

When do I get to lead?

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Research Aim



the concept of informal and distributed leadership opportunities as a method of increasing **accessibility to leadership** for students within secondary schools.

“Most everyday research begins not with finding a topic but with confronting a problem that has typically found you, a problem that left unresolved means trouble”.

(Booth, Colomb & Williams, 1995, p.49)



Lizzio, Dempster and Neumann (2011) refer to the importance of building leadership capacity and the promotion of distributed leadership practices amongst students as contributing to school improvement.

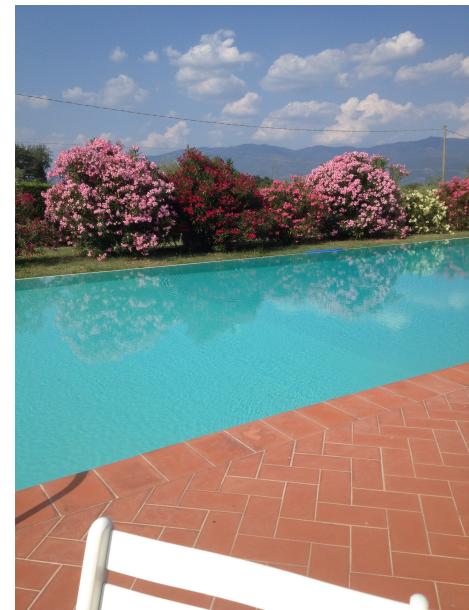
Harris (2004) points out that the concept of informal leadership can extend a schools perceptions of leadership and engages more school members

HOWEVER.....Karnes and Stephens (1999) state that youth leadership has remained an oft neglected concept



Much of the research relates to ADULTS discussing why leadership is important and their definitions of leadership development or training (Holdsworth, 2005; Mitra, 2005; Ricketts & Dudd, 2002)

McNae (2011) describes a new research agenda emphasising the importance of young people being involved in the planning of their own leadership development





Key Research Question

How can informal and distributed opportunities provide increased access to leadership for students within secondary schools?



Sub Questions

- *How* is informal and distributed leadership taking place for students within secondary schools?

- *What* are the perceived benefits of informal and distributed leadership opportunities for students within secondary schools?

- *What* are the perceived barriers to, and enablers of, informal and distributed leadership opportunities for students within secondary schools?

Method

- Two Case Study Secondary Schools
- Year 10 Students
- 50 Questionnaires in each School
- 6 Interviewed students in each School
- Qualitative Study



- Students referred again and again to **stepping up** and **moving outside of your comfort zone** as being a significant part of leadership.

- Students saw this '**stretching yourself**' component of leadership as being challenging and in fact a barrier for some young people to even begin to consider leadership.

“There’s always going to be someone out there better than you and you have to push yourself”.



Students associated
words like...

AUT
UNIVERSITY

COURAGE



Encouragement



Sharing Ideas



GUIDANCE

MOTIVATING
OTHERS

RESPONSIBILITY

helping others



STRONG
MINDED

- Students perceived there to be a positive correlation between high confidence and whether the young person would choose to lead or be chosen to lead.
- The removal of negative thoughts, the spontaneous jumping in and the positive approach of putting yourself out there were common catalysts to start leading.
- The recycling of the same students was off putting.

“...confidence is probably one of the most important but at the same time sometimes it's just easier to start leading something that you're good at – something you've been doing for a long time”.

- The **fear of the group's response** to them as a leader was seen by some students as the factor that puts some people off leading
- The **perception that the leader needed 'knocking off their perch'** seemed a significant barrier for these young people which may stop them being attracted to leadership or to leading effectively when in a position
- Several students spoke of the **challenge of speaking up or stepping up to lead** when **not** in a formal leadership position as being particularly difficult as you had no assigned power.

- The 'helping of others' was seen as a desirable trait by young people and something that was transferable from context to context
- 'Helping others' as a theme could encourage students to step up to leadership
- There was much data that indicated many of the students were able to consider others and think beyond themselves

"If people understood the entire process of helping and not advising, I would think a lot more people would view that as leadership because they understand what it is about and they'll definitely understand why they're doing it".

