

An Evidence-Based Practitioner's Model for Adolescent Leadership Development

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Introduction

Training the leaders of tomorrow has been a focus of school programs in the past and will continue to be a main point of differentiation for the future. While much has been written on leadership development across the lifespan and leadership of and within educational organizations, despite this breath of literature, little is found that directly aids the teacher or administrator wishing to implement a student leadership development program. Published literature on youth leadership development seeks to encompass all of the factors that potentially influence leadership development, many of which are already implemented at some schools and others of which are outside of the sphere of influence of the educator. The main issue with this approach for the educator is that the influences on youth leadership development extend far beyond the boundaries of what a specific school based program can entail. The lack of easily applicable research related to adolescent leadership development for practitioners limits the ability to translate research to train the leaders of tomorrow.

Additionally, universities have also begun placing an emphasis on skills such as leadership in the admission process, and leadership remains a desirable skill in the workplace (Kuhn & Wienberger, 2005). Furthermore, students who demonstrate high indications of leadership skill by 10th grade and are exposed to more leadership opportunities in 11th and 12th grades earn more as adults (Kuhn & Wienberger). Given this future benefit and value of leadership opportunities at the high school level, educators must focus on how leadership capabilities can be developed further for all students at increasingly earlier stages in their schooling.

This paper proposes a model for youth leadership education based on adolescent development and leadership research in an effort to provide practitioners with a practical blueprint to aid their creation and implementation of high school leadership programs. By focusing on student leader development areas which school level educators can affect, domains not generally addressed as required high school graduate competency outcomes, and leadership development components particularly applicable to adolescence, this proposed model can both advance the literature and help practitioners.

Although definitions of secondary and middle schools vary across countries, regions and schools, for the purposes of this paper the term secondary school will be used interchangeably with the term high and middle school, both referring to the years of 6-12 in the United States schooling system. Additionally, this same time period will be referred to as adolescence

encompassing both early and late adolescent which spans the age ranges from 10 to 14 and 15 to 19 respectively (Santrock, 2009).

Youth Leadership Development Programs Outside of Schools

Many non-profit and for-profit organizations offer programs claiming to enhance student leadership capabilities. While the cost and outcomes of these programs vary, Murphy (2011) offers an overview of some of the more reputable programs in her book chapter in “Early Development and Leadership.” Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, Rotary International and National Youth Leadership Training are all included as organizations touting youth leadership development. However, methods suggested for achieving these goals are often broad and include common competencies like communication, responsibility and character. While the degree of interaction and crossover with a student’s school varies by program, these learning outcomes can be redundant if already addressed through the school.

One for-profit educational company offering leadership training is called the National Young Leaders Conference. They claim to offer “something you can’t really get in school... It’s not taught in math or science or history class. It’s about responsible decision-making, listening, public speaking skills... Leadership is what runs through our conferences: collaboration, problem-solving, conflict resolution.” (NY Times, 2009) However, decision making, listening, public speaking, collaboration, problem solving, and conflict resolution are all essential competencies for all high school graduates in the 21st century. School curriculums that do not address these skills disservice all students, not just current and future student leaders.

Similar to adult and youth leader development models, youth leadership development programs often take on competencies that extend beyond the leadership realm and encompass moral development, character education and skills for academic success. While these programs provide valuable skills for the students that can impact leadership development, in order to help a school based program developer, a line should be drawn between the components of a leadership program and the minimum base for exit competencies for a K-12 graduate. This is not to say that leadership skills are not valuable for everyone; however, it does make the distinction that one can be a competent K-12 graduate and a productive member of society without ever being a leader. While it is important that all students know they have the capacity to be a leader in some realm, in reality, it is okay if some choose not to pursue this path. If they decide not to be a leader, they will still need communication, critical thinking, and other skills necessary to thrive in the modern world.

