leader of my peers, I inspire others to take action by showing my actions, commitment and good work." Kiki expressed that:

> Often I am labeled a goody 2 shoes, because I always do the right thing. I am honest no matter what pressure is placed on me or who is looking. So my perception is that while I don't have many followers as a leader, because my path may be too disciplined for others, I don't mind because Jesus only had 12 followers and Hitler had millions.

> Anna declared:

> I did not start developing my leadership skills when I got to high school because I have always had them, rather I began to utilize my skills even more by being more confident in my abilities and always being a team player.

> Then question #4 asked, "What qualities, values, or skills do *you* feel are

necessary to be an effective student leader?" Verna said, "To be an effective student leader a person needs to be able to give and take input or criticism and have good communication skills." Theresa believed:

> A student leader is one who inspires and guides others to do better, has good communication skills, a positive attitude, lots of confidence and is accepting of the opinions of others, even though I don't even have all these qualities.

Theme 3: Skills of student leaders needing development. Responses to Question #5 indicated that improvement in public speaking and communication skills was the most frequently provided response. This was followed by working more as part of a team instead of as a lone ranger, and exercising more patience in response to the

question "What qualities, values or skills do *you* feel *you* need to develop further to be an effective student leader?" as indicated in Table 4. Ally said, "I do not like speaking in front of people and it is something I want to work on. I get nervous and start mumbling in front of a large crowd and shut down." Andy declared, "I am a good speaker, but I know I can be greater at it. I am afraid to fail." Sybil, Kim, and Terri all indicated that, "They prefer to do all the work by themselves. We get frustrated when things aren't going well and need to work on our patience so we can work better on teams." Anna said, "I do not work well in groups and sometimes I fall short of believing in myself. Maybe I can get a mentor who can teach me how to believe in myself at all times." Theresa stated, "I grew up in an environment where individual opinions were not considered important, leading to my lack of confidence."

The student responses from questions 2, 4, and 5 are consistent with the predominant skill areas they felt they possessed and what an effective student leader possesses, with the exception of communication and public speaking skills and being able to work effectively on teams. Some of the students listed these two skills as necessary characteristics for effective leaders, but did not necessarily possess them, although they were desired.

Theme 4: Volunteerism. Questions 7, 8, and 9 were developed to ascertain the present level of student engagement by the students and their desire to seek future opportunities of leadership. Question #7 of the survey asked, "Do *you* feel *you* have a responsibility to participate in school activities, extra-curricular opportunities or community service?" The school encourages volunteerism by requiring that all students obtain 100 hours of school or community service to be eligible for graduation. Therefore,

the expectation was that the participants would answer positively to the question, which they did, with the most repeated response reflecting the theme, "It is important to give back." The two students that answered negatively stated that they did not feel it was a responsibility or an obligation to participate or perform community service, but something you do if you are interested.

Question #8 of the survey stated, "Many complain, but few take action. What have *you* done personally to help improve something at school or in the community?" All the participants felt they had contributed in some way to their school or community and their responses fell into four general areas. Those areas included: six students who listed participating in various awareness walks that support medical research for diseases; four students volunteered with community organizations to tutor students after school; three students used their "voice" to be a leader for the class and act as a liaison to the Administration; and five students participated in school sponsored activities that assist the community such as the Thanksgiving food drive, Adopt a Family for Christmas, Aesculapian Chow Hound House (a non-profit pet food bank), and the Reach Out & Read program at a local hospital.

Theme 5: Student expectations of learning community. The last question, #10, summarized the expectations of the participants. The question asked students, "What do you hope to gain by participating in this leadership development learning community?" Four themes emerged from this question involving three students who wanted to learn how to work better in teams versus working alone; four students wanted to increase their leadership skills in general; four students listed improving their communication and public speaking skills; and, three students said gaining greater self-confidence would be

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helpful.

Theme 6: Mentor perceptions of student leaders. The mentors were asked by me as the researcher, "Do you perceive your mentees to be student leaders?" and to reflect their thoughts in their journals. The overarching themes generated from the mentors perceptions about their mentees were that the student participants were all academically excellent, dedicated to their studies, determined to succeed, accept constructive criticism, work well with others, and possess leadership qualities. Some quotes from their journal entries include statements like this one from Dr. Finch about Kay, "She is an outstanding star student who outshines others, yet is willing to give a helping hand to her classmates." Ms. Kee said, "Donna is willing to go above and beyond for her peers and she takes criticism well, since she knows it will better herself." Ms. Bow felt that, "Amy is always the first to volunteer to help others, works well with her peers, shows confidence and models the way for others." Ms. Mays expressed her thoughts about Terri.

> She is an individual who strives for excellence and has blossomed into an extremely confident leader this past year and gets results, but sometimes her strong will is counterproductive. However, she is willing to accept constructive criticism when given to achieve her goals.

Both Dr. Finch and Ms. Bow believed, "Andy has shown leadership skills both in and out of the classroom. He knows how to take control of a group, while still listening to everyone's ideas." Ms. Jenkins said, "Chris is a student who defines quiet confidence. While he is not outspoken, he is often the strongest intellectually and is one of the top students in the class."

Notably several students recognized the role mentors already played in their lives and their development as leaders, which they explained to their faculty mentor. Charlotte

enjoys working with a medical student who has been mentoring her this past year, and helped her with SAT prep, college preparation, and life in general. Nancy spends time with her assistant pastor who encourages and motivates her to do everything from her heart and do it for no one else but God. Chris said his martial arts instructor has been helping him gain confidence and strength so he can excel in other areas other than academics. These students already have the advantage of an adult guiding them through leadership outside of the school.

The mentors also indicated that several of the students needed to work on speaking up more and not being afraid to voice their opinion, while others needed to build up their self-confidence in order to be a more effective leader. Some quotes from their journals reflect these thoughts from Ms. Jenkins, who said, "Nancy and Kiki need to work on having more self-confidence and realize that their input is just as valuable for others to listen to also." Ms Bow felt that, "Wendy needs to find her own voice and express what she wants and how she feels, instead of just listening to what others want." Ms. Mays declared that:

> I would like to see all the mentees become more accountable to the activities, events or programs that they made a commitment to and honor it. If you say you're a leader then you can't quit when the going gets tough or things become inconvenient. It reflects on your integrity.

The mentors were in agreement that the students all perceive themselves as leaders, but felt that while some are comfortable in this role, others needed to develop more concrete leadership skills that would enable them to initiate ideas on their own instead of waiting to be led. The mentors perceived that most of the participants worked well with others and on teams, which is incongruent with how some of the students perceive themselves.

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Cycle 1: Reflection and analysis. The findings from the Leadership Perception Survey were shared with the students and mentors as part of the peer review for Cycle 1's analysis, so all the participants could understand where they stood as a community in terms of leadership. Time was spent discussing whether students' self-perceptions as leaders reflected what they actually desired in a leader. The students were not surprised to hear that nearly everyone considered themselves to be leaders. The student participants all had differing qualities that they possessed and felt they wanted to develop further to increase their leadership capacity as outlined earlier. In the instances where the self-perceptions of the students were not consistent with their desired qualities of an effective leader, I informed the participants that as a community, we would try to work on closing that gap as one of our goals during the study. The students also agreed that they needed to participate in more community service that could be sustained over a period of time, in addition to one-day events. The data obtained from the survey also assisted in determining what should be studied as part of the leadership development lessons in the next cycle. Therefore, it was agreed that as a community, the students along with their mentors, would work on clarifying their skills, demonstrating what it means to model the way or lead by example, improve communication and presentation skills, and encourage others whenever possible to improve team collaborations. The pre-assessment data collected from the Leadership Perception Survey and National Honor Society applications and the resulting findings aided in answering the first research question outlined in the study.

Cycle 2: Leadership Development Instruction

      Role of student participants in learning community. As the researcher, I informed the students that as participants in the study, they would form a learning community along with the mentors, and begin undertaking leadership development lessons that are focused on developing their leadership skills and engaging the school community in a transformational process that would produce change. I explained that learning communities incorporate active and collaborative learning activities and promote involvement in academic and social activities that extend beyond the classroom. Students engaged in learning communities are linked with the same participants for an extended period of time which allows them to further develop their identity and discover their voice as well as being able to integrate what they are learning into their academic and social experiences (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

      The goal of this cycle was to initiate the teaching and integration of leadership skills within the scope and sequence of a high school curriculum with the hope of increasing the leadership capacity of student participants based on the needs expressed in the Leadership Perception Survey from Cycle 1. Teaching about leadership is a process, and the lessons I developed are the result of a cooperative and experiential learning experience that is meant to reflect what was needed to be of benefit to the students. The leadership development experience offered a variety of learning strategies that utilized lecture, peer-to-peer interactions, small and large group exercises, lesson assessments, and reflective journaling. It was my hope that the lessons, if effective, would be incorporated into the Exposure program of the school as a Leadership component in the following school year. The lessons described were selected and designed to correspond

with Kouzes and Posner's (2008) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, otherwise known as the Student Leadership Challenge Model, in an effort to increase engagement by students in the life of the school and community. The learning outcomes desired for the student participants were to learn the five practices of exemplary leadership of Kouzes and Posner (2008), and realize how each student can transform into becoming a more successful leader. It was desired that the students adopt the commitments and behaviors taught, and put them into practice and start making an impact within their school and community to increase student engagement. The students and mentors participated in leadership development activities for 10 weeks during their Exposure class periods. The student participants met twice a week in a classroom for 10 weeks to begin undertaking 12 leadership development lessons for 45-minute time periods. Additional meeting times were scheduled when necessary. Students also met with their mentor once a week during a mutually agreed upon time.

Role of mentors in learning community. The role of the mentors was to support and encourage the students as they developed skills and participated in activities during the leadership learning cycle. The goal for the mentors was to encourage greater leadership involvement from the students that would assist them in applying acquired skills in their school and community. Since the mentors were already heavily engaged in the culture and climate of the school, their responsibility was to motivate students to invest in their school and community. The mentors met once a week with their mentees and every other a week as a group. Having a group of faculty peers to discuss learning strategies that would benefit our mentees was essential to improving our desired outcome of increased engagement. The mentors usually met with their group of

mentees during their lunch periods to discuss their thoughts about the lessons from week, plans for college, school activities, and areas that they wanted help with whether it was academic or personal. The mentors taught some lessons, observed others, and consulted with their mentees after the lessons to work on areas identified by either party as needing development.

Lesson 1: Student leadership challenge model. The first lesson began the 2nd week in February and was conducted by me as the participant researcher and observed by mentor Dr. Finch. It had been established in Cycle 1 that this was a learning community; therefore, the first lesson was designed for the students to experience how to work in a learning community. The objective was to introduce Kouzes and Posner's (2008) five practices of exemplary leadership that the community would be striving to embody as part of their leadership development process. The lesson began with a puzzle activity in which the 20 students were divided into four groups. Each group received a bag of simple fairy tale themed puzzle pieces to put together. The participants soon discovered that they did not have all the pieces necessary to complete their puzzles. Students had to leave their groups to search for the puzzle pieces they needed from other groups. Once the students completed their puzzles, they were asked to reflect about the puzzle activity. Group 1 responded, "We learned that communication is a huge part of being successful on a team." Group 2 claimed that, "To effectively work on a team, a person has to know what they need to do and be active in the process, or there is no outcome." Group 3 noted, "It showed us what we had, and had to determine what we needed to finish the assignment." Lastly, Group 4 stated, "Analyze situations first and make a plan."

As that part of the activity ended, I introduced the Student Leadership Challenge

Model by Kouzes and Posner (2008) and explained what the authors have documented as the five practices of exemplary leadership. I asked them to form five random groups, and each group was assigned a practice to discuss and explain what it meant or looked like to Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. The Model the Way group stated, "A good leader has to be a good role model for their team members, and ask do you walk the talk?" The group from Inspire a Vision decided, "A leader needs to listen to everyone's thoughts and inspire team members with positive words." The Challenge the Process group said, "It is good to be different sometimes. A good leader knows how to initiate change to experience something new." The Enable Others to Act group felt, "A good leader works well with others as a team and gets them to do their very best." Lastly, the Encourage the Heart group agreed that, "Good leaders celebrate others accomplishments and recognize them whenever possible."

Dr. Finch observed that the students had many opinions about each of the five practices. Some students were more vocal than others but stayed on task and were able to come together and decide upon a definition to present to the class. A lot of debate occurred from the group that had Inspire a Vision, as to whether you should just tell people your vision since you are the leader, or should you spend time obtaining input from others first, but settled on the latter. The group with Challenge the Process came to consensus quickly. The students expressed that they like to be different so they can stand out as long as it is not too crazy. A few of the students from all of the groups stated that while they understood working with others is necessary, they liked working by themselves. Dr. Finch stated, "That is going to be a challenge for you as you continue on

with your education and enter college where you have to work in groups frequently, so start getting used to it." This was an area where the mentors helped coach the students with more team building strategies.

      Lesson 2: Admire, acknowledge, applaud! This lesson was designed to help students boost their self-esteem by admiring the qualities of others, acknowledging their efforts, and applauding their achievements as effective leaders should according to Kouzes and Posner (2012). This activity was facilitated by mentors Ms. Kee and Ms. Bow and observed by me as the participant observer and researcher. While Encourage the Heart is the 5th practice of Kouzes and Posner's model, the mentors and I felt it was important to set the tone early on in the study that being a leader is not just about you. All good leaders need followers, which are gained through building rapport, making others feel needed, and collaborating with them. The instructors wanted the student participants to gain a sense of community at the beginning of the study with the hopes of them engaging the entire school community after this lesson.

      The 20 students were divided into four groups and asked to make paper plate awards for members of another group highlighting something positive or admirable about the person who will receive it. Decorative supplies and markers were provided so the students could embellish the awards as they saw fit. A time limit of 15 minutes was given to complete this task. Then each group presented the awards to one another in an award ceremony. We asked the students to reflect in their journals how they felt about recognizing the qualities or talents of others. We also asked if they felt the award accurately portrayed their qualities or talents and why? Before the students even had a chance to write in their journals, Sybil immediately spoke up and said:

Everyone here knows that I am confident, not afraid to speak my mind, focused and talk fast, so I was easy. I didn't find it difficult to acknowledge something good about anyone else, because I feel you can always say something positive about someone. It's not hard with this group because we are all in the National Honor Society so we already have a lot of common characteristics that others see as worthy.

After reviewing the journal reflections of the students, it was determined that Sybil's initial comment summed up the feelings of the group.

Lesson 2: Admire, acknowledge, applaud - part 2. As an enhancement of this lesson, the mentors asked the student participants to brainstorm what could be developed to show appreciation and encouragement to the entire student body and staff. At this session, I facilitated the lesson. The students decided that they would like to coordinate a post Valentine's Day celebration for the school. After selecting a date and obtaining administrative approval, the students started making fliers and announcing over the public address system each morning that on February 27th, we would conclude Black History Month by celebrating "Show Your Love Day." The student participants asked everyone to wear something red on that day and either create a card, sing a song, write or recite a poem or rap, present a flower, or give a small gift to someone else.

As a community, the students worked for two weeks on their own developing this project and decided that they would buy or get donated leftover Valentine's Day cards or gifts from various stores to distribute to the entire student body and staff. The student participants drafted letters with the assistance of their mentors to present to store owners explaining their cause and asked for donations. They successfully obtained enough cards for the entire school population (230) and wrote words of appreciation and encouragement on all of them. At an assembly program complete with DJ provided by the principal, the cards were distributed to everyone. Anyone who had a gift for another

person was allowed to exchange it at this time. A group photo was taken of everyone in the auditorium wearing red and holding their card or gift, with a big "Show Your Love" banner held across the front of the group.

The learning community participants observed the smiles and laughter on the faces of students and staff and the hugs peopled started giving one another. Terry said, "All our hard work paid off. It was definitely worth it to see how happy everyone is." A comment from one of the teacher's stated, "This was a very nice idea and gesture. It really made everyone feel special." The principal commented that, "I loved the fact that no one was left out and that some students may have never received anything from their peers that was encouraging. Well done Ms. Mays to you and your group!"

