

An Analysis of the Effects of Student Leadership in Schools

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Electronic copies of a short article on the study and of the complete graduate paper are available from any of the authors.

Abstract

Student leadership in classrooms and schools has changed over time. For many years, it was believed that student leadership roles could only be assumed by gifted and talented students. Currently, many educators include leadership activities both in the classroom and the school, with the belief that *all* students have leadership potential. This study examines schools applying this inclusive concept of leadership and investigates the important impact on the achievement and social development of students.

District Administrators from Coquitlam, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, and Chilliwack were asked to provide information on schools in their districts that are leaders in providing opportunities of leadership for all students. The researchers used this information to approach three schools in each district identified as promoting leadership opportunities for all students. Elementary, Middle, and Secondary school teachers were given surveys that inquired about the leadership activities they offered and the effects that they observed these roles had on their students. Three teacher responses from the surveys in each district were selected for observation and interview. Data collected from these

instruments along with the research conducted in a literature review, fashioned the conclusions and recommendations of this paper.

Teachers indicated that by employing specific instructional methods, class management strategies, and changing the learning environment, they can create opportunities for leadership development within the learning context for all students. Classroom observations confirmed this as students led students in the lessons and learning.

This study looks at factors educators identify or demonstrate that contribute to leadership development and the learning process. The effects of student leadership on the culture of the school and classrooms are examined. A foremost conclusion to this study is that having students participate in meaningful leadership activities and develop skills, such as decision-making, problem solving, collaboration and communication, are key components in youth leadership development. As a result of collecting the data from three school districts, a wide range of grade levels and subjects have been included.

Since the inclusion of leadership activities within curriculum is commonly practiced, the focus is also on the assessment of leadership and the relationship to academic achievement. Developments in brain research highlight that brain growth and learning is maximized in enriched leadership environments. Opportunities of leadership for all students stimulate the brain, creating a firing of neurons and improving retention.

An amalgamation of the literature review and results of this study aims at best informing educators of the effects of student leadership. As indicated by current theorists and our findings, there is an innate need for all students to lead. Acknowledging this need and creating environments for student leadership to occur, as identified in observations and interviews, has shown positive social and academic effect on students. Outcomes of the information collected in this paper are conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice. Recommendations are that the Ministry of Education inform districts of the results of leadership practices that increase student development and achievement through the development of a leadership curriculum, leadership assessment tools, and training for educators. Another suggestion is for school districts to allocate funds towards student leadership development and to assign student leadership development coordinators to implement and assess the progress of the new student leadership curriculum. Wonderful opportunities for leadership were observed in the leadership exemplar schools of this study and should help to encourage all teachers at the classroom level to continue to develop leadership opportunities for all students.