Varying Models of High School Student Leadership Training

Although students’ leadership roles are often defined and influenced by the adults in the community, their work can be beneficial to all members of the community (Curtis & Boultswood, 1964). Student leaders have the potential to dramatically affect the school community both during the tenure of the students and for years to come. However, while student leadership can

be a valuable resource to a high school on multiple levels, it takes on different development forms depending on the institution. One of the first developments of student leadership began at the secondary school Eton College in the sixteenth century with the establishment of a prefect system (Curtis & Boulton, 1964). A prefect is a student given limited authority over other students in the governing of the school. This system was then imitated and expanded at other boarding schools so that prefects were included in school improvement conversations in addition to helping maintain order and discipline on campus and in the dormitories.

Identifying school leaders in the prefectship model is often done by the faculty administration, and students of the school. Lilley (2010) comments that “any system which incorporates an elite group as its student leadership model, per se has to have a selection process and criteria” (p. 16). Research shows that typically “student leaders are appointed, selected or elected, but that again implies a specific designated group, rather than leadership for all” (Lilley, p. 16). By selecting a specific group of student leaders, schools have the opportunity to educate and train these students in their roles.

However, others advocated for an alternate view of leadership in which students are partners in change processes and actively engaged in the governance of the school (Lilley, 2010). Summerhill School, a small co-ed boarding and day school in England, has provided an alternative model for student leadership and voice since its founding in 1921. There, students take part in the government of the school where it is believed that it is the right of all students and not just a few. It has become one of the leading examples of democratic education where all students have opportunities to partake in running the school.

With the rise of leadership emphasis in college and the workplace, recent leadership programs for high school have dramatically increased. Although resources exist compiling student leadership opportunities for college students (e.g. the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs), no such resources currently exist for secondary education. Murphy (2011) however, highlights two schools which incorporate leadership as a significant part of their curriculum. This first program is Leadership Charter High School in San Francisco. They seek to provide traditional academic skills as well as their four “School Wide Outcomes” of communication, critical thinking, personal responsibility, and social responsibility which are assessed in the final year via portfolios demonstrating competencies in these areas and thus prepare students to lead themselves and their communities. The second highlighted program is the Los Angeles Leadership Academy which serves students in grades K through 12. They seek to prepare students for success in college or elsewhere by using performance-based assessment, and by promoting critical thinking and intellectual depth, breadth, and agility. Additionally they seek to develop close relationships between students and staff and attention to students' individual needs. However, youth leadership development programs are not just gaining attention in public schools.

Many independent schools such as Eton College and Summerville School rely on their traditions of leadership training to both help run their schools and train students for the future. Newer initiatives like Leadership Baylor at Baylor School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Passport to Lead at Houston Christian High School in Houston, Texas have crafted a scaffolded approach that educates all students on leadership while allowing for more advanced experiences

for interested and capable students. Regardless of the model of student leadership applied at a particular school, educational environments provide a rich opportunity to test leadership skills. Lilley (2010) summarizes the thoughts of other researchers well when he states:

In school environments, traditional leadership roles are often the norm for young people... there is a void in identifying, providing practice of and the teaching skills required for student leadership. This highlights another problematic area; it is not enough for students to be given leadership opportunities and then be expected to absorb the skills be some sort of experiential osmosis. (p. 19)

Lilley addresses the concern that student leadership development should be intentional. This means that the opportunity to teach, train and develop student leadership is prime and necessary in schools. As Murphy concludes, “overall, leadership appears to be becoming an important part of high school students’ developmental experiences” (p 24).

While the traditions of high school student leadership training are rich and varied, a shared development model for this leadership growth process is lacking. This rise in the importance of high school student leadership development merits a unique model that can serve as the basis for their training.

Leadership Development Models Pertaining to Adolescence

Adult leader development literature has expanded dramatically over the past 15 years and now includes perspectives from leadership, education, and human development experts. Since more attention and resources have been paid to adult leader development research than youth leader development research, this can be used as a base for exploration. In the following section, four models are examined to glean relevant constructs for a practitioner’s model from the existing literature. Murphy (2011) seeks to bridge this gap by combining what is known about both adult leader development and youth by offering a “preliminary conceptual model for understanding youth leadership” (p. 6).