Lesson 3: The leader within. Using a popular book and movie series amongst teens entitled *The Hunger Games*, this lesson was designed for the student participants to recognize the leadership behaviors of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) five practices in action. The author's model stresses that the five practices comprise the qualities necessary for succeeding as a leader. The lesson was taught by me and observed by mentor, Dr. Finch.

Throughout the lesson two of the characters in the story (Katniss Everdeen and President Snow) were compared and contrasted in conjunction with the five practices from the Student Leadership Challenge Model. Katniss emerges from the masses as an unlikely leader who volunteers in a situation when no one else would, possesses empathy for others, protests against the injustice she sees with her peers, and begins to attract followers. President Snow represents the type of leader whose power is authoritative, controlling, and exclusionary so that the group he presides over can retain their position. As the students watched the movie they are asked to note how Katniss has portrayed the

five practices of Kouzes and Posner's model. The students note that when Katniss defied the odds by becoming the winner of the 74th Hunger Games, she signaled hope to the poor villagers and built a following around the values they cherished, thereby "Modeling the Way" for others to follow. The students also recognized that as the following of Katniss increased, she "Inspired a Vision" to the people in her village when she obtained a mockingjay pin, which became a symbol to her followers. That pin portrayed what their future could be with her as their leader. Katniss became a hero when she changed 74 years of oppression by those in power by refusing to be bound by their rules and her followers started rising up, so conditions could improve. In contrast, President Snow continued to live in the past and was only interested in maintaining the status quo among the oppressed people he ruled over.

Sybil said, "You have to be willing to take a chance and stand up when you want things to change. That is how a leader breaks through the status quo and "Challenges the Process." Kim also recognized that it is important to learn how to move from being a totally independent leader, as she and a few others are, to one who is capable of developing cooperative relationships, which reflects how one "Enables Others to Act." As the popularity of Katniss continued to grow against the powers to be, she began to publicly recognize those that were committed to her cause and shared her values, which exemplified the behavior of "Encouraging the Heart." Her followers in turn reciprocated their appreciation to her. The students noted that they accomplished this practice when they coordinated the "Show Your Love Day" at school. The instructor suggested to the class that one of the lessons to be taken away is that throughout the movie Katniss is at her personal best as a leader.

After the students finished watching the movie, they were asked to reflect upon a

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time when they performed at their very best as a leader. Some examples from their

journals indicated the following. Teresa stated that she is really proud of her

improvement in English:

> Four years ago, I did not even know a single word in a children's book, but now I can read AP level books without searching through the dictionary for definitions and meanings. I am even leading my class in academic ranking. If I can do it, so can everyone else.

Faith said:

> My first time playing tennis was my freshman year and though I am not the best at it, I enjoy playing it which makes me work harder to play well. It was through perseverance and dedication that I became one of the leaders on the team and began encouraging others to follow in my footsteps, which led to me becoming team captain.

Verna expressed that:

> Being in the Poetry Out Loud Contest was so scary. I'm not the outgoing type, but memorizing the poetry and reciting it in front of others has helped me break out of that shell. It was difficult, but I succeeded. I made it to the state level of competition. My success encouraged other classmates to participate because they saw how great it made me feel to excel, especially when I didn't think I could.

Our mentor, Dr. Finch, stated that:

> Charlotte and Chris have spent a lot of time the past couple of years studying law cases, policies and procedures as a part of the Marshall Brennan Moot Court program. Both of them have indicated to me that their greatest achievement as leaders has been competing in the National competition in Washington, D.C and emerging with a place holding win. They feel they have paved the way for other students to follow their example even though the emphasis at our school is on medical and health related careers. They challenged the process, by following their hearts and finding their passion even when it may be different than everyone else.

Lesson 4: Who are you? This lesson was developed using another popular

movie/book series entitled *Divergent* and taught by me as the participant researcher and

observed by one of the mentors, Ms. Jenkins. It was explained to the student participants

that the premise of the literary work/movie is about a society that is divided into five

factions in which one may live. At the age of 16 every inhabitant is given a test that

indicates which faction they should join. However, each person gets to decide and choose

which faction they are going to associate themselves with for the remainder of their lives,

regardless of what the test reveals, but the decision is irrevocable.

At a choosing ceremony, each 16-year-old is given the choice to select one of the

following factions. Their choices are Erudite, who are considered the Intelligent group.

They are extremely knowledgeable, tech savvy and seek power. Abnegation are the

Selfless, who devote themselves to serving others instead of themselves and thereby run

the government. Dauntless are the Brave free spirits who are trained to fight and defend

as Security for the nation. Amity are the Peaceful people. They exist in love and provide

the resources and food for the nation. The Candor faction is the Honest group, who

believe everything is viewed as being black or white. They speak only truth, even if it

hurts. If your test reveals that you could possibly join more than one faction, you are

labeled Divergent, which the nation considers most dangerous of all, because then you

are difficult to control. In many cases children decide to leave the families they have

grown up with and go live in another faction, never to return.

After the students finished watching the movie, they were asked to write in their

journals and answer the following questions. "How would you decide which faction to

join and explain your answer? Include influences that may be impacting your decision."

Seven out of the 20 participants chose Dauntless, four chose Candor, three chose

Abnegation, and six chose Erudite, and no one chose Amity. It was noted from their

responses that seven of the Seniors chose Dauntless or Candor as their faction.

Conversely, six of the Juniors chose Erudite.

Ms. Kee, the mentor observer and I asked the students what we noted about their choices, and questioned if this was an indication of where they see themselves at this time in their lives. The Seniors responded that the reason they chose Dauntless or Candor is because they relate to going off to college soon where they will be free to be who they truly are, speak their minds without the boundaries and restrictions of a high school setting where you are told what to do, and make their own choices as adults in our society. The Juniors stated that most of them chose Erudite because academics at this stage is very important to them, because it reflects how well they will be perceived as they apply to colleges, receive honors, and seek scholarships. They see themselves as part of Erudite so they can go to the college of their choice. These statements suggest that the students are in touch with their values and future goals.

The question was also asked, "What positive influences do you have in your lives that have impacted your leadership and decision making?" The point of the discussion was to gather whether the student participants chose a faction that was in alignment with what they stated their values and beliefs were in Cycle 1, or were they being influenced by family or outside sources? From their journal reflections, the most significant influence in the student participants' lives were their parents, family members, and mentors. The majority of the students expressed that they would make their own decision about which faction to choose, but would give serious consideration to the feelings of their family. They believed that while their family or mentor may not agree with their decision, they would probably support their choice. The students indicated their parents believe in them, encourage their dreams, and want them to become successful despite the odds. Due to time students were asked to review this information and make a self-

assessment of their values for their personal growth.

Lesson 5: Where are you going? In order to be an effective leader you have to be able to inspire others, which is the second practice in Kouzes and Posner's (2008) model. You do this by creating a vision and carrying it out. For this lesson, the students were asked to form five groups of four and select one U. S. president for their group to research. The lesson was taught by Mrs. Bow, one of the mentors, and observed by me as the participant researcher. The presidents selected were Washington, Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Clinton, and Obama. Each group was asked, using their phones, to identify why their president was famous, and what was their cause? How did they get others to believe in their cause? Who did they impact and how did the people react to their leadership? The participants were also asked to reflect if the leaders are viewed any differently now, than when they first became famous as president?

After each group reported out the information pertaining to their president, the participants were asked what famous leader would they like to meet and explain their answer. The leaders most often chosen amongst the participants were Dr. Martin Luther King, Michelle Obama, Oprah, and President Obama in that order of preference. Their reasons for selecting these individuals are conveyed in their reflections. Andy said about Dr. Martin Luther King that, "I want to learn how to lead a group of people and become someone who is looked up to. I want to learn how to stand up for the things I believe in even if there are consequences." Chris stated, "I would like to learn what kept him motivated to work towards his goal and how he was able to fight through it all when others criticized and objected to his actions." Faith believed that, "Oprah inspires people to give back and I think that is an admirable quality." Donna suggested that, "Oprah

models the way of how to lead and is an example to others. She encourages the hearts of many when you watch her tv shows." Susan said, "Michelle Obama is involved in a lot of issues that affect children. She really inspires me. I think she should run for President." I also asked the students, "What do these admired leaders have in common?" In reviewing the list of individuals, we found that the entire list consisted of people with unwavering commitment to principles. They were passionate about their causes!

This activity allowed the students to examine who they valued as leaders and hopefully try to increase their leadership capacity by incorporating the traits, behaviors, and qualities they admire of these individuals into their leadership styles, so they can inspire others. Verna said, "I didn't realize that leadership can be put into so many categories, and how many different people from the past and present represent different styles of leadership." From this lesson, the students were asked to reflect in their journals what they could take from those leaders that have influenced them and admire, to create their own vision and goals. The message was clear from their writings that they admire those leaders who speak out, but are also willing to follow, and those who stand up for their beliefs.

Lesson 6: Stand up! This lesson was designed to build upon the former lesson and was taught by Ms. Bow again, who is one of the mentors, and observed by me as the participant researcher. Each president that the student participants researched had a slogan associated with the presidency that expressed their values and what they hoped to accomplish for the country. Students were asked, "What did the slogan mean?" In order to "Model the Way," the student participants must be able to express and demonstrate what their values and beliefs are, so their followers will understand what they stand for.

The Leadership Perception Survey results obtained in Cycle 1 identified the values the

student participants felt they possessed and were important to be an effective student

leader. They were challenged to come up with a slogan that reflected their values and

beliefs that could also be used to "Inspire a Vision." The student participants were

provided with common slogans from well-known people, companies, or organizations

and asked to identify them. Examples were given such as "Be All that You Can Be" from

the United States Army, or from President Barack Obama's campaign the slogan, "Yes

We Can." These terms offer a vision of what the person's or organization's belief is and

the meaning that they want to convey to the various groups they are trying to inspire.

The slogans the students created revolved around four main themes, which are

outlined in Table 5. The students were then challenged to begin using these slogans in

their daily activities both orally and in writing, to reinforce their beliefs and values, not

only to themselves, but to inspire others as part of their leadership development learning

outlined in Kouzes and Posner's (2008) model as a component of the conceptual

framework. It was noted by Ms. Bow and myself that the slogans either addressed how

the students felt about themselves as a leader (I categories), or what they felt others could

be as leaders (You categories). In addition, we believed that the concepts of not wasting

time and never giving up were a reflection of their values and belief systems which could

assist in motivating their peers.

Table 5
Slogan Categories

Slogan Categories	Student Slogan
I	I will! I got this! I know I can!
You	If you think you can, you will! Only you can stop you! Be you! You can become anything you put your mind to!
Not Giving Up	Never give up when it gets rough! Don't give up-ever!
Time	Destined to be better! Think better, live better! Make it happen! Get it done! Do today, tomorrow is not promised!

This lesson allowed the students to examine their behaviors as they began to transition through the stages of Komives et al., (2006) Leadership Identity model to determine who they are evolving into as a leader as defined in the conceptual framework.

Lesson 7: Visions. This lesson was designed to build upon some of the former lessons and was taught by Dr. Finch, one of the mentors, and observed by me as the participant researcher. Dr. Finch is the Site Manager for the school who is responsible for bringing in speakers daily from the medical and health communities to speak to our students about their careers or programs. The information these professionals offer our students provides them with a foundation to create their own goals, pursue opportunities, and visualize their future. Dr. Finch asked the students to reflect upon the values they had

identified in Cycle 1 that make up their character, the slogans they created in the previous lesson that reflect their beliefs, and consider what their personal and career goals are for the present and future which is in alignment with the leadership development and identity components addressed in the conceptual framework. They were asked to remember how the president they researched in a previous lesson inspired people and how the leaders they chose to meet inspired them and incorporate those feelings in their speech.

Once they gathered this information, they were asked to write a statement or story in a paragraph or two that would convey their vision for the future. The students were allowed to brainstorm with one another to gather their thoughts. Once written, they were asked to read it aloud and practice saying it with a partner. The objective was to practice public speaking and have their statement inspire the group. The next time we met, the students delivered their vision speeches. Since this was our first public speaking lesson, I asked the instructor not to provide any guidelines about public speaking so we could see how the students delivered a subject area they were familiar with, to see what areas we needed to work on.

My observation and feedback to the students included positives and negatives. The majority of students were clear about their career goals, what personal qualities they would need to utilize or improve upon to obtain these goals, and incorporated some form of their slogan in the vision. However, there were only a few that delivered their visions with the type of passion expressed in their statements. I explained to them that words alone cannot inspire, if you cannot make your audience feel what the words mean to you.

Dr. Finch stated to the other mentors during one of our group sessions, that after teaching and listening to the presentations of the students, it was evident who the students

were that presently hold leadership positions at the school as class presidents, school board representatives, sports team captains, etc., because their vision statements were much more expressive. We agreed with his observation and assessment and decided that this was an area all of the mentors needed to work on with their mentees individually. Since this was an area many of the student participants had designated as needing improvement from our Cycle 1 findings, it was decided from this lesson that the mentors would have their mentees recite selected speeches or poems every other week during their mentor sessions to work on increasing their credibility and believability utilizing voice projection and body language techniques.

Lesson 8: Scrabble anyone? Through previous conversations with student participants, I discovered that most of them had never played the board game of Scrabble. I thought this would be an excellent opportunity to not only improve their vocabulary skills but practice leadership skills in action. I taught the participants the rules and goals of the game with the added challenge to try and beat my score in the game, since I consider myself to be a Scrabble aficionado. I played with three groups of four students each for one week during their lunch periods, introducing various strategies of play during our games.

After a week of continuous play with the students, I asked the participants to write in their journals what they were learning about themselves from playing the game in relation to leadership. Learning this game brought out the following themes from the students, which relate to some of the five practices of Kouzes and Posner's leadership model (2008). The first practice (Model the Way) were reflected in the responses of Kim and Sybil when they stated, "I had to learn to think ahead and I had to come up with

another plan to play my word when someone went in the spot I was planning to go in quickly." Andy said, "I'm learning how to visualize better, by thinking steps ahead, which I can also apply to my sports play" (Inspire a Vision). Sarah said:

> I had to search the board for not only places to play, but places where I would get the most points for my word. It was a strategy I had to get used to instead of just trying to spell words. (Challenge the Process)

Kay said, "I found myself encouraging others to try and make better words so the game would be more challenging" (Enable Others to Act & Encourage the Heart).

Watching and interacting with the students while playing Scrabble gave me greater insight into their developing leadership abilities. Those that I thought would excel at this game because of their academic abilities and perceived leadership qualities soon became bored because of the pace of the game. Their attention spans wandered, and they just wanted to play words to keep the game moving rather than spend time strategizing to get the most points for their words. Additionally, they became frustrated with not being able to keep up with the number of points I scored in the game. I found this disappointing from students who I deemed as academic leaders and go-getters.

Conversely, students from outside our learning community began to ask to play after watching our group. They were students who I thought would struggle with the game because of their lower academic records or unconventional study habits, so I hesitated at first. However, they were so eager to learn I began playing with them on their lunch periods for several weeks and these students became Scrabble enthusiasts. These students spent time thinking ahead to plan when they were going to play, and strategizing to get the most points for the words they did play. They also spent time in between sessions trying to learn new words to improve. They stayed focused on the goal of trying

to beat me. Research agrees with these findings, which indicate that non-traditional leaders often have a greater influence on peer behaviors than students who are sanctioned as leaders by their teachers (MacGregor, 2001; Whitehead, 2009).

While the majority of my study participants stayed the course, when I pointed out my observations to the learning community in terms of game playing before one of sessions I received the following responses. Terry and Sybil summed up the thoughts of the group from our discussion, stating, "I guess we do need to work on having more patience." Sarah, Andy, Wendy, and Sybil felt challenged by my statements and decided to improve their playing and persevere with the statement, "I'm going to keep on playing till I beat Ms. Mays." This revelation spoke volumes to me in terms of student leadership, reinforcing the cliché of "Don't judge a book by its cover."