One student in the interviews defined leadership in a simplistic form as...

“leadership to me is just like a way of coming out of your shell”



Blockers

- ❑ The need for young people to **gain acceptance** from other young people and the **desire to fit in** can all be counterproductive to the desire of young people to put themselves out there to lead

- ❑ If we could find a lever to place underneath **the rock of fear** and **the lack of confidence** to enable a young person to begin or to even want to begin to step forward then we may catalyse some change.



Perhaps the most significant hurdle to young people seeking leadership experiences is their **perception of what leadership involves** and them making it more complex than it actually is in reality.





Accessibility: Who gets to lead?

- An emerging theme of who gets to lead and who does not and why and why not, formed much of the discussion in the interviews
- “People who from a young age got their first opportunity” was a common response when asked who gets chosen for leadership roles
- There was some frustration voiced that the roles often go to the same small group of people
- Students frequently spoke of other students they knew who would be good leaders if they were given the chance.



Accessibility: Who gets to lead?

- Students pointed out the gaps in opportunities for some students and the inequities across the student body in accessibility to leadership

- The message from students to teachers around the selection processes and opportunities for leadership is well summarised in:

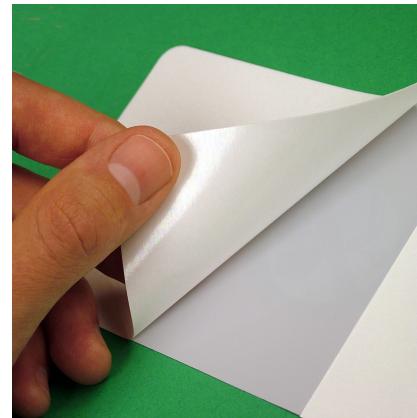
“Only after giving everyone the opportunity you’re also seeing who has the potential to be an amazing leader”

- Students **highlighted the need** for learning about how to take the lead in a smaller, informal and casual manner
- One of the **advantages of a less formal approach** to leadership in the teenage years is the smaller amount of pressure it may place on the student
- There were several references to the **pressure of being in a leadership position**. Sometimes referred to as pressure, sometimes as responsibility and often as requiring courage.
- With **smaller experiences of an informal nature** some of the challenges and pressure may be either removed or diminished significantly

- Students commented on their awareness of the **value of such learning**: “Leadership roles give you a lot of skills you can’t get anywhere else”

- The students at Year 10 are capable of **conceptualising leadership**, assessing their personal approach to it and brainstorming a programme to develop their skills

- Students need an opportunity to **peel back the layers** of their understanding through trying leadership out



In the words of a young person...

“All these people who do have the potential to become a good leader, they never become a good leader because they haven’t had the opportunity presented to them”.

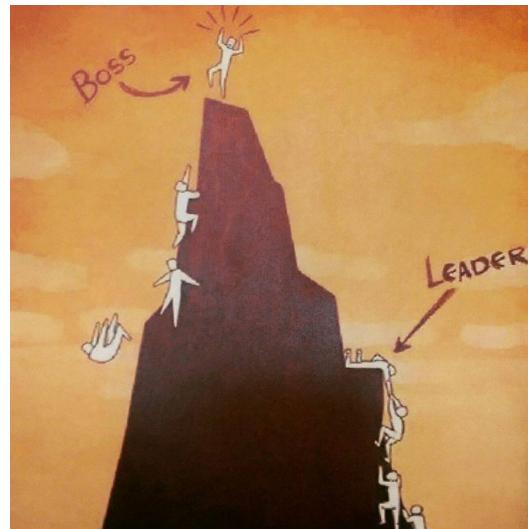
Karnes and Stephens (1999) ... youth leadership has remained an oft neglected concept:

The youth voice out loud ...

McNae (2011): the importance of young people being involved in the planning of their own leadership development:

**Insight for youth leadership development by youth
for youth**

Watch this space ...



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