Model 1.

Murphy and Johnsons’s lifespan approach to leader development provides a clear indication that many of the contributing components of leadership are outside of the secondary educator’s control (Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

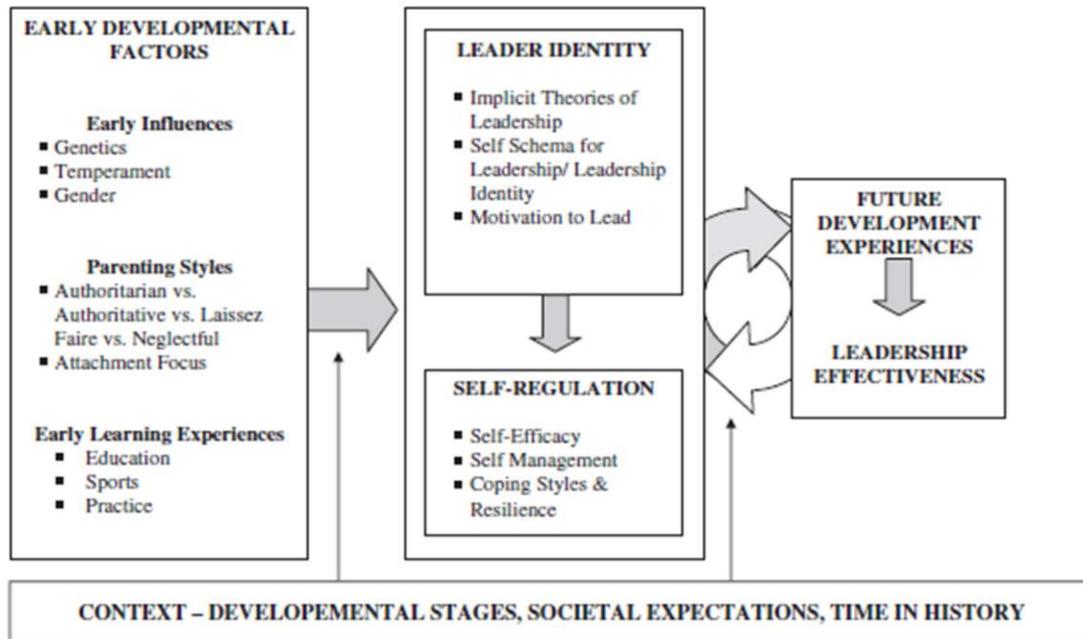


FIGURE 1. A life span approach to leader development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 461)

While the Murphy and Johnson (2011) model attempts to encompass all influences in a leader's development, many factors such as parenting styles, gender, genetics, and prior early learning experiences are not within the sphere of influence for the secondary school level educator. However, other factors from their model are necessary learning outcomes for all students, regardless of leadership training. For example, while self-management is important to leadership development, it is also an important skill to learn in school for success at any level, whether or not as a leader. For this reason, although included in other leadership development models such as Murphy and Johnson's lifespan model, it is excluded from this practitioners' model. Since a model for adolescence would (by law) accompany school attendance, and therefore certain elements included in other models should be left out of the model because they should be components of the quality education of any student, not just leaders. Furthermore, school system policies such as enrollment cut off dates, which can correlate with leadership outcomes, are also outside of school level educators control (Dhuey 2008). Murphy (2011) discuss this conflict of some leadership models by describing a model which lists seven competencies in their leadership development model for youth; "A list of competencies such as these may provide a comprehensive view of leadership requirements but does little in the way of explaining the process of leadership and may end up merely being a laundry list of the things that every competent person should do" (p 29). Particularly with adolescent leadership development, a model must reflect divergence from a typical high school curriculum (i.e. the elements taught specifically for leadership should be different from items found elsewhere in the curriculum such as self-efficacy).

For a further example, the 21st Century Learning Framework (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009) can be utilized and compared to existing youth leader development models. This framework has become a common language among independent school educators.