When the weeks of game playing ended so we could move on to other activities, the student participants who enjoyed playing Scrabble continued to do so on their own whenever they had the opportunity and I would play with them when time permitted. The interest continued to build throughout the study, and the students decided they wanted to form a club as one of the extra- curricular activities of the school. This exercise helped me realize that I may be overlooking student leaders because they did not present themselves in the image I deemed to be leadership quality. It was a powerful lesson for me!

Lesson 9: Teacher for a day. All the students in the learning community volunteered to participate in the Junior Achievement program. The High School Heroes program gives high school students the opportunity to teach financial literacy and career development in an elementary school setting. Students spent several class periods

preparing the five packaged lessons that they would present to their classes under the tutelage of Junior Achievement personnel and three of the study mentors Dr. Finch, Ms. Kee, and I, the participant researcher. This was an opportunity for the students to act as role models for younger students and instill community service values in young people at an early age. It also provided an opportunity for the student participants to build career readiness skills required for today's workforce, practice public speaking, and utilize their leadership and communication skills through hands on activities. The 20 students were grouped in pairs or triads and were assigned a specific grade level to prepare their lessons. Upon arrival at the school the students were dispersed to their various K-3 classrooms where they were responsible for teaching and managing the class for the day. The Junior Achievement representative, Dr. Finch, Ms. Kee, and I circulated to the various rooms to observe the students conducting their lessons. Short videos were taken by the mentors of the student participants so they could watch themselves in action afterwards.

Feedback from the event included reflections in the form of evaluations from the Junior Achievement coordinator, mentors, classroom teachers, classroom students, and the study participants. Here is a sampling of the data collected. The Junior Achievement Coordinator stated:

> Your time spent in the classroom as a mentor and role model provided each of the students with invaluable lessons that will continue to inspire them to dream big and reach their full potential – at no cost to the schools and their families.

Ms. Wolk, one of the 2nd grade classroom teachers had this to say about Jack and Kay:

> It takes poise, maturity and courage to stand in front of a class of 1st graders and their teacher and deliver almost a full day of instruction. You demonstrated those qualities today and while you may not see it, I can tell you that today you became role models for this group of students.

A 3rd grade classroom teacher Ms. Vee spoke about Sarah and Faith, and said:

> When you take risks and say "yes" to service like you did today, you become an agent of change. It doesn't have to be perfect to make a difference it just has to be done with preparation and heart.

Several of the kindergarten and first grade classroom teachers had their students prepare handmade, crayon- colored cards and presented them to their student teachers thanking them for what they learned that day. I observed that the student participants were very touched by these acts of kindness from the children, giving them an added boost of self-confidence that they had made an impact on the children's lives that day. The mentors Dr. Finch, Ms. Kee, and I shared our observations of the study participants with the following comments from our field notes. I said:

> Every group we watched looked prepared and comfortable leading the class in instruction. In those circumstances where you may have been losing the attention or focus of the students, we saw you trying different classroom management techniques to keep control of the classroom, just like their teacher would. That is one of the first steps of becoming a good teacher!

Ms. Kee said "All of you were engaged with the students. You walked around the room and worked with the students at their desks to build rapport and trust."

When the mentors and I debriefed with the students at the end of the day, we shared our observations and we listened to their stories about their classroom experiences. Comments received from the various participants began with Verna who stated, "I didn't know teaching was this hard, plus my feet are really tired from all this standing." Terri and Mary said, "The kids were really fun and energetic, but we had to keep flipping the light switch to keep them focused on us." Jack and Kay expressed this observation, "We could tell that their teacher had them very well trained on the procedures of the classroom. We didn't have to spend much time on discipline and could just teach, which

made our job a lot easier." Chris, Donna, and Charlotte said, "The kids were really into the lessons we presented, which made us feel good about the work we put in preparing them."

We asked the student participants to reflect upon two questions in their journals. "What do you feel you learned from this experience and secondly, what was your greatest challenge and how did you overcome it?" Amy and Anna said, "One thing I learned from the Junior Achievement experience is how to manage my time properly when dealing with any and every situation." Kay and Wendy stated that, "being prepared was key. If we didn't know what we were doing, it would have been over and the lessons probably would have been a mess and we never would have been able to keep the kids together." Verna said, "I learned that I don't want to be a teacher. This job is way harder than I thought it was, and having to manage those kids all day and keep them quiet is a lot."

The majority of the students expressed that their greatest difficulty was trying to keep the students focused. They tried different behavioral strategies, but clapping their hand three times was the overwhelming choice to get the students attention and keep the students focused which is a skill they can add to their leadership capacity. Kiki, Nancy, Ally, and Mary said:

> We're glad we got a chance to work on our public speaking skills. We had to keep our voices at a certain level so the students would pay attention and stay interested, which isn't always easy to do since we are rather quiet, but we tried.

Ms. Kee commented that:

> I think some of the public speaking practice you have been doing with your mentors has been helpful because I could tell today that you felt less nervous in front of the classes and more confident when you had to present your lessons.

The student participants were so well received at the elementary school where they delivered their lessons, that the Junior Achievement personnel asked them to bring the program to two other schools outside of our district. The students agreed to participate after seeking the principal's approval, so they could continue to grow in all the areas previously discussed and build leadership capacity and identity as indicated in the conceptual framework. This became an ongoing activity with Junior Achievement.

Research by the Junior Achievement organization corroborates the data collected from this lesson in a 2013 survey of 1,631 Junior Achievement High School Heroes. The statistics from that survey indicated that 90% of the participants strongly agreed that the experience helped them improve public speaking skills and 79% strongly agreed that working with younger children helped build their self-esteem, along with learning the importance of teamwork, presentation, communication and organizational skills, being prepared, patience, assertiveness, courage, the confidence to lead, teaching others, and time management.

Lesson 10: Decisions, decisions, decisions! In this lesson the students learned about the different types of group decisions they will need to make as leaders and the appropriate times to utilize them. Mentor Ms. Jenkins led this lesson and it was observed by me the participant researcher. Five different types of decisions were introduced to the participants of the learning community. Definitions were provided for the five types of decisions commonly used which are democratic, autocratic, consensual, laissez-faire, and strategic. The student participants were asked to respond to phrases provided by the instructor to discuss and determine the decision type that could be used in various scenarios such as a presidential election, sexual relations, assigning detention, applying

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for college, etc. As the students debated about what type of decision could be made, I observed that they soon realized that while some scenarios were clear-cut, and others could be viewed from several perspectives.

When the topic of applying to college came up Sarah stated:

Well I decided where I wanted to apply so that would be autocratic, then my mom decided from my choices which ones were viable based on finances, location, programs offered etc…and I agreed so I guess that would be both democratic and consensual. But once the offers came in from the choices we had selected, I decided where I was going.

The more vocal students really took control of the discussions and tried to sway others to their viewpoints, while the quieter students voiced their opinions they did not try to persuade others to believe in their choices. Sybil immediately said, "I make my own decisions and then inform people. I do not solicit opinions from the group unless I have to, I feel it makes you look weak as a leader." Ally disagreed with Sybil's viewpoint by suggesting that "how can you consider yourself a good leader if you don't bother to get the opinions or ideas of others before making a decision, especially when planning a school event? Mary said:

I always try and get a group of people together and ask their opinions before I make a decision. I don't like to have the entire decision on my shoulders. It may sound chicken, but I think it benefits everyone in the long run.

The instructor ended the lesson with asking the students to reflect upon in their journals as to what type of decision maker they are when planning activities or participating in school related events? How will you use your voice to aid you in the decision making process?" Once the students wrote a response and their reasoning, they were asked to share with their peers and receive feedback. Then the students were asked to do a self-assessment and analyze if their perception of how they make decisions is in

alignment with how they are viewed by their peers. Make a leadership self-adjustment if necessary!

Lesson 11: Action, you're on! The desire to possess enhanced speaking, communication and presentation skills was the highest rated area identified as needing further development by the student participants from Cycle 1. To build upon our initial lesson on public speaking, our Teacher for a Day activity, and the practice students have been receiving from their mentors, I taught this lesson and mentors Ms. Jenkins and Dr. Finch observed along with their Health teacher. As the instructor I modeled and reviewed what are considered effective oral presentation skills and strategies for the students to practice in front of a full-length mirror. These included voice projection exercises, making and maintaining eye contact, body language dos and don'ts and pacing.

All of the student participants had chosen Public Health topics for an assignment from their Health class. They were required to research an issue that was impacting our community, write a paper, and develop a power point presentation based on the required components provided by their instructor. That part of the lesson had already been completed prior to this activity beginning. Our goal for this lesson was not to critique the content, but the presentation skills and assess if the students were improving. An oral presentation rubric was utilized to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each of the participants. There were seven groups of student participants, who were videotaped by their classmates, as they presented their power point projects. After each presentation, feedback was provided to the students from both their peers and the instructor. Each group was then required to watch the videotape of their presentation so they could

visualize and internalize the feedback provided. This was the first time the students had ever been videotaped for a classroom presentation, so they were anxious to see how it would turn out.

An observation made by mentor Ms. Jenkins indicated that when feedback was given to the presenters from their peers and teacher, some of the students expressed that they did not believe or feel the comments were as critical as indicated in the critique. However, once the student participants viewed the video, they were able to admit to themselves that the critiques were accurate and indicated that they needed to work on improving any areas of concern. Ally said, "I never realized how much I move around when I speak. I'm going to have to try and keep my body more still. I've been working on it, but I still need more practice." Mary stated, "I always think I'm speaking loud enough, but I always get feedback that I'm not. I guess it's true, because I can hardly hear myself in the video." Ms. Jenkins offered this feedback to the students along with Dr. Finch and myself:

> The more prepared you are, it shows in how confidently you present. Let's continue to work more on having you review your presentations several times beforehand, so you don't have to read as much or stumble over your screens which leads to you being less nervous and frees your voice up to project.

The literature suggests that students need support and coaching in order to fully understand their feedback in a positive way, and that support needs to be provided on a one-to-one basis first (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). After the lesson, the mentors and I discussed what we had observed and felt that this was an area that we could continue to work on with the students in future sessions to increase their public speaking, communication and presentation skills. I also wanted to work on this particular area for myself as a leader.

Lesson 12: Let's hear from you! This lesson was an opportunity for students to have a voice in getting other students engaged in the life of the school. The student participants were asked to brainstorm what they would like to improve, change, or add to Aesculapian High School that would benefit the student body and provide an explanation. All of the mentors and the participant researcher facilitated the planning and implementation of this activity with the learning community members. The student participants were directed to form random groups and reflect upon the challenges they perceive exists at the school or what is missing that could possibly improve the culture of the school. The groups brainstormed to come up with a question that they could present to their peers. With the permission of the principal, each student who was present in homeroom on that day was given a sheet with two questions on it to voluntarily complete. The questions for the students read, "If you could put something positive in place to make things better at Aesculapian, what would it be and why?" and "Are there any courses you would like to add to the curriculum?"

Out of the 92 students designated as Juniors and Seniors, 63 completed responses were collected at the end of homeroom by the mentors. When the mentors were collecting the questionnaires in each classroom they asked, "Why they didn't some of the students complete the form?" The mentors reported that the most frequently expressed response was that there was no point in returning the form because the administration does not listen to what students have to say, much less give us something we actually want. The student participant groups tabulated the results and the following ideas were generated: 38 students who suggested creating some new clubs, which included clubs for knitting, sewing, dance, choir, debate, poetry, Scrabble, chess, cards,

video games, environmental, garden, and arts and crafts. Sixteen students suggested providing more extra-curricular activities such as getting the school district to start a sports program at our own school, getting the school district to build a gym on the property, forming a band, expand the mentoring program, restoring our greenhouse so plants and vegetables could be grown, and mandatory volunteerism at local hospitals. Nine students requested adding more AP Science courses to the curriculum and more electives such as cooking and other foreign languages other than Spanish and Chinese.

The learning community mentors were asked to retain this information so the students could use it to help them formulate action plans in Cycle 4 that could be presented to the administration for approval and budget consideration. Many of the ideas from the survey had been talked about before, but none of students had been willing to put forth the initiative to gather the information necessary to make a formal presentation to the administration. The students were now eager to begin formalizing plans that they would be responsible for initiating in the school even if some of them would not be here to benefit from it. This learning community was willing to step up and possibly make a difference. It would be an opportunity for them to use their voice to represent the ideas of their peers and get other students engaged in the culture of the school so that change could occur.

Cycle 2: Reflection and analysis. Through education, experience, and mentoring students learned how to identify their leadership capabilities, build communications skills, plan effectively, and begin to inspire others to become leaders. This was the last leadership lesson presented to the learning community, which ended the last week in April. Therefore, in keeping with Kouzes and Posner's (2008) practice of Encouraging

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the Heart, we celebrated this phase of the study by arranging a bowling excursion which included a pizza party to celebrate the accomplishments of the participants. I provided each student with a certificate of accomplishment and everyone had to give a positive shout out to someone else in the community.

As this cycle came to an end I asked the students to think about two things, what lessons they enjoyed the most and the ones that they felt have made a difference in their growth as a leader, and their mentoring experience. From their journal writings Anna, Amy, Andy, Kay and Charlotte stated that they liked the Junior Achievement activity the most because they got to do what they felt they were best at, which was planning, organizing and speaking in front of others. They believed these characteristics portrayed them as leaders among their peers. Some of the learning community participants said after watching the Hunger Games and Divergent movies, the associated lessons had helped them gained a better understanding of their personal values and beliefs through continuous reflection noted in their journal writings. Chris, Theresa, Nancy and Kiki who felt they were quiet leaders, expressed that they were emerging from the shadows and beginning to speak up more, voice their opinions to others and volunteering to take the lead more often on projects and activities. They enjoyed making people feel good about themselves, so working on the Show Your Love Day activity was one of their favorite activities, because it allowed them to work behind the scenes but still be acknowledged as one of the leaders that executed a successful event. As identified in Table 3 the student participants were mostly engaged in activities outside of school prior to the beginning of the study, but they now felt a need to initiate and become more engaged in the life of the school as indicated from the responses gathered from the

student body. It had been observed by the mentors that students like Kim and Sybil have worked on exercising more patience when working with group members. Practicing this skill has enabled the students to better achieve their goals as a team, through the lessons and exercises conducted during the study. I told the students that they would have an opportunity to discuss their thoughts further in the next cycle of the study, where they would participate in focus group interviews. The learning experience of the students during this cycle of inquiry laid the foundation for the researcher to gather data in response to the second and third research questions outlined in the study. This cycle ended the 4th week of April.

Cycle 3: Focus Group Interviews

Morgan (1997) defines focus groups as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on topics determined by the researcher. Focus groups have the advantage of helping the researcher gain insight into a wide range of thoughts by the participants and connect their personal experiences in a relatively short period of time (Morgan, 1997). With the leadership development lessons completed, it was now time to assess from both students and mentors if perceptions had changed about leadership, if personal growth had occurred concerning leadership development, identify if student voice and engagement were increasing, and if expectations from the learning community were met.

During the first two weeks of May, I convened three different focus groups to discuss these topics, so that all perspectives could be heard from the participants. The first group consisted of ten 12th graders from the learning community, the second group had ten 11th graders, and the third group was designated for the five mentors including me as the participant researcher. The focus group interviews were triangulated with data from

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the Leadership Perception Survey from Cycle 1 and the leadership development lessons in Cycle 2 to add greater depth to the findings. The semi-structured interview questions utilized can be found on the focus group protocols in Appendix C for the students and Appendix D for the mentors. The focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed and then member checked via email by the participants for accuracy. From the written transcriptions, the same coding methods were applied to the data to build upon the initial themes outlined in Cycle 1. After the interviews were coded, statements from the participants were extracted to reflect the themes that emerged from the data. The focus groups generated the following themes from the discussions of the student participants and mentors: identifying as a leader, listening to students, demonstrating the five principles of the student leadership challenge model, and learned student outcomes and mentor perceptions of student leaders and themselves.

Student Focus Groups

      Theme 1: Identifying as a leader. Reflecting back on the information gathered in Cycle 1 from the Leadership Perception Surveys and what was learned through the leadership development lessons about yourself, I asked, "Has your perception of what a student leader should be in alignment with your perception of yourself as a leader? Has your perception changed since the beginning of this study?" This question brought about a lot of discussion because all the students felt they were leaders. The student participants did not feel their perception of leadership had changed from what they expressed in Cycle 1. They reiterated what they believed a leader is, which they stated was being a role model, does what is right, is responsible for their actions, and walks the talk, which was in alignment with how they perceive themselves. The students restated the characteristics of a leader as being one who is honest, confident, has a positive attitude, communicates

well, is accountable, determined, and able to inspire or motivate. The students expressed

that while individually they may not possess all those characteristics, they are working

towards improving any that they and their mentors felt were lacking. The students who

already were confident leaders felt they were always looking for opportunities where they

could contribute or experience growth. Sybil said:

> I volunteer to be the spokesperson for any group I am a part of, and address conflict whether it is in the classroom or a meeting. I am not afraid to speak up in class, at meetings or discuss ideas or concerns with the Principal. So I feel my self-perception is in alignment with my beliefs of what a student leader should be.

Some admitted they were quiet leaders and act by doing things behind the scenes

or away from the school. Therefore teachers or other students may not be aware of what

they are involved in such as tutoring, church activities, or volunteering at community

programs, because they are not seen as being engaged at school, but just viewed as

excellent students. I asked those students how can they now use their leadership skills to

become more involved in the life of the school, and quietly if that was their leadership

style, to motivate their peers? Mary said, "We have to look for and take advantage of

opportunities presented to us, so we can build our leadership capacity, instead of shying

away from participating in activities at school when others ask."

Theme 2: Listening to students. The question was asked if the students feel they

have an opportunity to be heard and listened to in the school. The group felt that students

do have an opportunity to be heard, but not always listened to until recently. Kim said:

> The principal has always allowed us to come to his office and speak about whatever is on our minds, whether it involves scheduling, courses, student behavior, ideas for projects or events but more times than not he tells us we need to provide more information or he'll have to consult with staff before he can make a decision.

For some students this approach is perceived as a turn-off and patronizing, but for others

they will follow through if it is something they really believe in and feel it will benefit the majority.

I asked the students if they felt their teachers gave them an opportunity to be heard, specifically their class advisors. The students felt their class advisors and the principal have listened to some of their suggestions and they think it has helped with their class planning and collaboration. For example, as a result of participating in this learning community, the senior class officers suggested to the principal the idea of holding class meetings once a month so that everyone has an opportunity to provide input and have a voice when planning activities, programs and trips. They felt this would help to offset the backlash they often received from their classmates when decisions were made solely by the officers. The principal liked the idea and stated that if the schedule could be changed to accommodate the class meeting times that it would be beneficial for the entire school community. The class officers now had the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership skills by conducting and facilitating a large meeting, preparing agendas, managing the discussions, analyzing feedback, and practice group decision-making. However, it was evident from their responses that the learning community participants, especially the class officers, needed more training on meeting facilitation so they could conduct more productive class meetings. This was an area where the mentors helped the class officers become more proficient in managing class meetings.

It had been observed by the faculty and noted by the students that initiating these meetings had provided a platform, whereby everyone had the opportunity to have a voice in setting the tone for the culture and climate of the school if they desired. It proved to be a successful model, and it was implemented with the other grade levels and their advisors

for the planning of activities and events for the remainder of this school year and the next. The meetings continue to be works in progress. This was a unique circumstance that most high schools cannot accommodate due to their size, but this was an instance where being a small school afforded all the stakeholders the opportunity to share in the decision-making process, practice leadership, and increase student engagement.

Another example provided by the student participants was the establishment of a Student Council in the spring of 2015. When some of the learning community students approached and met with the principal regarding this issue, they explained that the school needed a group that brought everyone together to plan activities. Prior to the suggestion, all activities, events, and programs were grade level oriented and did not focus on the school as a whole. The principal agreed with the idea, and asked the students to draft a mission and goals for the group, and if approved to then proceed with recruiting members. The student participants developed and distributed an interest form for the purpose of recruiting students from the entire school population. The students who had expressed an interest met to develop the criteria the principal requested and a Student Council was created to begin putting some structure in place for this school year and then become fully functioning during the next school year.

The students noted that there have been other times in the past when they have not felt listened to, but admitted that usually occurred when other personnel reviewed or listened to what was being presented and different perspectives emerged, which required them to reevaluate or search for additional information when they thought they were finished. The students felt they did not receive enough feedback on how to improve their suggestions so that the idea, event, or program could become a feasible opportunity until now.

Theme 3: Demonstrating the five practices of the student leadership

challenge model. During the study, in my role as participant researcher, I continually

planted the thought in the minds of the students, to visualize what could be implemented

in the school that has never been done before at Aesculapian. Therefore, as part of their

leadership learning experience, students were encouraged to demonstrate how they could

implement activities or events utilizing any of the five practices of the Student

Leadership Challenge Model and engage other students in the process. I asked the

participants to describe how they performed this task.

The participants expressed that as they progressed through the leadership lessons,

some of them were inspired to honor our student athletes in a special assembly. While

this is a normal activity at most high schools, this had never occurred at Aesculapian. As

stated previously, the students who are interested in sports are required to play on the

teams of the other high schools in the city, since this school does not offer an athletic

program. Study participants who were not athletes sought other students outside of the

learning community, to plan and coordinate an assembly/sports rally. This was an

opportunity to demonstrate the practice of Encouraging the Heart outlined in Kouzes and

Posner's (2008) model, by recognizing the student athletes with medals and acknowledge

their accomplishments at their own school. What made the event even more special was

the fact that it was a surprise to all the athletes who were being honored, even the ones in

the learning community. The event was so appreciated and enjoyed, that the students

asked the principal if they could plan another program to honor the fall sport athletes and

engage even more students, and he agreed.

As an outgrowth of this activity, some of the musically inclined participants of the

study group decided to write a Fight Song to provide some school spirit for the student body. Again, this is something that did not exist at the high school because there are no Aesculapian sports teams. However, the students who took on this challenge cleverly focused the fight song around sports and academics. After they refined and practiced it, and set it to music they sang it for the principal in my presence. He loved the song, and thought it was a unique opportunity to recognize the creativity of the authors of the song, as well as leave a legacy behind for years to come that students would remember. The student participants taught the fight song to the entire school at our next assembly program and the entire school sang it several times until it was learned. It was collectively decided that from that day forward, it would be sung at all our assembly programs as part of the opening activities. Both of these activities are examples of how the students demonstrated, Modeling the Way, Challenging the Process, Inspiring Others, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart, which in turn allowed them to utilize their voice and increase student and school engagement

Theme 4: Learned student outcomes. When the students completed the leadership development lessons they were asked how they benefited from the experience. Specific qualities, skills, and characteristics were elicited from the participants that included the topics of confidence, collaboration, patience, and building rapport. Authors (Astin & Astin, 2000; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004) note that leadership development programs should focus on instilling empowering beliefs in students that will allow them to believe that they can utilize their skills and make a difference as a leader within their school or community.

Confidence. Both Junior and Senior students expressed that this experience has assisted in boosting their self-confidence. For example, Nancy felt that, "When I started

in this learning community I was a quiet and shy person, and even though I am still quiet, I have gained more confidence in expressing my opinions especially in group situations." Anna believes her mentor helped her realize that she needed to face her fear of failing and the unknown by continually acknowledging that she is a leader in every area of her life and that she is accomplishing great things. Mary stated that, "Participating in Junior Achievement helped me with my public speaking, and while I still have room for improvement, I now have the confidence to keep trying to get better."

Collaboration. Working on teams, being a team player, and engaging with others was another area identified in Cycle 1 that some students felt they needed to develop, so they could move from being a controller to a collaborator. Kim, along with some of the other students said they were learning how to relinquish some of their control issues so that they could acknowledge the input of others and respect their learning style in preparation for college where working in teams happens much more frequently. In another instance, Terri, who was elected President of Student Council for this school year by her peers, met with interested students and began to brainstorm and plan activities for next year, so they could hit the ground running in September. She stated that:

> Besides providing opportunities for students to develop their leadership potential our overall goal was to unite the school and get students meaningfully involved by allowing them to offer ideas and create solutions to issues for the betterment of the entire Aesculapian community. If we can get other students involved in activities like the Show Your Love Day or Sports Appreciation assemblies, which were firsts for the school, then Student Council will serve its purpose. We had a common goal of bringing the student body together and all hands were on deck for those projects, and this is the system we will continue to use going forward.

Comments from Faith and Ally reflected that, "We are always the encouragers of the group, and purposefully provide positive thoughts to our classmates because we believe we need everyone to achieve our goals."

Patience. Patience is a skill area that requires continuous self-reflection and analysis. Sybil expressed this self-actualization process with this statement:

Since participating in National Honor Society and this learning community I can say my patience and leadership has changed for the better. While I am still working on having more patience, I have toned down my impatience and when I feel it rising, I've learned to concentrate to react differently in situations. I learned a technique of taking deep breaths and counting to 10 before I speak.

Another instance is reflected in Terri's statement where she declares:

I am a person of action and when I ask for something I expect it to be done as soon as possible, often disregarding the agenda of others. My mentor Ms. Mays, helped me to understand during these leadership lessons that collaboration is critical and if I call myself a leader, I have to respect the time of others and allow them the time necessary to process requests or take action if my expectations are going to be met.

Building rapport. Authors Komives and Johnson (2009) say having adult mentors and peer role models, along with meaningful involvement in school and purposeful reflection, all contribute to the development of a leadership identity. Wendy felt that:

We built relationships with our mentors that allowed us to view them in different roles other than just our teachers, and that has helped me understand how important it is to work with people in all types of environments.

Andy said:

I feel like we have developed relationships with our mentors who have invested their time helping us to become leaders even beyond our high school years and for that I am thankful, and know I will need their support when I go off to college.

Mentor Focus Group

Theme 5 reflects the views of the mentors from their focus group interviews. The mentors shared their perceptions of the students as their mentees, as well as how they perceived themselves as mentors and the impact they had on the learning community.

Theme 5: Mentor perceptions. During the focus group interviews we discussed how we had served our mentees and built relationships with them in accordance with

the position we held in the school. When we assessed ourselves in terms of leadership

style and how that impacted our mentoring, I reiterated to the group that I saw myself

as the Coach. My strategy for mentoring students was to provide options for the

students that they may not have considered so they could attain greater success at

whatever goals they wanted to achieve. This was achieved through engaging the

students in reflective exercises, having them analyze their choices and arrive at their

own decisions on how to proceed. I provided a story about Terri one of my 12th grade

mentees that I had taken a particular interest in during this study. I had been observing

and interacting with her ever since she was a freshman. She had a certain spark about

her that let you know she was a force to be reckoned with. Terri was quick witted,

extremely intelligent, resourceful, and a go-getter that was focused on the goals she had

set for herself. She was a natural born leader and she knew it, as did her peers.

However, the impression she left in the eyes of her teachers was that yes she was a

leader, but needed her skills to be refined. On Terri's teacher recommendation forms

which were submitted when she applied for National Honor Society consideration at the

end of her sophomore year were the following comments. Teacher #1 shared that:

> Terri is an individual who strives for excellence. She is a leader among her
> peers. As she matures she will also need to be mindful of making sure her
> attitude coincides with her desire to achieve and be respected.

Teacher #2 said, Terri often gets an attitude when something doesn't go her way or is

not given to her when she expects it. Both of these teachers felt improvement was

needed in the area of accepting criticism and recommendations willingly and

graciously. Teacher #3 stated, Terri is an excellent student and worthy of membership

in the National Honor Society. However, at times her strong will is counterproductive

to her goals. My perception of her now was, as a Senior she still displayed some of the same characteristics mentioned in her teacher recommendations despite her outstanding academic achievements. But it was my belief that she had matured and could benefit from both individual and group based mentoring to refine her skills as a leader.

From the time Terri agreed to participate in the learning community, she asked the most questions, was well spoken and always had an opinion along with being focused on the task at hand. The areas she revealed needed development were in the areas of patience, collaborating with others and working on teams. As Terri indicated in some of her responses in Cycle 1 and 2, she often expected others to accomplish tasks according to her timetable without giving them any consideration to offer input or make adjustments. When her peers or adults didn't meet her expectations, she exhibited signs of frustration and a change in attitude would surface. Her behavior often resulted in her overstepping her boundaries as a student when interacting with adults, or deciding to remove herself from her group or team and perform the task herself without their input. She always justified her actions with the response that she was not going to let others deter her from accomplishing her goals. As her mentor I emphasized to her that while I agreed with the premise of her statement, that how she approaches a person was critical to her development as an effective leader.

As we journeyed through our leadership learning lessons I spent considerable time reinforcing the fact that leaders cannot lead alone. You must be able to communicate your ideas, requests, suggestions and concerns in a manner that your followers as well as adults are willing to listen and thereby follow you. That is what makes an effective leader! I recalled when Terri led her first Student Council meeting

as its newly elected President and was planning to conduct the meeting without an agenda and inform the members about her ideas and the direction they should proceed in for the coming year. I advised that if she wanted her ideas to be received by her peers, she needed to present a written agenda which would indicate that she had thought about what she wanted to discuss beforehand and was prepared, but also that the agenda provided a format for the members to offer their input to her. She was resistant at first claiming that this wasn't necessary since she knew what she wanted to say, but after the meeting occurred she saw the benefit of this approach over hers. This is just one of many examples of how I worked with Terri to consider alternate choices to improve her leadership skills. My mantra to the mentees, Leadership requires action. "Continually challenge yourselves! Never be satisfied with what you have always done!" I mentioned in one of our mentor group sessions that "I believe in and welcome change but it is not going to happen overnight, however if we can begin to see a shift in the thinking or actions of our mentees, than we are succeeding."

Ms. Jenkins exemplified the Structural leader who believed everyone needed a plan. She set about having each one of her mentees develop a vision board of how they would visualize improving their skills, especially in the areas of communication and public speaking. Ms. Jenkins indicated that the more vocal students who spent time complaining about what was lacking at Aesculapian, have now channeled that energy into writing proposals about their concerns and discussing them with the principal. Teaching students how to present themselves with a prepared agenda was a goal she desired for her mentees every time they had an opportunity to interact and collaborate with their Advisors or the Administration. Ms. Jenkins stated that, "It has been important to teach

the student participants the protocol necessary to communicate with persons of authority

and influence and that has come with practice."

Ms. Kee believed that mentors invest the time in planting seeds of success in their

mentees. Mentors create a positive vision of what people can become and continually

encourage and nudge students along that path. She often told her students "You are a

child of destiny. You are destined for great things." which was reflected in this

statement:

> I want the students to always feel that they can come to me about any issue or
> concern and in return I will offer advice as if I am their mother, because
> ultimately the mentoring experience for me is about how I engage with them. I
> accept the fact that I may not change my mentee's path of thinking at that time,
> but I am planting seeds that may blossom at a time unbeknown to me, and they
> will realize the influence mentoring had on their lives.

Ms Bow's approach to mentoring was to engage students as friends. She built

trust and rapport with her mentees by sharing personal experiences she felt they could

relate to and used those experiences to help shape their identities as leaders. She felt

mentors are tuned into the little things that make a big difference. They realize that it's the

little kindnesses you do on a regular basis that forge the strongest ties. She commented

that "I liked that I had the flexibility to do things together with my mentees that they

felt would benefit them."