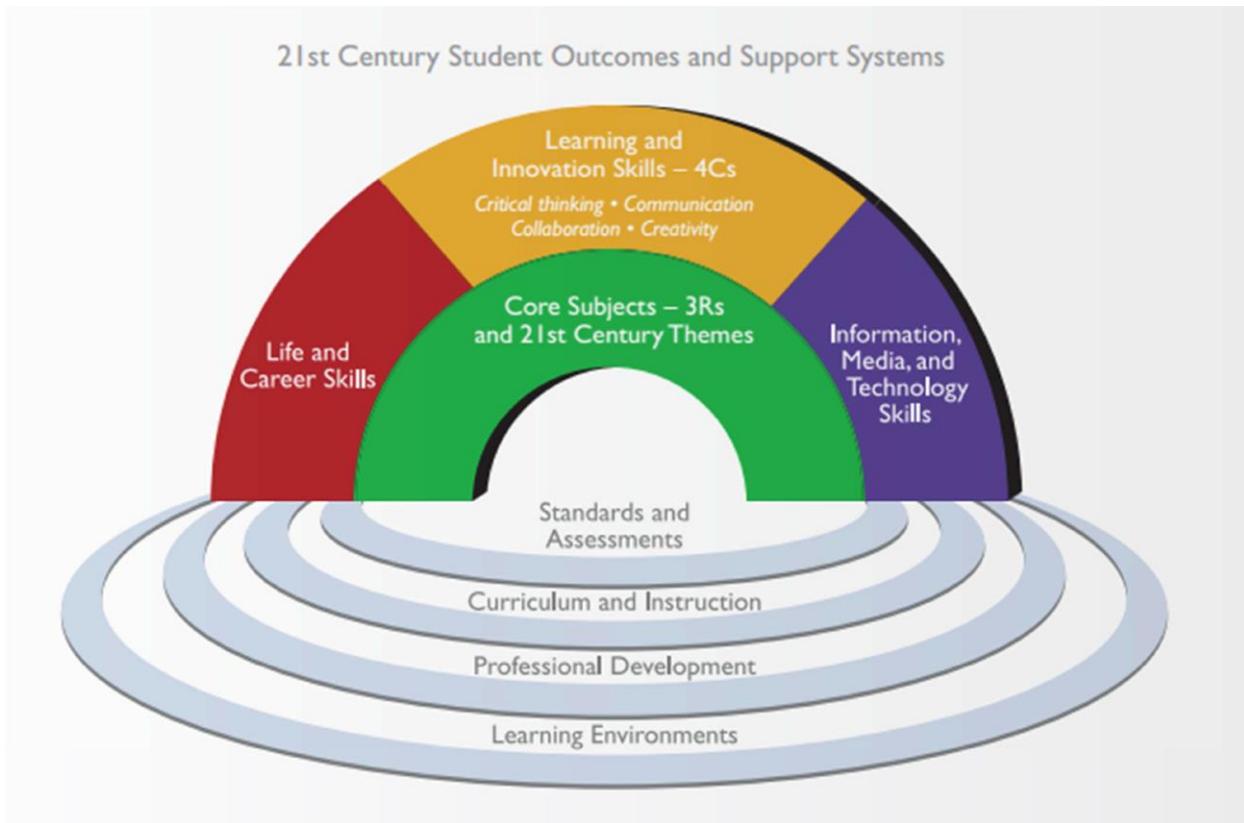


FIGURE 2. Framework for 21st Century Learning (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009, p. 1)

In the explanation and details of the framework, leadership is listed as a “Life and Career Skill.” In an effort to further define youth leadership development within the context of a school adopting the 21st century learning framework, it follows that outcomes such as the Learning and Innovation skills of Critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity need not be included in a leadership training program model since they are elsewhere in the greater context of 21st century learning. Similarly, although learning environments naturally affect and program or curriculum within a school, much literature and knowledge is devoted to these critical areas which affect many more programs than just leadership development. Therefore, it is critical to focus on elements which are critical to leadership development and not found specifically elsewhere in the educational curriculum for students.