Dr. Finch was the mentor who felt that a big part of his responsibility was to hold

students accountable, especially in his role as Site Manager. He constantly tried to

motivate students to take advantage of the opportunities he received as our Site

Manager, for internships during the school year, after school programs, weekend

workshops, summer jobs and pre-college programs as well as building relationships

with members of the medical community in the city.

Our group sessions also provided an opportunity for us to discuss issues or concerns of the participants and reach solutions that would improve the community or acknowledge improvements that we observed in our mentees. We expressed what our perceptions were of our mentees in terms of strengths and weaknesses and what they had gained from being a part of the learning community and any growth we had observed which aided in our personal growth as educators and mentors as well as the students. I asked if their perception of their mentees had changed in terms of leadership and how do you feel the students view themselves as leaders? I reiterated their feelings expressed during Cycle 1 which alluded to the notion that the students all perceived themselves as leaders, but the mentors felt that while some were comfortable in their role as leaders, others needed to develop more concrete leadership skills that would enable them to initiate ideas on their own instead of waiting to be led. Prior to this study, when the mentors interacted with these particular students, they perceived themselves as the primary motivators to the students and had to provide and supply them with ideas and leadership opportunities to pursue. Ms. Bow stated then that, "I wish they had more intrinsic motivation to seek out opportunities, but they didn't." Ms. Jenkins believed it was a lack of maturity on many of their parts. "They are capable of running with the opportunity once presented, but this too required considerable follow up and monitoring of progress.

The mentors now felt that since the students have participated in this learning community, their perspective about their leadership abilities has changed. Ms. Jenkins commented that the student participants seem to really have appreciated the time they spent undertaking the leadership lessons as well as time spent with them.

Ms. Jenkins stated that:

> I have been incredibly impressed with the growth I have witnessed from my mentees as we have progressed through the study, especially in the areas of confidence and accountability in comparison to my other students. Their actions and influence as leaders are spilling over to other students who are not in the study, which I hope will result in more students becoming involved. I believe the students really do benefit from having one on one time with us, I only wish we had the time do it for more students.

The mentors indicated that the students have become more responsible about tasks, and their communication and presentation skills have increased which they contribute to one on one time spent with their mentees practicing strategies for improved presentation delivery to audiences. Dr. Finch was delighted to report that he had recommended two of his mentees for medical research internships at a renowned hospital in the area, due to the leadership growth he felt they experienced as part of this study. He witnessed an increase in their confidence and their ability to work collaboratively. Dr. Finch emphatically stated that:

> Prior to this study I would not have recommended any of our students for the internships due to the commitment and accountability required for the positions. I was excited that we would be able to take advantage of this first time opportunity and not have to pass because it was perceived that we did not have student leaders who could handle this type of responsibility.

The mentors acknowledged that the implementation of the class meetings has helped the class officers many of whom are part of this learning community, with their meeting planning, presentation, and communication skills. The mentors felt the student participants were better able to manage a large group setting, monitor questions, and provide feedback to their classmates and are better prepared for their presentations so that order is maintained in the meetings. The meetings provided a platform for all students to be heard, listened to, and engaged in their school community. They attributed this to the

one- on-one time spent with the mentees to improve in this area, which was suggested as an outgrowth of one of the lessons in Cycle 2. Ms. Bow had observed that as a result of the class meetings new leaders were starting to come forward from the group, and were accepting roles that they hadn't previously. The quieter students were beginning to break out of their shells with new confidence and were willing to take on more responsibility in the classroom and school as evidenced by their desire to participate in the newly formed Student Council. These students started to self-actualize, whether or not they enjoy taking on the roles related to being a leader.

The mentors were grateful that the Administration was now more willing to listen to students and collaborate with them since they had been working with them in the areas of preparedness, communication and presentation. The mentors had observed that the student participants were feeling appreciated for their suggestions and the opportunity to be heard. They were now able to motivate themselves and each other as they pursued new ideas to improve the culture of the school. The mentors also liked the opportunity that central administration had provided for the student participants to have a voice outside of their school buildings. Central administration solicited many of the study members to participate in roundtable discussions with the superintendent to discuss policy issues, student behavior, curriculum, school climate, and other topics impacting them as students and leaders. While the roundtables provided another stage for students to be heard and listened to, the feedback from these discussions has not returned to the schools so that we know what students are saying, feeling, and thinking. We asked the students to suggest that to the superintendent as a recommendation the next time they met for a roundtable discussion so that the school can be responsive to the needs of the students.

Cycle 3: Reflection and analysis. All three focus groups (11th graders, 12th graders and adult mentors) provided insightful data summarizing their pre- and post-perceptions of effective student leaders, skill areas of growth, new opportunities that were explored by study participants, and learned outcomes. Students and mentors visualized a progression of leadership development (Kouzes and Posner, 2008) and identity (Komives et al., 2006), utilization of student voice (Mitra, 2005), and increased engagement (Fletcher, 2003) from Cycle 1 to 3 as a result of mentoring and leadership education which was directly related to the components outlined in the conceptual framework. This indicates that perceptions were changing from the viewpoints of both the students and the Administration which is evidence of progress on Mitra's (2005) Pyramid of Student Voice. The students were demonstrating the steps described in Fletcher's (2003) Model of Meaningful Student Involvement to increase student engagement which corroborates his research indicating that teaching and learning happened through meaningful student involvement by engaging students in various facets of schooling for the purpose of strengthening their school and community. The students also utilized the steps in Kotter's (1996) change model as they initiated new ideas and implemented them as a result of their leadership learning lessons which motivated them to become more involved and produce change. The culmination of this study experience is outlined in Cycle 4 where the participants move from being an absorbent of information to a continued innovator of action.

Cycle 4: Action Plans

This last cycle of inquiry for the study began the second week of May, and encompassed how the students developed and presented action plans, which were initiated by the learning community participants to produce change in their school

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environment. Fullan's (2001) model for change focuses on the participants taking part in the process and proposes that there are four broad phases in the cycle, which are initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome. Fullan (2001) and Kotter (1996) suggest that leaders must create learning communities that enhance the skills and knowledge of the people in the organization and they must have a common culture of expectations and must be held accountable.

Senge (1990) states that a learning community "where students continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p.3) is the foundation for successful change. The student participants were very excited about having some input to initiate and plan new clubs and activities for the school. They had polled the classes of the school during Cycle 2 of the study to obtain the interests of the students and had prepared actions plans for the administration to view in both written format and power point presentations that reflected the ideas and voices of the learning community and the student population. The participants were even more excited that the administration was willing to listen and actually would consider their ideas.

The action plans were formulated using Appendix E as a culminating outcome of student engagement addressed in the conceptual framework utilizing Fletcher's (2003) model of meaningful student involvement. Each action plan outlined the purpose of the club or event, goals desired, proposed meeting times, projected number of students to be involved, supplies needed, fundraising efforts that are needed, advertising sources, total budget required, and who the beneficiary of the club will be or the organization to which

event proceeds will be donated. The students asked the principal to view their power point presentations and they set up times for that purpose. Thirteen action plans were submitted for review and possible consideration and implementation with approval by the principal. The students needed to sell their idea, get them to commit and inspire others to become involved in the life of the school. They also had to indicate how they would collaborate and recruit others for these efforts utilizing the practices of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) model as part of the leadership progression described in the conceptual framework. The mentors sat in on the presentations as their schedules allowed and offered their feedback to the principal along with the students who presented the action plan. The principal expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the students for showing an interest in improving the culture of the school and submitting concrete plans that could be initiated.

The action plans outlined how each of these clubs or activities could be implemented and led by students thereby shifting the responsibility from the adult mentor or advisor, which was the desired outcome of the study and the purpose surrounding Fletcher's, (2003) model for progressive modes engagement by students. The action plans included a mentoring program between seniors and incoming freshman entitled (Aesculapian Aces) whose purpose was to form relationships that would promote a sense of belonging to the school and emphasize academic achievement through peer tutoring. An FBLA Club (Future Business Leaders of Aesculapian) was created for aspiring entrepreneurs, especially those who may not be interested in pursuing a medical or health related career. The Card Club was created for pure entertainment and engagement by any student, but also would assist with Math skills. The Chess Club was designed to entice

the quite thinker who enjoys intimate sessions with peers focused on specific goals. The

Color Runs are events which refer to various health awareness walks and are designated

by a color that represents the disease such as pink is synonymous with breast cancer. The

events would be similar to the one the student participants organized for their teacher

who had been diagnosed with lupus, and therefore it was suggested that Student Council

be responsible for pursuing this activity in the upcoming school year. Dance Club and

Glee Club provided a creative outlet for those that possessed that specific talent.

Whatever the groups created would be used for the enhancement of special events or

assembly programs, so the students participating felt valued in what they were producing.

Debate Club grew out of an interest students formulated from participating in the

Marshall Brennan Moot Court program where they learned about constitutional policies

from Rutgers law students. This club provided another outlet for students not necessarily

interested in pursuing medical careers to become further engaged in practicing their

debate skills for possible law careers. The Go Green Club was designed for students to

volunteer their time to maintain the school rain garden, tree plantings, and recycling

efforts which had been donated by outside organizations in conjunction with the STEM

philosophies of the school. The refurbishment of the Aesculapian greenhouse which had

been vandalized by outside community members would require that students apply for

grant monies from within the district with the assistance of their adult mentors, or

fundraise to help with repairs and needed supplies. A Science teacher who had been a

Forensic Investigator in his previous career had incited an interest in the students to form

a Forensics Club and possibly even create a lab at the school. This club provided an

opportunity to engage in a popular academic pursuit and generated a lot of interest from

students, which is one of the reasons the Principal agreed to fund it from the school budget. A Scrabble Club emanated from a lesson taught in Cycle 2 of the study. The interest it garnered from both student participants in the study as well as those outside of the study indicated that there were unidentified leaders waiting to be recognized for their potential. Hosting a Fashion Show to honor and celebrate our athletes who all play for other schools was another event that was suggested that Student Council carry out because it could engage the entire student body, parents, faculty and even the community, making it another opportunity for students to lead and become meaningfully involved. A Video Game Club stressed the uses of technology and was in alignment with our STEM philosophy. It was open to anyone who is interested in increasing their skill level. A Young Mothers Club was suggested as a support group for teen mothers at the school who have children, in an effort to minimalize their isolation from the school environment. Interacting with peers who empathize with their circumstances would assist in increasing self-esteem and confidence.

In addition, it was requested that Class Meetings for all grade levels continue to be held once a month since they had proved to be successful for all grade levels and included in their schedule. The meetings were instrumental in helping class officers plan agendas, organize and present information, receive feedback from their peers, manage large groups, and reach decisions, which were all skills deemed necessary for leadership development as expressed during the focus group interviews. The participants also desired that Student Council be continued as discussed in the focus group interviews and expanded upon in the following school year. Several of the action plans were developed with the notion of Student Council being responsible for the implementation of the

activity or event.

After dialoguing with the students and mentors, the principal reviewed his budget to determine what clubs or events, if any, could be funded, which clubs or events could be overseen by faculty, and which could be implemented within the next school year. The principal approved all the clubs or events with the condition of finding a faculty member who would act as an advisor. He stated that the school budget would only fund Student Council, the Forensics Club and the Go Green Club, and that the other clubs or events would have to utilize the fundraising strategies outlined in their action plans. He also indicated that the class meetings would continue for next year for all grade levels on a monthly basis as soon as the new class officers were in place. It was noted that the only stumbling block to implementing any of the actions plans could be finding an advisor to oversee the club or event, and determining whether the club or event could be funded through the school budget or if it was going to be participant funded through fundraising and donations. The principal was confident that the commitment shown by the students, would be carried through to next year and that the Seniors should spend time recruiting and familiarizing underclassmen with the approved plans and start generating interest for active participation. Charlotte said, "We worked really hard putting these plans together and it was great to see that our ideas are going to really happen, if students follow through. This was the conclusion of the study which ended the first week in June.

Cycle 4: Reflection and analysis. This cycle of inquiry reflected the culmination of the study and portrayed how the change framework of Kotter (1996) guided the steps for the resulting actions. The urgency for the study was established from the pilot study findings, and a coalition of teachers was formed who not only believed in my vision but

shared similar views of their own. With a core group of students and teacher mentors agreeing to participate as part of the study in place, a learning community was established to carry out my vision for empowering students with leadership skills that would increase student engagement within the school. The stages of development leading up to this cycle now required final action from the students, as increased engagement present and future became the focus for this research cycle.

The outcome was ground breaking because none of the clubs or events developed and presented to the Administration had ever existed at Aesculapian, although some had been talked about for many years. The fact that students were formally presenting plans initiated by them for possible implementation was a true indication that a change was desired and needed. This was an opportunity for the students to demonstrate the communication and presentation skills they had practiced during Cycle 2 and formalized the ideas they had been sharing with their peers, and collaborating with their mentors and the Administration to bring to fruition as indicated in Mitra's Pyramid of Student Voice (2005). Mitra (2008) suggests that at the simplest level, the collective voices of the student participants provided an avenue for them to share their opinions about school with administrators and faculty. As student voice increased, and students collaborated with adults to address issues or concerns in the school and this became a crucial step in their development as leaders.

Fletcher (2003) indicates that meaningful student involvement challenges schools to transform learning activities by fostering accountability and interdependence between students and educators. The prospect of accountability between students and educators shifts the burden of school change from resting solely upon the shoulders of educators,

and shares the responsibility of school improvement with students (Fletcher, 2003).

As educators we are constantly looking for avenues that we can explore to effect change and improvement and when we can involve students in the process, their development as leaders becomes a priority (Kotter, 1996; Mitra, 2005). Authors Fullan (2001) and Kotter (1996) both suggest that active participation in school does not end in recognizing the initial effort with the innovation of ideas, but starts with the commitment of the participants and evolves into promoting growth in the changes that it will bring.

This opportunity demonstrated to the students that they could have a voice and be influential in making a difference, which the mentors observed increased their self-confidence and self-esteem. Aesculapian had always been a magnet school focused strictly on academics, so the implementation of these clubs and programs were vital to improving the culture of the school because it would offer another avenue for students to invest in the identity of the school. In the past, the school employed teachers who taught elective subject areas which offered a little bit of diversion for students to enjoy, but with budget cuts from the school district and a new central office administration, those positions had been eliminated, leaving the students with limited opportunities for extracurricular development. While the senior student participants would not enjoy the privilege of benefitting from most of their ideas, they will have the satisfaction of knowing that they are leaving a legacy behind. It became the responsibility of the senior students to ensure that the juniors would carry out their plans in their absence, and recruit and train other underclassmen. I also will not be at the school next year to witness the implementation of these activities or continuation of projects started due to my retirement, however I have requested that Ms. Jenkins who served as one of the mentors

in the study, be allowed to oversee the fulfillment of these action plans by the students and monitor the progress of student engagement along with Dr. Finch. Both Ms. Jenkins and Dr. Finch, along with the Administration have agreed to move forward, continue monitoring and encouraging student involvement with the assistance of the remaining study participants as role models for students to follow as they proceed to engage others in the life of the school. In addition, I have provided the leadership lessons utilized during Cycle 2 of the study to Dr. Finch so they can be fully integrated into the Exposure curriculum for the following year. This will allow all students to become exposed to the practices of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) Student Leadership Challenge Model for their development as leaders which was the cornerstone of the conceptual framework.