Egocentrism is one such element commonly observed by secondary school educators. Originally postulated to be an early adolescence phenomenon, recent studies have suggested that egocentrism is a trait common in late adolescence (Peterson & Roscoe, 1991; Rycek, Stuhr, McDermott, Benker, & Swartz, 1998). Additionally, “adolescence is often the time that underlying narcissistic vulnerability becomes apparent through individual and interpersonal behaviors” (Kerr, 1994, p. 204). Although, this is a trait common in leadership positions,

“narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) may be reason why organizations see high levels of incompetence within their leadership ranks” (Wonneberg, 2007, p. 1). For these reasons, the development of healthy self-efficacy, particularly in regards to leadership, is a necessary tenant of an adolescent student leadership development model. Murphy defines it as follows:

Self-efficacy, rather than generalized confidence a person may have, relates specifically to how well people feel they can accomplish a task, and in this case the task is leadership. In other words, it is people’s belief in their ability. For individuals to perform well it is not enough that they possess the ability, but to perform well they must believe they can accomplish a task. (2011, p. 17)

Self-efficacy, which some researchers describe as leadership attitude, is thus both developmental appropriate to adolescence and leadership.

As such, it is another desirable outcome of student leadership training. Paglis (2010) reviews the research examining self-efficacy’s role in leadership and finds that the Big Five personality traits of extraversion and conscientiousness are predictors of Leadership Self Efficacy (LSE). Although researchers do not always agree on all of its components, the Big Five is a five factor structure of encompassing personality traits helpful to researchers in establishing cross study commonality and understanding the relationship of personality to outcomes such as leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004). Since the Big Five are highly correlated with successful leadership, Paglis recommends focusing on LSE a predictor of quality leadership potential. To further support the imperative inclusion of LSE in leader development, he highlights the role it plays in leader performance: “Research shows that high LSE leaders achieve superior results, both in terms of their individual performance and in their ability to inspire followers to higher levels of collective efficacy and performance” (Paglis, 2010, p. 779). Since high levels of LSE are essential in the palette of effective attributes, further inclusion of self-efficacy training is crucial to student leader training programs.

Model 2.

Although distinctions can be drawn between secondary and post-secondary institutions of learning, in many ways their students are similar, and thus college based student leadership development literature can inform a model for adolescence. Age differentials often overlap as 17-year-olds are seen in colleges and 19-year-olds (and sometimes age 20) are seen in high schools. With age discrepancy unconvincing as a distinction, the collegiate student leadership research can be used to inform the field of high school student leadership. Adolescent literature focusing on late adolescence extends into the college years. Additionally, early adulthood is cited as a period of continued developmental change so lessons can be taken from collegiate student leadership research which spans both late adolescence and early adulthood (Santrock, 2009).

Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella and Osteen (2005) conducted a grounded theory study on developing leadership identity and used thirteen diverse college students as their sample. This revealed a six stage developmental process that students passed through in five different categories connected to leadership identity.