Conclusion

This action research study evolved over a four month period at Aesculapian high school in Welby, New Jersey utilizing four cycles of inquiry to gather data from the student and mentor participants. When this study began the majority of the student participants who were all National Honor Society members, believed they were leaders based upon their acceptance into the organization, data collected from the Leadership Perception Survey in Cycle 1, and their present involvement in extracurricular activities as evidence. However, they were not necessarily perceived as leaders from their teachers and the administration, due to the lack of confidence, commitment, and accountability observed when opportunities were presented to them as discussed in the pilot study. This perception served as the impetus for this undertaking, whereby 20 high school honor students formed a learning community along with five faculty mentors to develop their

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skills through leadership lessons. The conceptual framework provided the foundation for how students progressed through a continuum of leadership development and instruction utilizing the practices of Kouzes and Posner's Student Leadership Challenge Model (2008). These lessons became embedded in the curriculum of the school utilized the practices of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) Student Leadership Challenge Model during Cycle 2 for the student participants only. Leadership learning provided an opportunity for increased utilization of student voices as movement occurred up Mitra's Pyramid of Student Voice model (2005) from the participants. Engagement increased as students progressed up the rungs of Fletcher's Ladder of Meaningful Student Involvement (2003) along with the establishment of their leadership identities as students transitioned through various stages of Komives et al.'s Model of Leadership Identity (2006) during Cycles 2, 3, and 4, as knowledge was constructed and applied from their leadership learning experiences.

The role of the student-mentor relationship became central to creating a supportive learning environment where students expressed their ideas, thoughts, opinions, or concerns as a collective group or by individual voice to their mentors, advisors, faculty, and administration during the focus group interviews. The application of acquired skills by the student participants from the leadership learning experiences within their school environment was pivotal in changing how they were perceived as leaders from their mentors, faculty, and the Administration. The mentors and Administration observed and noted the commitment, accountability, confidence, and improved communication skills demonstrated by the student participants, which provided a platform for them to be listened to in ways that they had not been previously.

The learning community provided the students with the opportunity to begin collaborating more with adults and share in the decision-making process to implement change so that all students could become more engaged in the life of the school (Kotter, 1996). A quote from Kouzes and Posner (2008) embodies the sentiment of the entire learning community as the study concluded, which states, **"**Somewhere, sometime, the leader within each of us will get the call to step forward" (p. 8) and for our students that time had come.

The findings from Chapter 4 were analyzed and interpreted for presentation in Chapter 5 of this study which addressed how the outcomes answered the research questions in relation to the literature and conceptual framework.

Chapter 5

Implications, Future Recommendations, and Conclusions

As a result of this action research study, students conceptualized what "being a leader" meant, recognized their leadership potential and strengths, learned that they could have a voice and be influential in making a difference. The learning experiences discussed in chapter four of this study emphasized how engaging in reflective exercises throughout the action research cycles, assisted students in applying their acquired leadership skills. As students began to motivate themselves through the encouragement of their mentors and inspire others to become leaders, the desire to initiate, develop and implement activities that promoted change occurred. The findings from the study were documented utilizing qualitative instruments outlined in previous chapters, which included a survey, lesson assessments, focus group interviews, observations, field notes, and reflective journals of the learning community participants. The data were triangulated from several sources at different times within the study to look for patterns or themes that could be utilized to draw conclusions about the students as leaders. Obtaining data from more than one perspective that reflected the experiences of the participants provided outcomes which were addressed in conjunction with the research questions. Implications from the findings were corroborated with the literature in relation to the components of the conceptual framework, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research were suggested as they emerged from the data.

Implications Related to Research Questions

    Research question #1: Impact of leadership learning on leadership development. The first research question ascertained what qualities, values, or skills high school students perceived necessary for leadership development? The student participants and mentors formed a learning community where students were afforded the opportunity to develop their leadership capacity utilizing the principles of a research-based model from renowned authors Kouzes and Posner (2008). The skills, values, and beliefs that were discussed, evaluated, and analyzed validated how students perceived and identified themselves as leaders. The findings from the Leadership Perception Survey in Cycle 1, which was identified in Table 4, and the leadership development lessons from Cycle 2, revealed several recurring skills, such as being a role model, inspiring a vision, providing guidance to peers, being committed, celebrating others, and possessing good communication skills along with the attributes of self-confidence, intelligence, determination, and honesty as the characteristics that the students felt were necessary for leaders to possess and areas that they grew in. These findings are consistent with those detailed by authors Kouzes and Posner (2008) throughout their research, with honesty being the number one trait most admired in a leader. This implies that high school student perceptions of leadership align with past research that suggests leadership encompasses trait and situational characteristics and is dependent upon personal values and experiences (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004).

    The participants embodied the practices of the Student Leadership Challenge Model throughout the course of the study and showed improvement in all of the five areas designated for becoming effective student leaders as observed and noted by their

mentors, faculty, administration, Junior Achievement personnel, and other students. Because of the leadership skills acquired by the participants in the learning community, the student participants collectively were able to construct a greater understanding in all areas of Kouzes and Posner's (2008) Student Leadership Challenge Model, by modeling the way, inspiring a vision, challenging the process, collaborating with others, and encouraging the hearts of many through their leadership lessons and activities. The leadership lessons were developed to align with the Student Leadership Challenge Model that is outlined in the conceptual framework, and empowered the student participants with the belief that the behaviors, skills, and characteristics of leadership were attainable. Modeling the way was a practice that was utilized by many in the learning community. Each student mentee and adult mentor discussed the importance of "walking their talk" by demonstrating their style of leadership, and not only explaining to the learning community what they wanted to do, but doing it themselves during leadership instruction, mentor/mentee sessions, or brainstorming gatherings with their peers. The two practices that demonstrated the most student discussion and interest during the leadership lessons and focus group interviews were the practices of inspiring a shared vision and encouraging the heart, as indicated in the activities developed through their own ideas to celebrate their peers. The areas where the student participants viewed their strengths to be were: enabling others to act, developing relationships with others, and thinking in ways that included creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem solving. Those leadership practices were demonstrated with the execution of the Sports Recognition Assembly, Show Your Love Day, and Lupus Walk in honor of one of their teachers as examples of increased student engagement.

While the specific activities of the lessons were distinct, the discussion and reflection gained from the instruction and mentoring experience reinforced research which indicates that leadership is a process, and that the definition of leadership by students may influence if they view themselves as a leader (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004; Stenger, 2004). There was agreement by the learning community members including the mentors that the leadership development lessons empowered the students to believe that leadership was attainable through practice, feedback, reflection, and analysis, and was the first step in encouraging students to consider themselves as leaders in their school and community as evidenced during the focus group interviews. Being a part of the learning community helped the student participants focus on skill areas they possessed and personally needed to develop as identified in Table 4, so they could become more effective leaders that others would want to follow. A research study by Posner (2014) generated results that were consistent with the findings from this study, which indicated that the most effective student leaders engaged in the five leadership practices more than other student leaders, thereby increasing their engagement in school and the community. However, it should be noted that regardless of the particular leadership model or framework students are taught, it is essential to provide students with an opportunity to examine what is most true for themselves which are their core beliefs and values (Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

Through the cycles of inquiry, the student participants heightened their leadership self-awareness and identity through the continuity of the learning community environment and interaction with others. During each cycle, the student participants interacted with adult mentors and peer leaders, who also helped to influence the

development of their leadership abilities. When asked about the subject, Teresa said, "I used to think that leadership is something one is born with. However, I now understand that although some people may be a natural at leading, that leadership can also be learned." Donna felt that studying the five key areas of exemplary leadership was a model that she could follow to help her focus her energies on developing and improving her skills in preparation for college and practice reflecting on her actions. Chris said that, "Learning did not end when we left our classes. I have never before spent as much time and energy reflecting on my own leadership abilities, practicing my leadership skills and developing my leadership goals." This evidence supports the research of Dugan and Komives (2007) and Rosch and Caza (2012), which indicate the benefit of students participating in short-term leadership development experiences where understanding values, team collaboration, discussion, reflection, and communication skills are the focal point of the learning experience. Their research also implies that the enhanced development of these competencies by students will still be strong months after the leadership program ended.

The mentors observed that the students gained a better understanding of their personal values and beliefs through continuous reflection noted in their journal writings in response to the lessons delivered and their mentoring experiences. For example, Ally expressed that:

> Overall, during the past five months my leadership abilities have been enhanced by working on my communication and presentation skills with my mentor. I have to say that this learning experience has been personally rewarding and has led to a deeper understanding of my strengths and weaknesses.

At the beginning of the study, several students indicated in Cycle 1 that they did not like working in teams, became easily frustrated, and did not have patience with peers

who did not actively participate in team projects. It was observed by the mentors that the student participants had worked on exercising and exhibiting more patience when working and collaborating with group members, which emerged as one of the themes evidenced from statements during the lesson assessments and the focus group interviews. In addition, it was noted that those students who lacked confidence in their presentation and communication skills also improved in this area. Practicing these skills with their mentors and each other, improved their confidence and enabled the students to achieve their goals as a team, through the lessons and exercises conducted during the study as ones in need of development.

Becoming a better leader only happens when students practice leadership. Posner (2012, 2014) found that the more students were engaged in learning, the more use they made of the five leadership practices. The themes of identifying as a leader, the skills student leader's possess and those in need of development, listening to students by adults, volunteer efforts of student participants, learning expectations from the study along with the mentor perceptions of student leaders, all emerged from the Leadership Perception Survey and the data collected during Cycle 1.Several of these themes were carried through the remaining cycles of inquiry in the study as students transitioned through stages of leadership development and identity. This may imply that students realized that in addition to the individual competencies they already possessed, that their participation in the leadership learning community may have promoted more integrated thinking about all of the skills required to lead in today's society (Posner, 2009). Learning about leadership is not the same as learning to be a leader. Students often learn about what it takes to be a great leader, but they do not learn to be leaders nearly often enough (Komives, Lucas,

McMahon, 2007; Posner, 2009, 2014).

Impact of leadership learning on developing a leadership identity. Research suggests that educators must support students in adopting an accurate and healthy self-awareness regarding their leadership identity (Dugan & Komives, 2007). This involves helping students to better align their levels of self-efficacy for leadership with actual knowledge and skills. In the literature review, Komives et al. (2006) state that first a student must be aware of their leadership identity and eventually develop through the six stages outlined in the model as they begin to interact with others.

As the leadership identity of the student participants progressed throughout the study, their perception changed from viewing leadership as strictly positional, as indicated in the Cycle 1 findings from the Leadership Perception Survey, to a relational process where all stakeholders could have a voice as leadership skills were acquired, which is noted from data collected from the focus groups in Cycle 3 and the action plans in Cycle 4. The students in the learning community began this journey of development in the 2nd stage of Komives et al.'s (2006, 2009) leadership identity model (see Figure 5), which was Exploration and Engagement, as evidenced by the pre-assessment data collected from the Leadership Perception Survey in Cycle 1. During this stage student participants interacted with their peers, explored their interests, and recognized that they have leadership potential as affirmed by their mentors. By the end of Cycle 3, the students had progressed to the next level of Leader Identified. During this stage, they identified new skills needed for their development, acted as role models for others to emulate, began building self-confidence, assumed more leadership roles, and explored ways to become more meaningfully involved in their school, as data from the lesson

assessments and focus groups interviews indicated. These students were able to move quickly through Stage Three to arrive at relational views of leadership which is in alignment with research by Komives et al. (2009). The students realized that they could not be a leader alone, but needed the talents and skills of others for success to occur.

The student participants were transitioning to the 4th stage of Leadership Differentiated in Komives et al.'s (2006) model as the study ended. At this level they realized that leadership is a relational process and that they can have influence and make change through collaboration and shared group decision-making with their action plans as the resulting outcome and evidence. The findings from the study corroborate assertions that leadership development programs should focus on instilling empowering beliefs in students that allow them to internalize the notion that they can have influence and make a difference as leaders (Astin & Astin, 2000; Komives et al., 2006, 2007, 2009; Lindahl, 2008; Marcketti & Kadolph, 2010; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004;). With the leadership identity of the participants being established, the next question discussed the implications that leadership learning had on students using their "voices".

Research question #2: Impact of leadership learning on enhancing student voice. When students have a voice into how their schools are run, they are more likely to be engaged in other activities in the school for which they may not have considered being involved in previously (Mitra, 2004). The findings indicated that student voice was definitively enhanced at Aesculapian High School as a result of the participants feeling they were now being listened to in a manner by which they had not been previously. This learning community allowed the student participants involved to feel "listened to" in a

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way they never before experienced as indicated by their responses during the focus group interviews in Cycle 3 and resulting action plans in Cycle 4. The data implied that the Aesculapian learning community provided a safe environment and avenue for the student participants to voice their opinions, concerns, and views in a constructive way with the support of their mentors.

The principal, while always willing to listen to the students, was hesitant prior to this study to move forward with student suggestions because of the lack of commitment and accountability displayed after approval was given. The administration and class advisors, two of whom served as mentors, were now more willing to listen to students as a result of them learning how to better present ideas and suggestions to faculty and the administration along with the level of preparedness and commitment exhibited for the issue at hand. The principal attributed the difference in the students then and now to their acquired leadership skills and mentoring experiences with faculty members. For example, during one of our lessons, Wendy and Charlotte shared that:

> We want to do a lupus walk in support of Ms. Miller our Science teacher, who was diagnosed with lupus last year. After her diagnosis she went through all her treatments for months and never missed a day of coming to school. It would mean a lot to us to honor her for all that she has given us. She is a survivor and we want to learn more about the disease and help people be more aware.

So we listened to them, and they organized the event acquiring the needed materials from the Lupus organization after the student participants sought approval from the Principal. The whole school participated in a 3-mile walk around a local park and passed out literature about lupus. Not only was the day important to Ms. Miller, but the students felt supported in their efforts. Acquiring these skills provided the student participants with the desire to utilize their voices without fear, and welcomed being a

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stakeholder in decision-making processes. When students took advantage of opportunities to make a difference, and embraced the lessons that we tried to impart upon them, those were the examples that validated the purpose and significance of the study. These observations and actions are in alignment with Fielding's (2001) views, which claim that the motivation for encouraging student voice must be genuine. Educators must be ready to hear innovative ideas, unexpected issues, unwanted or even uncomfortable concerns that may potentially shift their relationships with students.

In accordance with Mitra's (2005) pyramid of student voice highlighted in Figure 2 and outlined in the conceptual framework, student participants in the study progressed from the beginning stage of "being heard" to the next stage of collaborating with adults in Cycles 2, 3, and 4. The leadership lessons and focus groups provided an open forum for the student participants to express their feelings about the topics discussed utilizing the protocol instrument and validated that the faculty and administration were willing to collaborate with them and move beyond just hearing them. When the students initiated their action plans, presented the plans to the administration, and then began implementing them, they realized that they do have influence and power, even if it is limited which provided an opportunity to walk their talk.

The students were striving to reach the top of the pyramid where shared decision-making was beginning to take place, which is a stage not often reached in schools according to the research of Mitra (2008). According to Mitra (2008), these experiences enabled the students to build their voices in three areas, which were agency, belonging, and competence. Agency is a condition that instills a feeling of self-confidence and self-worth enabling the students to recognize that they could exert influence and power. Amy

stated that:

> Now I'm very confident in myself. I now know that with a lot of determination and a lot of will, I can help make real changes not only at school but in other organizations because I have witnessed it happen.

The student participants became comfortable with discussing ideas with their mentors and the principal as their confidence grew, which enabled the principal to be more willing to listen to their suggestions and support their requests. The concept of increasing student voice in schools broadens the notion of shared leadership, which includes considering students as capable and valuable members of a school community who can help initiate and implement educational change (Lindahl, 2008; Mitra, 2008). Belonging is the sense of comfort and identity students gained when positive relationships with peers, teachers, school, and the community were developed.

Andy stated earlier:

> I think that relationships developed between teacher/mentor and student are one of the most important things that can happen to a student in their high school career that will forever impact our lives. Once you have established that relationship, you can go to that person to celebrate accomplishments, achievements, seek advice and encouragement.

Faith said:

> One of the best things to come from this experience for her was planning and executing the Sports recognition assembly. For four years I was a tennis player for Welby High, but on that day I got to be a tennis player from Aesculapian High, recognized for my accomplishments from *my* school peers and celebrated at *my* school. It was a special day that I will not forget!

Competencies are skills that were needed to serve as an effective student leader. By creating a learning community that allowed for risk taking, openness, and self-reflection, the student participants were encouraged to explore the power of their personal development and move towards greater utilization of their voices. This transformational

process provided the students with the opportunity to move forward with greater clarity and confidence in their leadership voice.

Research question #3: Impact of leadership learning on enhancing student and school engagement. Meaningful student involvement transforms schools into places where students can make significant contributions alongside educators and administrators. This occurs within an educational setting when adults and students are equal contributors in a continuous learning process focused on school change (Fletcher, 2003, Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1996). The literature addresses how behavioral engagement takes on many forms of student participation and observable student behaviors through involvement in extracurricular activities that may enhance student engagement. The literature also indicates that emotional engagement includes feelings of belongingness to school and feelings of competence in one's abilities (Fredericks et al., 2004: Mitra, 2008; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). A study by Posner (2009) suggests that teaching about leadership is necessary to enable others to lead effectively, but it is not sufficient in the sense that leadership development requires participation, practice, and action-learning to find one's voice and hone one's skills.

Prior to the beginning of the study, student participants were mostly engaged in activities outside of school as indicated in Table 3. However, as the learning experience progressed, the students felt a need to initiate activities and become more engaged in the life of the school, which they accomplished by planning, developing, initiating, and implementing their action plans by the end of Cycle 4. A study by Posner (2014) explored how the leadership behaviors of high school students may vary from a student and observer's point of view. Posner's (2014) study revealed that levels of engagement increased in direct relationship to the frequency their observers reported the student

leaders using the leadership practices. The more the student participants reported having opportunities to be a leader, or opportunities to develop their leadership skills, the more frequently they utilized the five practices and became increasingly engaged in the life of the school regardless of gender, ethnic background, or school setting, which is in alignment with the findings from this study. Promoting meaningful student involvement is a practice that gives students and educators the means to establish a foundation upon which to build relationships and requires learning for all participants to define their roles.

Looking at Fletcher's (2003) Ladder of Student Involvement as shown in Figure 3 and outlined in the conceptual framework, the student participants progressed from the beginning of the study up the ladder from level 5 and 6 on the rungs, where students were either informed about completing projects, programs, or activities designed and run by adults or in some cases adults initiated the projects, programs, or activities and the decision-making was only occasionally shared with the students. However, by the conclusion of the study students had moved up the Ladder of Meaningful Involvement to rungs 7 and 8, where they were initiating projects, programs, or activities, and decision-making was shared among students and adults. The student participants occupied the top rungs of the Ladder of Student Involvement by leading the action and taking full charge of many activities in collaboration with adults as coaches and mentors, as indicated throughout the cycles of inquiry.

As a result, leadership learning positively impacted student and school engagement as evidenced by the learning activities that engaged students in practical and purposeful lessons that resulted in the initiation, development, and implementation of activities, clubs, and programs during Cycles 2, 3, and 4. For students, developmentally

appropriate learning lessons were needed to increase their capacity for empowered

participation in the life of the school. For mentor teachers and administrators, learning

focused on developing positive perceptions about student involvement and their own

ability to meaningfully involve students in different kinds of activities and situations.

Various dimensions of meaningful student involvement were present in activities where

students led others in classroom settings, collaborated with fellow students, facilitated

meetings, explored utilizing school resources, planned, conducted, and implemented

cross-curricular activities for the school community. While the study participants may

have initiated and inspired the visions for the activities, clubs, or programs they wanted to

implement, they learned how to reach outside of their group and work more

collaboratively and collectively with others to bring the ideas to fruition through activities

such as the Class Meetings, Student Council, Sports Recognition Rally and Show Your

Love Day.

The administration of the school was impressed by the way the student

participants presented the concerns of other students making sure adults understood what

each concern involved. The students learned how to present that information to teachers

and the administration effectively through their leadership lessons and mentoring

sessions. Many students reported that participating in the learning community improved

their self-confidence and provided opportunities to develop meaningful interactions with

adults at Aesculapian High School as evidenced in the focus group interviews.

Therefore, the findings imply that an essential part of any plan to increase student

engagement in school must involve elevating the importance of building the leadership

skills of students as suggested by Avolio (2004). Fletcher (2003) indicates that

participation in extracurricular activities through meaningful student involvement may increase student engagement or attachment to their school and for many students will increase their opportunity to become leaders and share accountability with adults. The findings from the study also support the research of Yazzie-Mintz (2010), which implies that student engagement can be increased by providing authentic learning environments, which include project and problem-based learning, instructional demonstrations, and by involving students in the process of their learning. Meaningful student involvement charges educators with the responsibility of engaging all students with ongoing responsibilities and the continual task of creating and fostering success in schools (Kotter, 1996). Although systemic change in schools can take between five and seven years to achieve (Fullan, 2001), this action research endeavor marked the beginning of increased student and school engagement that will serve as a long-term strategy for collaboration and shared group decision-making within the Aesculapian school community. Successful action research can result in a paradigm shift that completely alters the way individuals within a given organization perceive it (Craig, 2009).

Research question #4: Impact of the mentoring experience on student engagement. Mentoring programs have proven to provide benefits to students and are expanding rapidly in schools (Eby et al., 2008). Mentoring youth assumes that supportive relationships with adults are important for personal, emotional, cognitive, and psychological growth and suggests that interpersonal skills and relationships have improved along with self-confidence, attitudes toward school, and academic achievement (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2006). From middle childhood to adolescence the primary developmental issues of mentoring involve learning how to cultivate healthy peer

relationships, master academic challenges, and develop a sense of personal responsibility (Eby et al., 2008).

The process of mentoring and leadership development involved working with students whose leadership style was considered to be traditional or nontraditional, such as the quiet influencer, the patient student, the student who perseveres, the compassionate leader, and sometimes, even the negative leader. The student participants relied on the advisors and mentors to provide a safe place for them to reflect and construct meaning from their learning experiences as they engaged in this leadership process.

The use of mentoring to develop leadership skills in high school students had great implications, stemming from the fact that student leaders increased their own self-confidence and engagement levels when they experienced being a leader in new ways. Several of the senior student participants expressed the opinion through the focus group interviews, that having a mentor assigned to them that was interested in seeing them succeed, and pushing them to be responsible, accountable, committed, and more engaged in the life of the school, helped them at a critical time in their growth process. Kay stated, "Dr. Finch was a good role model for us. He didn't try to be our friend. He just made everything more interesting by always looking for opportunities that we could participate in. We actually wanted to learn from him." Faith and Sarah felt that:

> Ms. Bow believed in the goodness and success of every student, and enjoyed mentoring and advising the Senior class. She taught us how to organize and plan with the input of our classmates which resulted in more students becoming involved in the activities of the school.

Ms. Bow commented, "That what Faith and Sarah said was an example of me bringing them in, and making them feel like we have something important for them to accomplish every week and not just a meeting to meet." The student participants felt the

leadership mentoring process made them think about leadership in an alternate way. Collaboration became less about who is in charge and more about what needs to be accomplished.

The findings indicated that the leadership lessons and mentor sessions with the mentees reinforced the concepts of thinking positively, which opened their eyes to different possibilities and motivated them to seek out new experiences. The findings of the study also suggested that mentoring had a positive effect on the attitudes of the mentees. This was indicated by increased patience and collaboration among their peers, along with the activities they engaged in with their mentors associated with school spirit and student involvement documented throughout the instructional lessons and focus group interviews.

The student participants felt college was fast approaching, and they recognized the skills learned and developed with their mentor would assist them in their educational pursuits. The student participants felt their learning community experience would provide them with an advantage, because they would be entering college with established mentor relationships that they could utilize when needed. The findings delineated the types of outcomes that one would reasonably expect mentoring to influence, such as setting achievable goals, staying focused on tasks, and realizing personally relevant outcomes. Increased communication and presentation skills, better collaboration with peers, and modeling the way for others, were attributes that were revealed as having an influence on student leadership as evidenced from the data collected during Cycles 2, 3, and 4 of this action research study.

The mentors felt the one-on-one time spent with their mentees assisted in creating

a desire from them to change how they were perceived by the faculty and administration. The mentors were critical in providing affirmation and support, which they felt was needed for the student participants to develop self-confidence and shape a leadership identity as discussed in the focus group interviews. The leadership lessons provided a foundation for the mentors to build upon when working with their mentees to develop their skills, as well as increased responsibility, accountability, and commitment so student engagement could be enhanced. Ms. Kee believed that her mentoring helped the students succeed, but she felt that an added benefit was boosting their self-confidence and creative skills by facilitating brainstorming sessions with the students, and letting them go. "Once they were in charge, some extremely creative and innovative things happened."

Ms. Jenkins stated that Kiki and Mary had strong organizational attributes when they joined the National Honor Society and became part of the learning community, but learning to model that sense of organization through our mentoring sessions helped other student participants become more engaged when conducting meetings and during the planning process for the development of activities.

Overall, the mentors noted from the leadership lessons and mentee sessions, that the student participants improved their ability to manage their time, speak in public, present information, facilitate meetings, work in groups, and think more critically, leading them to believe that they could be a part of a change process in their school community. One strong implication discovered through this study was that the presence of an adult mentor who identified the various avenues by which a student could lead, recognized attributes in individual students, and encouraged students to develop their strengths and diminish weakness resulted in increased utilization of their voices and

engagement. The literature supports the findings of the mentors as indicated in a research study by Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning, which determined that adults who act as mentors and share their backgrounds and optimism, are able to motivate participants to meet their projected goals, which has proven to be inspirational to urban students who rarely have the opportunity to work with individuals who view them as part of the solution, instead of the problem so change can occur (Anyon & Naughton, 2003). Terri expressed her feelings about the mentoring she received from Ms. Mays with these words:

> I am a natural born leader but with her guidance and input my skills became sharper. She taught me that not everything deserves a reaction, but can be a learning experience. Sometimes silence says it all. Ms. Mays has been there when I needed someone to talk to, offered me words of wisdom when I felt like it was the end of the world, and showed me how to be a better me. I know her motives are heartfelt and that made all the difference.

The findings of this study complement the research of Anyon and Naughton (2003), which suggests that the ability to engage with an adult who offered a combination of encouragement, challenge, and support and who modeled diverse ways of thinking about leadership facilitated shifts in the consciousness of students.

Much of the empirical research surrounding mentoring in educational settings has revolved around trying to reverse the negative circumstances that often prevail among at-risk disengaged students. Mentoring efforts are usually employed to prevent students from dropping out of school, decrease frequent absenteeism, reduce behavioral disturbances and substance abuse concerns, and reengage those who need to increase student achievement (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2006; Eby et al., 2008; Garringer, 2007; Hall, 2003; Malone, 2006; Portwood, Ayers, Kinnison, Waris, & Wise, 2005). In this study, the implications for mentoring were to increase the leadership capacity of high achieving

at-risk students who were deemed leaders, and those that had not realized their potential yet by enhancing their skills and leadership capabilities to increase student engagement within their school environment, thereby filling a gap in the literature. The findings of this study were similar to those of Portwood et al. (2005), who found that students receiving weekly school-based mentoring gained higher levels of school belonging compared to those who were not mentored.

Research question #5: Impact of my leadership on student engagement. When I enrolled in this doctoral program, I was interviewed by Rowan newspaper staff for an article that was being written about the first doctoral cohort on the Camden campus. During the interview I was asked what dissertation topic I may be considering, to which I replied, "I think I want to do something with female mentoring. I want to help empower women to be leaders." Little did I know then having only been in the program for several months, how my words were going to come to fruition. Those thoughts stayed in my spirit and I began to contemplate how I could utilize my leadership abilities to influence others, and impact the lives of my students in a way that I had not been able to before. Posner (2009b) says, "leadership is driven more by internal forces than by external forces, and thus the development of leaders is fundamentally the development of the inner self" (p. 2). This statement provided the foundation behind the development of this study.

So the question was how has my leadership contributed to the development of leadership skills for National Honor Society students to increase their student/school engagement? Because I am passionate about coaching and encouraging others, the idea of empowering students so they could become better leaders was a plus for me, but I first

had to persuade the administration and other teachers/mentors that I wanted to be involved in the study to internalize my vision and realize how it would benefit our school community. It was not an easy sell initially to the principal, because he was frustrated with our students not being committed, responsible, or dedicated to opportunities they asked to be a part of, which he felt ultimately reflected on his leadership as the leader of the school. I convinced him that undertaking this study was an opportunity to change perceptions and create new realities. Nothing could be gained if we just continued to do the same things and expecting a different result. He eventually agreed and the development of the study began.

That was one of the first steps for me as a leader in following Kotter's (1996) change process of building a guided coalition. By utilizing Kotter's (1996) change process model, I was able to form a guided coalition of teacher mentors who were interested in doing things differently, and who had some real commitment and passion to do it, and partnered them with National Honor Society students. I shared and communicated my vision with all the stakeholders who were going to be involved that our ultimate goal was to increase student engagement. It was my desire to act as a facilitator of professional growth among my colleagues to advance student learning and engagement. I knew that I could not accomplish these goals in isolation, so I enlisted the assistance of the teacher/mentors myself that complemented my weaknesses as well as my strengths when working with the students. I believe the wise leader creates an opportunity for continual learning and development in their educational environment for the betterment of all.

There are many definitions of leadership, but one that has resonated with me, and

reflects my definition of leadership is John Maxwell's (2002), which states that leadership involves leading or influencing people to develop shared values, vision and expectations based on shared principles and behaviors to increase the effectiveness of an organization" (p. 56). As a leader, I have always had a tendency to look at the larger picture and take a wide-angle view, along with being adaptable and flexible to the specifics of a situation to accomplish end goals. As an urban educator, action learning was a logical approach for this research, because it was specific to our school setting and extremely focused on internal actions that aimed to make a change at this high school. There is power in the realization that you can exhibit influence and become an integral part of school reform as a change agent. Noted author, John Kotter (1996), states that "Leaders establish the vision for the future and set the strategy for getting there, they cause change. They motivate and inspire others to go in the right direction, and they along with everyone else, sacrifice to get there" (p. 25).

As part of my self-assessment analysis, I have declared my espoused theory in action to be most closely aligned with having a transformational (Burns, 1978), situational approach (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995) to leadership. My position within the school district and the nature of the leadership experiences that I have held over the last several years has determined the type of leader I have become. Whether I am assisting as part of the administrative team, working in an instructional capacity in the classroom or library, functioning as a chairperson for a school or district-wide initiative, acting as a club advisor or mentor, or working independently on a school projects, I have found the tenets of situational leadership to be very important to my success (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995). My principal always said, "Ms. Mays challenges people to try new approaches,"

which speaks to my transformational leadership style, and "often searches outside our school for innovative ways to improve," which is reflected in my ability to develop relationships with other organizations to provide support and service to our students. All of these experiences have taught me the importance of using the appropriate leadership style for the appropriate situation as an administrator, instructor, advisor, or mentor thus far.

Following the concepts of transformational and situational leadership dictated how I led, the types of relationships I developed with my mentees, and the course of action I pursued for the learning community. As a participant researcher and observer, advisor, mentor, and instructor, I was immersed in leadership relationships with all the learning community members as I provided guidance about learning activities that supported greater improvement in student engagement. During Cycle 1, I spent considerable time with the students as a group, having them evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, offering not only my suggestions and opinions, but those of the mentors. I knew I could make a greater impact on the group if I enlisted the assistance of others who had the same desire to see these students reach their leadership potential, with the understanding that our end results should benefit both the students and the school.

As the students began to realize what skills they possessed and how to best utilize them, along with those that needed further development, it was my responsibility and those of the mentors to continually encourage them to focus on the leadership practices outlined in the Kouzes and Posner's (2008) model and help them visualize how they could transform themselves to become an effective student leader. I created and provided leadership instruction and development modules, as well as encouraged and enabled them

to become meaningfully involved in the life of the school. Anna said:

> Mentoring about leadership was important to Ms. Mays. She met with us often, usually at lunch time to let us brainstorm ideas with each other, often about how to be an effective leader, and ways that we could achieve our goals.