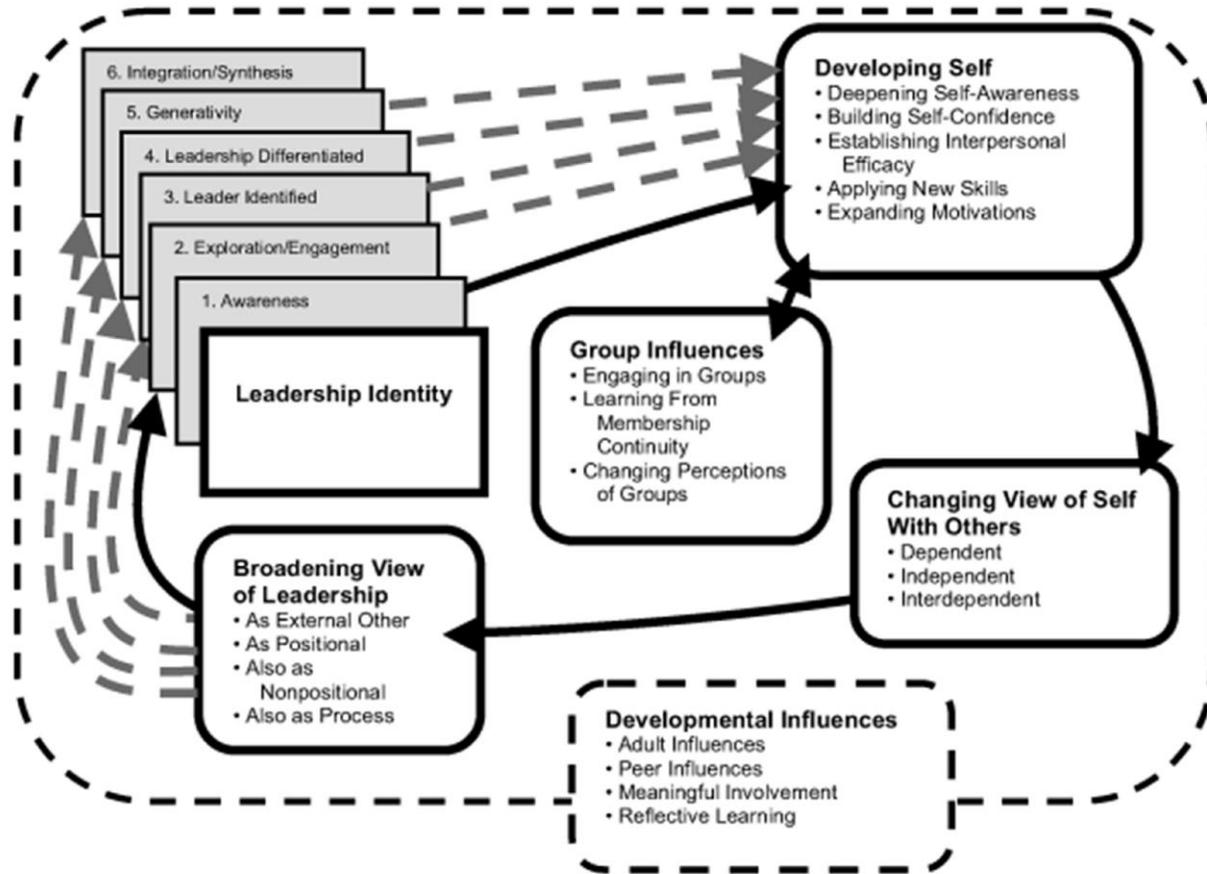


FIGURE 3. Developing a Leadership Identity: Illustrating the Cycle (Komives et al., 2005, p. 599)

Komives et al. report:

After developing an awareness of leadership, the students in this study described their shifting leadership identity as moving from a hierarchical, leader-centric view to one that embraced leadership as a collaborative relational process. Participants' recognition that they function in an interdependent world was an essential part of having a *leadership differentiated* [the 4th level] leadership identity. Students in the *generativity* [5th level] and *integration/synthesis* [6th level] stages recognized the systemic nature of leadership. (2005, p. 609)

The model has promise for application to high school students, however, their self-reflective constraint is worth noting: "Although relational leadership is a broad postindustrial approach, the process for identity development might be different for those who espouse other specific leadership philosophies such as servant leadership" (Komives et. al., 2005, p. 610). The Komives et al. approach can be used as a crossover tenant for the secondary leadership development model whereas is the intersection of identity and personality awareness with leadership practice.

Thus, a clear sense of identity is critical to the healthy advancement from childhood to adulthood (Erikson, 1959, 1963). Research in this area has its origins in Erikson's theory of psychosocial growth. By focusing on this developing sense of identity and personality during adolescence in the leadership development model, we can capitalize on this unique growth stage to further a student's understanding of leadership.

In another study, Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) develop this concept further by creating a leadership identity development (LID) model. The model can be useful in developing the leadership capacity and identity of students both as individuals and as members of supportive groups that can foster leadership development. This model emphasizes the role of leadership educators in facilitating student movement through stages and their design of learning experiences. Furthermore, "the LID model may prove useful in explaining why some individuals are frustrated in particular group experiences" (Komives et al., 2006, p. 415). This is in congruence with the findings of Allen and Hartman (2009) who found that targeting appropriate teaching techniques and experiences for learners' individualized needs allows for maximum personalized growth. Students' learning needs is a factor worth considering when implementing this model or designing training sessions for student leadership development.

Students must have the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to their lives in a practical way. Experiential learning traces its origins back to Dewey (1938) and was further defined by Lewin as a cycle of concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations (Kolb, 1984). In Kolb's (1984) seminal work on the subject, he states that "knowledge is continually derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner" (p. 27). Students must be able to apply and test their understanding of leadership in meaningful situations - referred to in the proposed model in this paper as a Personal Application Experience. Additionally, research has also revealed that students want practical individualized training as part of their leadership development (Allen and Hartman, 2009). These opportunities allow students to both succeed and fail but always learn, applying the other components of the model to their concepts and methods of leadership in real and tangible ways.

Models 3 and 4.

Two additional models exist that can inform a practitioner's model for adolescent leadership development. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) identify three stages of leadership development progressing from awareness, to interaction to mastery. They further identify five dimensions leadership development that are found within each stage: leadership information, leadership attitude, communication, decision making, and stress management. This is similar to Ricketts and Rudd (2002) model for youth leadership curriculum which they proposed for career and technical education with the hope that it could extrapolated to other educational forums. The dimensions that they defined in their conceptual model are: leadership knowledge and information; leadership attitude, will, and desire; decision making, reasoning, and critical thinking; oral and written communication skills; and intra and interpersonal relations.

The similarity between the two models is evident and both are commendable for beginning the dialogue on essential curricular topics. However, while it is essential to know that

all of these components are valuable leadership development components, the scope of all four models makes them less accessible in the creation of a leadership development program in a school where several of the dimensions are already thoroughly advanced in the students. To be more clear and helpful to practitioners looking to develop a leadership program, a model must exclude the qualities and exit competencies that every graduate should possess and focus on what truly is different in leadership development program from that of a good standard K-12 curriculum. Using this as a guide, the dimensions proposed in the previous models of communication, decision making/reasoning/critical thinking, stress management, and intra/interpersonal relation skills all fall out of a leadership development model for K-12 education. These qualities are still vitally important but do not make up a unique foundational block for a leadership development program because they are essential outcomes for all students regardless of leadership instruction. It should be noted that the degree to which schools are implementing the constructs outside of the model will naturally influence the students' leadership development; however, one benefit of this proposed model is to focus the efforts of the school based educational practitioner on factors over which they can directly have influence. In this way, perhaps the model draws too small of a circle, however, it avoids the ambiguity and redundancy of prior attempts to apply research to practice.

Need for a More Focused Model

Although these models pertaining to adolescent leader development seek to inform youth research by including appropriate developmental and environmental factors, for the educator seeking to develop youth leaders, its scope is too great for practical consideration. Therefore, a model is needed that focuses on constructs within the control of the educator but outside the scope of preexisting school curricula and documented environmental factors which affect learning and development. This proposed model is intended to supplement sound training in communication, self-management, collaboration and other leadership development component areas that should already exist in a high school curriculum.

Focus of the Model

Given the wide body of leadership research, secondary educators may struggle to find ways to implement the wide array of contributing factors in a student's leadership development. Therefore, this proposed model incorporates an emphasis on personal growth and development combined with the opportunity to practically implement the understandings obtained through the training.

This model attempts to distill elements of adolescent development and the leadership research in order to create a practitioners' blueprint for student leadership development at the high school level. Three foci were chosen in order to make the model more applicable to secondary school educators:

- Focus on Student Leader Development Areas which School Level Educators Can Affect
- Focus on Domains Not Generally Addressed as Required High School Graduate Competency Outcomes
- Focus on Leadership Development Particularly Applicable to Adolescence

Through the filter of applicability, the scope of the model was limited which in turn makes it easier to implement.

The Model



FIGURE 4. Proposed Practitioners' Model for High School Student Leadership Development
*PAE = Personal Application Experiences

Practically Using the Model

Implementation of this model could be achieved in a variety of ways. One potential method is described below.

Leadership can be taught to a group of high school student selected through a variety of means. These leaders could be self-selected for the experience, nominated by peers, nominated by teachers or appointed by the administration. These reasons for enrollment should be documented for each student. Prior to any training through the program, students should be given a series of leadership evaluation instrumentation and guided essay prompts to gain a baseline understanding of their perceptions of their personal leadership. Then, three part training should be employed catering to each of the areas of the model.

The Best Practices of Leadership can be taught using Kouzes and Posner's Student Leadership Practices Inventory (2006). This method contains workbooks, self-tests and observer tests to learn about the processes that leaders employ. It is a research based methodology that avoids the pitfall of containing practices that every competent human should possess. Students should be guided in discussion of the principles and review of their test scores. Connections to their Personal Application Experiences from this SLPI should be drawn with instructor guidance. PAE is essentially experiential learning and a chance for students to do a project through which they integrate the other three domains of the model.

Identity and personality can be explored using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Briggs et al., 1998). This commonly used test can be expanded through instruction for students to learn both more about who they are and also how they relate to others. Connections to their leadership identity and how they could relate to others in different leadership situations should be explored. Application to the PAE can also be required through individual reflection and discussion.

Self-efficacy can be explored through exposure to success stories of young leaders in high school and college. Students should discuss these stories and relate them to their own experience. Additionally, mentors can be provided for each student in the program. Mentors are desired by young leaders (as previously discussed) and can further develop the self-efficacy of the student by coaching them through the PAE.

After the PAE is complete, students can be required to digest their experience through a guided essay response reflecting on their successes, lessons learned and how they will maintain and change their behavior in future leadership opportunities. Changed leadership perceptions can also be explored in this reflection paper. Finally, a series of leadership evaluation instrumentation could also be administered at the end of the program.

This is one way to practically apply the proposed model in an educational setting. There will be many others that tap the understanding and creativity of talented educators. By using this model, practitioners can help ensure that they address the needs unique to leadership at the adolescent age when students are already subject to additional learning outcomes from their high school experience.

Implications for Future Research

Further research should focus on defining best practices most appropriate at each developmental level from early childhood through late adolescence. Murphy (2011) provides both a list of leadership tasks and skills and a list of possible developmental experiences, outcome and indicators that can be used as a starting point for exploration. Both lists for youth leadership define benchmarks at each developmental stage. Furthermore, future research should focus on differentiating character education from leadership development. These two vital areas for our youth should be both distinct albeit overlapping. Literature, however, often does not appropriately differentiate between the two, especially at the lower levels of schooling. Given this value of leadership development for adolescence, educators must focus on how leadership capabilities can be developed further for all students in school settings during these critical years.

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Author Biography

Christopher J. Rehm majored in both History and Business Operations/Information Technology at the College of William and Mary, holds a Masters in Educational Administration and Supervision from the University of Virginia, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Strategic Leadership Studies through James Madison University. He is currently the Head of School at Sullins Academy, a PK-8 independent school in Bristol, VA. Prior experience includes work with the Center for Creative Leadership, as Associate Head of School/Academic Dean at Middleburg Academy, and as Director of Residence Life at the Blue Ridge School. Early career experiences also include several years with The American School in Switzerland as a teacher, coach, dorm parent and IT “techie” and as the Program Administrator for the Turnaround Specialist Program in the "Partnership for Leaders in Education," a joint endeavor of the University of Virginia’s Darden Graduate School of Business and Curry School of Education. Based on his work in schools, consulting and graduate studies, Mr. Rehm is passionate about developing the potential to lead in all students and empowering them to better the world.