As a transformational leader, I recognized the expressed needs and wants of the student participants, by listening, instructing, coaching, and engaging in reflective analysis so change could occur. I involved students in decision-making, shared collaboration of ideas, and empowered them to become leaders themselves. This transformational style worked well when trying to build trust, rapport, and commitment amongst colleagues and the students, which was crucial for the learning community to be effective. Relationships were the bridge to success! I tried to implement a systematic approach to leadership learning by endorsing teamwork, collaboration, and the development of others and their abilities, so they would desire to take on additional responsibilities. Each situation encountered required that I utilize different traits, behaviors, styles, and skill sets to obtain the greatest productivity from each member of the learning community. A clear implication from the study was the emphasis placed on implementing and supporting extra-curricular activities and programs, which Lambert (2002) suggests that high school students perceive as significantly important and beneficial when teaching them leadership behaviors.

From the beginning of this journey to the present, my leadership role has been one as the coach. The coaching leader directs and guides, along with providing encouragement and inspiration to help motivate others (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Being an encourager by nature, I strived to be a leader that empowered students to "do what they do best," and own a piece of the solution or end result. I empowered the

student participants to become leaders and get involved in the process and be a part of implementing change by initiating new ideas, programs, and activities that would create change in the culture of the school. I have acted as the facilitator, discussion maker, consensus builder, and information provider who sometimes defined roles and tasks for the learning community, but always with the input and suggestions of my fellow mentors and student leaders. Valuing the input of my fellow mentors and student participants allowed decisions to be reached by consensus whenever possible, and enabled them to buy into my vision as the leader for this dissertation study. It has been my experience that if you listen, students as well as adults appreciate the opportunity to be heard, and will usually assist in generating new ideas and approaches to further your vision or goals (Mitra, 2008). The coaching leadership style was most appropriate in the learning community because the students agreed to participate with the goal of becoming more responsible, experienced, and committed to making a difference. As a coach, educators can provide feedback, enhance opportunities for practice, and create simulations for students to examine their beliefs and ways of thinking (Komives et al., 2009).

I have internalized many concepts about leadership, motivation, and inspiration, which I applied to my thinking and actions when mentoring, planning, implementing, or executing ideas. My goal as a leader has always been to assist in the development of a culture that stimulated collaborative effort, but allowed for freedom of thought while respecting the diverse learning styles of students and remaining unified. Skill in the practice of leadership is gained by reflecting and executing what you are internalizing through your core values. Students must be able to clearly delineate what you stand for through your beliefs and values to be an effective leader. The core values that impacted

my leadership style are all beliefs and traits that I attempted to portray in my interaction with students. It was my responsibility as a leader to continually seek and promote new levels of engagement for our students through shared learning, collaboration, research, and discussion. The leadership style I employed with students can take on transactional attributes at times, because I believe students always need guidance in conjunction with democracy, no matter how independent they are in their thinking and actions. It was important to model the behaviors I expected from my followers especially when working with teens, if the students were going to view me as a leader, and then model for themselves how an effective leader within the student population should perform. I taught them that leaders should not be afraid to be held accountable and should hold their followers to the same standard. High expectations should be the norm! However, accountability is often a difficult value for urban teens to grasp, due to the many barriers they often face in their daily lives, which override what they know is expected of them. Since accountability is a core value of mine, I found that appealing to their espoused core value of integrity by asking them to reflect on why they could not be committed actually improved their motivation to become just that. It was not an easy task, but I utilized recognition and praise as an excellent motivator for continued commitment and accountability! Evidence of my leadership influence on the students' learning, which resulted in increased student engagement, is documented within the text throughout the chapters of this dissertation. The voices of my colleagues and the voices of the students captured in their comments and reflections provided the data that would become the evidence for increased student engagement.

Limitations of Study

The following limitations were attributed to this research study. The sample population was limited to the National Honor Society students at Aesculapian High School who were involved in a specified leadership development program. Since the student participants were members of the National Honor Society, it could be assumed that they possessed some leadership skills or abilities based on the eligibility criteria of the organization and may already act as leaders. Students graduate from this population every year, which could make it difficult to maintain a consistent sample population throughout the time frame of the study, if the data could not be collected and analyzed within a specific time period. Had this occurred, it would have been difficult to provide an authentic analysis of the findings and replication of the study. Finding willing mentors could be a significant problem for mentoring programs in urban settings, suggesting that in order to serve more students, one-to-one relationships need to evolve into group-based mentoring, such as in this study. The students who were Seniors, were not able to participate in the continued implementation of changes approved for this coming school year due to graduation, leaving the responsibility on the remaining Junior student participants to carry out their plans and initiate change to further increase student engagement.

Financial or material resources needed to implement aspects of the leadership learning or the action plans initiated by the students to increase engagement limited the degree to which change could be implemented within the school environment due to budget restraints. Action learning expenses were self-funded or donated during the study, which limited the scope of activities that were developed. In addition, because of the

action research methodology and specific sampling chosen, the results of the study may not lend itself to generalizations beyond the Aesculapian High School environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

It will be important to study the empirical relationships between the role of student engagement through extracurricular involvement in high school and leadership outcomes of students. One of the goals of the study was to recommend that a leadership development component be embedded in the curriculum of the school to continue building leadership capacity amongst the student body and serve as a spring board for meaningful involvement in the life of the school. Since it is essential that leadership behaviors be nurtured in students to prepare them to become successful leaders for college and society, implementing leadership education into the curriculum should be encouraged. Recent literature strongly suggests introducing leadership development into high school curriculums and not limiting it to specific groups of students. Creating opportunities for students to develop the skills they need before they are assessed as adults on a professional level is another area for future research (Bowman, 2014; Seemiller & Murray, 2013; Van Velsor & Wright, 2012).

The results of the study also implied that short term leadership and mentor programs can serve as effective tools for building skill development, as identified in the research (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Posner, 2009, 2014; Rosch & Caza, 2012). The educational impact of these programs, where students build skill in one area first before advancing to master more complex skills, may aid administrators when deciding to create a leadership development program that meets the needs of its students (Posner, 2014; Rosch & Caza, 2012). Future research also needs to

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be conducted to understand which types of leadership skills can best be fostered in students through short term programs and mentorship and which are better suited for longer programs, since all leadership skills are not acquired at the same speed or in the same context. Using short-term leadership programs and mentoring that can effectively educate students may also be more fiscally efficient and can provide a means to create new initiatives in a school environment.

The findings also imply that structured short-term programs can impact student leadership practices and sustain student and school engagement after participation in the program has ended and is in alignment with the research of Rosch and Caza (2012), who suggest that educators must be aware that when assessing student leadership development, future research will need to differentiate between measuring students' satisfaction and immediate reaction to the program versus assessing learned leadership skills that are applied and practiced by students over time once a program is over or a course is complete.

Future research might also utilize additional measures of mentoring relationships, to better account for the potential influence of an adult in the lives of students in and out of school. Studies found in the literature generally viewed mentoring as a component needed to improve negative social and academic attributes in students. The implications of this study suggest that mentoring high school students is an area that can be utilized for positive reinforcement of leadership development, thereby expanding the study of mentoring for future research, especially in the area of leadership. A comparison could also be made between formal mentoring programs and leadership developed through informal implementation. Future studies could be beneficial for establishing a framework

for the mentoring of student leaders that contributes to leadership success.

The findings from this study also implied how adults can provide support for adolescent leaders while creating platforms for students to assume, and sustain meaningful leadership roles and responsibilities that are shared with adults (Cook-Sather, 2007; Harris, 2005; Mitra, 2005).

Leadership Conclusion

Why does this study about the development of leadership matter? It matters, because "when you change what you believe, you change what you do" (Johnson, 1998, p. 5). An analysis of the research questions outlined in this chapter imply that through education, practice, and mentoring, the students were perceived differently as leaders by their mentors and the Administration by the conclusion of the study. The perceptions changed because the students learned how to identify their leadership capabilities, demonstrate the effective leadership practices, build communications skills, plan effectively, utilize their voices to produce change and become meaningfully involved in their school. The student participants shared the experience and skills that they received with other potential student leaders, as well as developing their own leadership identities to ensure that they would become a leader who made a difference in their school environment.

As a community, the students with the support of their mentors, internalized the components of the conceptual framework beginning with Kouzes and Posner's (2008) model of leadership development where they acquired new skills and enhanced old ones, practiced being a role model to their peers and were motivated to assume leadership responsibilities. They inspired new ideas in the minds of others, realized the benefit of collaborating with not only their peers but adults, and recognized the importance of

celebrating the achievement of others to improve the culture of the school. Building on a foundation of leadership learning students with the support of their mentors, became more proficient at public speaking and presenting information to adults which enabled them to move from being students who were just heard to ones who were listened to by adults as indicated in Mitra's (2005) Pyramid of Student Voice. Through the lessons and exercises conducted during the study, the participants were encouraged to utilize their voices to express their thoughts and concerns and become meaningfully involved so change could occur for the purpose of strengthening student engagement. During the study, the students worked on improving communication and presentation skills so others would want to listen to them, and built rapport with their peers, mentors, and the administration whenever possible to improve team collaborations.

As students started to be listened to more by adults, they were able to become increasingly more engaged in the culture of the school and began assuming more leadership responsibilities. This led to the development and implementation of new activities and events at the school indicating increased engagement by students as they transitioned from adult initiated and directed to student initiated and led activities as desired in Fletcher's (2003) model of Meaningful Student Involvement. All of the components outlined in the conceptual framework are interrelated and assisted students in establishing their leadership identity throughout the cycles of inquiry as a result of mentoring and leadership education. As students acquired and practiced skills, identified strengths and weaknesses, and clarified their personal values, they were able to define who they are as a leader as they grew through the stages of development outlined in Komives et al.'s (2006) Leadership Identity Model.

All of these achieved outcomes were areas that students and their mentors desired as indicated in the Cycle 1 findings of the study. The findings implied that the learning community participants gained a better understanding of their personal values and beliefs through continuous reflection noted in their journal writings in response to the leadership lessons delivered during Cycle 2. All three focus groups of participants provided insightful data summarizing the pre- and post-perceptions of effective student leaders, skill areas of growth, new opportunities that were explored by study participants, and learned outcomes. The mentors and administration perceptions of students changed by listening more to students due to their demonstrated levels of increased commitment, accountability, and dependability, thereby allowing them to be a willing partner in the decision-making process. The learning community provided the students with the opportunity to practice these skills, which enabled them to achieve their goals as a team.

After the study ended, I continued to monitor the engagement of students for the remainder of the school year to determine if improvement was continuing to occur. It was paramount that the momentum created by the student participants continued, as they engaged their peers in new school activities and projects slated for future implementation. I ensured that the leadership lessons were passed along to Dr. Finch, who served as one of the mentors, so they could be incorporated into the Exposure curriculum of the school and utilized the following year for the entire school population. Ms. Jenkins, who also served as one of the mentors, agreed that she would be responsible for overseeing the implementation of all the approved plans for the following school year, and bring other faculty members on board who were interested in engaging students in extra-curricular activities.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in an action research study entitled "Empowering High School Students to Develop Leadership Skills and Increase Student/School Engagement". The study is being conducted by Corlette Mays, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Department of Rowan University in Camden, New Jersey and an employee of the Camden City school district.

The purpose of this study will be to explore the developmental leadership experiences of urban high school students at Dr. Charles E. Brimm Medical Arts High School. The study will involve 20 members of the National Honor Society to determine what skills and qualities along with learning and social needs students perceive are valuable for leadership, and should be developed to increase student engagement.

The data collected for this study will include the administration of a leadership perception survey to students, observations of leadership classes, interviews from focus groups, reflective journals of students and student developed action plans. The data collected in this study will be analyzed, synthesized and interpreted and the findings will be documented in the dissertation of the researcher, Corlette Mays.

I understand that the results of surveys taken will be kept confidential, and that any interviews conducted may be recorded, but that the responses will be made confidential. All the data collected written or recorded will be kept secure in a locked storage cabinet by the researcher.

I understand that my participation in the study will not exceed more than 2 hours per week over a four month period, and that I may voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Signature of Participant:_____ Date:_____

Signature of Parent or Guardian is required if the student is under the age of 18, when the study begins. Signature of Parent/Guardian:_____ Date:_____

Questions may be directed to: Corlette Mays-Brimm Medical Arts H.S.- 856-966-2500

Appendix B

Leadership Perception Survey

1. Do you perceive *yourself* to be a student leader? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. If *you* answered positively to Question 1, what qualities, values or skills do *you* feel *you* possess as a leader? If you answered negatively to Question 1, skip to Question 3.

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What does it mean to *you* to be a student leader?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What qualities, values or skills do *you* feel are necessary to be an effective student leader?

_____

_____

_____

5. What qualities, values or skills do *you* feel *you* need to develop further to be an effective student leader?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. What is *your* perception of student leadership at Aesculapian (Brimm)?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Do *you* feel *you* have a responsibility to participate in school activities, extra-curricular opportunities or community service? Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Many complain, but few take action. What have *you* done personally to help improve something at school or in the community?

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Are there leadership opportunities *you* have pursued or would like to pursue? Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. What do *you* hope to gain by participating in this leadership development learning community?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Student Focus Groups

1. Has *your* perception of leadership changed since learning about how to develop *your* leadership capacity? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

2. From *your* learning experience, what do *you* now feel are the most important qualities, values or skills of being a leader?

_____

_____

_____

3. Has *your* learning experience assisted in helping *you* feel that *you* are a leader? Ifso, how would *you* describe *yourself* now as a leader? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

4. Having participated in leadership learning, would *you* feel comfortable voicing *your* ideas and opinions as well as making decisions with teachers and administrators of the school? Please explain how you accomplish this.

_____

_____

_____

5. Do *you* feel that students have an opportunity to be heard and listened to in this school? If so, explain how *you* can make an impact?

_____

_____

_____

If not, how can *you* affect a change?

_____

_____

_____

6. How will *you* demonstrate *your* leadership skills to get students positively engaged in the daily life of school utilizing the Student Leadership Challenge Model?

Model the Way

_____

_____

_____

Inspire a Shared Vision

_____

_____

_____

Challenge the Process

_____

_____

_____

Enable Others to Act

_____

_____

_____

Encourage the Heart

_____

_____

_____

7. How do *you* feel *you* can contribute to your school or community environment?

_____

_____

8. If *you* could implement or initiate a project, program or activity, what would it be and who would it benefit? Please explain in as much detail as possible.

_____

_____

_____

9. How do *you* feel *you* benefited from being in this learning community with the other students and mentor teachers?

_____

_____

10. Would *you* like to say more or make additional comments about any of your answers to these interview questions?

_____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Mentor Focus Group

1. Has *your* perception of student leadership at Aesculapian changed since mentoring students from this learning community? Please explain.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

2. What do *you* feel are the most important qualities, values or skills a student leader needs to possess?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

3. Do *you* feel that the students in this learning community view themselves as leaders? Please explain.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

4. Do *you* feel that students have an opportunity to be heard and listened to in this school? If so, how?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

5. If not, how could the school do a better job of listening to students?   _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

6. In what ways have *you* made students feel comfortable sharing ideas and expressing their "voice" to *you,* other students, faculty or the administration?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. From this learning experience, how do *you* feel the student participants could utilize their "voice" and contribute to the school environment or community?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. How have *your* mentoring and leadership skills assisted in getting more students positively engaged in the community or school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Would you like to say more or make additional comments about any of your answers to these interview questions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E

Action Plan for Increasing Student Engagement

Project/Activity
Name:
Date/Duration:
Location:
Time:

Purpose:

Intended

Results:

Budget:

Resources Needed:

How will you raise funds, if needed? Possible donations:

Recipients of funds raised or donated: Advertising for event/activity:

Names of students involved: