Student Leadership in Secondary Schools

by

Elizabeth A.H. Robertson

B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1997

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies
Faculty of Education

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

[redacted]

Dr. V.J. Storey, Supervisor (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. C.E. Harris, Committee Member (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. Y. M. Martin-Newcombe, Committee Member (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. M. Mayfield, External Examiner (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Supervisor: Dr. Vernon J. Storey

ABSTRACT

The educational literature in leadership focuses on adult leadership. This study attempts to extend this literature to student leadership by exploring how student leaders in secondary schools experience and understand designated student leadership positions. The participants involved in this study were secondary school student leaders who were preparing to host the annual provincial Student Leadership Conference. The data collection methods involved questionnaires from 10 students and in-depth interviews with 5 students.

The data from both sources were analyzed in order to reveal the experiences and understandings held by the student leaders. Three themes were derived from the data: leadership as an organizational process, leadership as a relational process, and values in leadership. These themes were discussed in relation to the literature on leadership and recommendations were given for the focus of leadership programs in secondary schools.

[redacted]

Dr. V.J. Storey, Supervisor (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. C.E. Harris, Committee Member (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. Y. M. Martin-Newcombe, Committee Member (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies)

[redacted]

Dr. M. Mayfield, External Examiner (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with respect that I thank the British Columbia Association of Student Activity Advisors (BCASAA) for welcoming me into their teaching community and for supporting my research. I wish to thank the students who participated in my study. Their lively enthusiasm and willingness to share their experiences is greatly appreciated.

It is with gratitude that I thank my supervisor and committee members: Dr. Vernon Storey for his careful and thorough guidance and his confidence in me, Dr. Carol Harris for extending my thinking and introducing me to a new realm of ideas, and Dr. Yvonne Martin-Newcombe for her willingness to participate in my committee.

I also wish to express my appreciation of the administrators at my school for granting me a year's leave to pursue academic work at the University of Victoria.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Most secondary schools have a system of student leadership or elected student government. The experiences the students have and the lessons the students learn in their roles as leaders are invaluable; these experiences shape the lives of the student leaders. This study examines such leadership experiences from the perspectives of adolescents designated as leaders within their secondary school communities.

The area of student leadership interests me partly because I had very positive leadership experiences in school. As an elected leader in elementary school and later as both a designated and elected leader in secondary school, I had opportunities to develop leadership skills and contribute to the school community. I recognize that through these experiences I have had opportunities to develop skills in communication, decision-making, and risk-taking. These have become integral to the way in which I practice my profession as a teacher and in the expectations and hopes I have for my students.

As a teacher, I have worked with students in courses and extra-curricular programs that have provided them with opportunities to act as leaders: in Outdoor Education programs students are provided with experiences to acquire skills and attributes such as independence, and determination and an appreciation for the strengths and limitations of others while they build physical skills in the area of

endurance and wilderness travel. Similarly, students involved in sports must acquire attributes such as reliability, confidence and trust that will allow them to participate successfully in a team environment. In drama, students develop self-confidence and responsibility towards others by working as a group to produce and perform plays while developing an appreciation for the aesthetic quality of their work. These teaching situations are the ones I value most, as I see students developing skills and attributes such as commitment, self-reliance, and dependability; I believe that the experiences of the students in those roles are also rewarding and significant to them.

The student leaders who participated in this research were members of a large group of students preparing to host a student leadership conference within the provincial school system. They were from three secondary schools in the city. While a graduate student on leave from my own teaching position, I worked with a team of teachers and with the students over a period of six months preparing for the conference. The students in the group ranged in age from fourteen to seventeen; some had been student leaders for three years and some were new to being a designated student leader. The conference preparation activities were widely varied: public speaking skills, brainstorming conference themes, approaching sponsors, learning strategies for working with people with disabilities, preparing the website, deciding on menu items, and problem solving and role playing anticipated challenges.

Throughout my work with the student leaders, I observed a variety of leadership styles and characteristics among the students and also detected changes in students' understanding after selected conference preparation activities. For example, after the workshop run by two students with hearing impairments, one student leader who was very confident that his own style of leading would be effective for conference attendees realized that he would have to make some changes in order to suit the learning needs of other individuals. Also, throughout the workshop on public speaking, I witnessed a number of students whose anxiety decreased and whose confidence increased with each practice activity.

My observations as a teacher led me to raise questions about what students thought they had gained from their experiences as student leaders in their schools, not only as they prepared for the conference, but as they had experienced leadership throughout their schooling. The role of student leaders in schools is defined by the school and the structures existing in the school. While the student leaders in this study were given decision-making authority within their schools, there were limits to their activity because of their age and inexperience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore how students experience and understand designated student leadership positions (e.g., student council president, class representative, leadership student). The main focus of the research was on the experiences of the students in leadership positions in secondary

schools. To understand the perspectives of the student leaders will make us more able as teachers to guide students through a student leadership program.

Significance of the Study

The area of student leadership programs in schools is critical to study because the opportunities provided within those programs shape the lives of the participants, who may, in turn, contribute to the society in which they live. Leadership programs stress the importance of skills such as communication, awareness, responsibility, risk-taking and self-reflection. The *BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (2001) complement already existing programs in schools whose goals are similar to the principles outlined in the Performance Standards: contributing to the classroom and school community, solving problems in peaceful ways, valuing diversity and defending human rights, and exercising democratic rights and responsibilities. Educators are responsible for providing students with opportunities to develop these skills over the course of their schooling.

The concern for developing attitudes of social responsibility is widespread in the world today. UNESCO (1998) addresses the responsibility that educators have to provide students with opportunities to be able to practice citizenship, particularly tolerance, democracy and peace. This raises the question of the roles of students in the development of these understandings and how their

contributions might contribute to programs that will enhance such understandings in their school community and society.

Research Questions

The main focus of the research was on the experiences of the students in leadership positions. How do designated or elected student leaders understand their roles as student leaders in secondary schools?

The Subquestions.

1. How do students define and describe leadership?
2. What are the responsibilities of a student leader?
3. What do student leaders identify as leadership skills?
4. In what ways do student leaders recognize their successes?
5. To what previous experiences in life do students attribute their profiles as secondary school student leaders?

Theoretical Framework

Many conceptions of leadership are argued in the educational literature (Gronn, 1999; Hodgkinson, 1983, 1995; Morgan, 1997). The focus of these principal writers in this area is adult leadership, but ideas related to leadership style, attributes, and values are extrapolated for consideration in research in student leadership. The contemporary literature in adult leadership which emphasizes the importance of character and values (Hodgkinson, 1983; 1995) is relevant for consideration in student leadership.

Many students enter into their new roles as leaders without having held formal roles of leadership. For all students, the experience of leading an organized group is a learning one. The students learn without specific objectives and without formal evaluation, yet as teachers, we fully expect a productive and positive outcome from the work of the student leaders. Since they are making meaning of their experience as they live it, as opposed to learning specific knowledge (although many specific skills are certainly acquired), they begin to see the significance of what they are doing. This awareness is not connected to specific learning objectives, but is perhaps more closely connected to personal development and responsibility.

Overview of Research Design

Student leaders in this study were interviewed to share their own experiences as leaders in their school communities. The experiences they have as leaders in high school will not only influence decisions they make in their lives, but also the ways in which they make decisions. Since the focus was on the experiences of the students, the questions on the questionnaire and in the interviews were designed to elicit the knowledge that students had constructed about leadership as a result of their experiences.

The process of data collection began with a carefully constructed questionnaire. It was formed by drawing on three main areas: the relevant literature, my own observations and experiences and the suggestions from

experienced teachers who work in the area of student leadership. Following the questionnaire analysis, I conducted individual interviews with five participants in which I sought an authentic dialogue through conversational techniques (Kvale, 1996), since this gave the students the opportunity to share their experiences openly.

Delimitations

The research was limited to Grade 9, 10, and 11 students in designated leadership roles in secondary schools in a region in Western Canada. The study participants were all volunteer members of a group of students who were preparing to host a provincial conference in the area of student leadership. The time to gather data was limited to one period in the school year lasting six weeks; examinations and graduation times were avoided. The group was voluntarily led by leadership teachers from various schools in the same district.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the academic literature on the notion of leadership and a summary of some student leadership programs currently existing in schools. The development of social responsibility in school communities begins early. In primary grades, young students are guided to share, to work in cooperative learning groups and to be fair, honest, and respectful with one another. By the time students reach their final years in schooling, many are ready to participate in the school's formal structures such as student councils and other programs designed for leadership opportunities and characterized by leadership responsibilities within the school.

Secondary school students are preparing to fulfill various roles within their school and in the communities in which they live and will live after their schooling is completed: one such role is that of a leader. To combat many of the current challenges in society, there has been a thrust in schools to provide programs which promote moral responsibility and values based decision-making in today's youth. It is important to examine the nature of existing programs to determine what kind of effect they have on students' learning, the community, and the way in which students live their lives. It is also important to question whether the programs are simply maintaining the status quo with regards to social behaviours, or whether they are challenging and transforming the ways in which we relate as members of a community.

There are many conceptions of leadership in the educational literature: Dewey (1916/1944) speaks to duty as an element of democratic leadership; Hodgkinson (1983, 1995) addresses the importance of moral leadership and decision-making based on values; and Greenfield (1993) stresses the notion of understanding organizations through the people and experiences of the organization, with a focus on the character, rather than the characteristics of leaders. Embedded in these concepts are suggestions that there is a need for leaders to be socially responsible, committed, caring and moral in nature. Although the focus of these authors is adult leadership, their ideas provide some background to this research into student leadership.

Leadership Concepts

The literature on leadership addresses many institutional areas: business, politics, education, professional sports and the military. Ideas from different areas can be used to inform one another and they provide a mixture of personal, political, and psychological perspectives. Theorists and practitioners, from a variety of institutional areas, have defined the terms "leader" and "leadership." Bennis (1989) believes that the term leadership is hard to define, but that it is "like beauty... you know it when you see it" (p. 373). Others are more precise in their definitions: Fiedler (1967) defines a leader as, "the individual in the group given the task of directing and coordinating task-relevant group activities" (p. 373); Lipham (1973) emphasizes that a leader is an individual who "initiates a

new structure in interaction within a social system" (p. 5). The literature in all of the areas addresses the main concepts of leadership styles, characteristics of leaders, and values of leaders.

Styles of leaders. Leadership style refers to the way in which a leader leads; there is not a specific style of leadership that would suit all situations or organizations (Mazarella, 1981). A number of labels are assigned to the various styles of leadership, some of which include autocratic (authoritative), democratic (participative), laissez-faire (delegative), charismatic and transformative (Weber, 1947; Lewin, 1952; McGregor, 1960; Burns, 1978).

McGregor (1960) formulated the concept of Theory X and Theory Y, which holds that each person acts according one of two opposing theories of human behaviour and applied these styles to leaders. Theory X indicates that people are generally unmotivated, unless there is a promise of reward. Theory Y leaders are self-motivated and have a desire to make positive contributions; they are leaders who, in their efforts to motivate other people, are "modern, enlightened, humanitarian and compassionate" (p. 61). Distinguishing between Theory X and Theory Y leaders indicates that only two styles exist: externally motivated leaders and intrinsically motivated leaders. McGregor's contributions provoked theorists to regard "leadership as more humanistic" (p. 61).

Weber (1947) proposes three types of authority or style: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. First, the rational-legal authority is grounded in rules

that have been legally established. A clearly defined hierarchy exists when rational-legal leadership exists. Second, traditional authority is based on a belief in tradition; power is handed down from the previous leader. Weber's third ideal type is the charismatic leader who is qualified to lead by virtue of his or her heroic or exemplary character. When a charismatic leader is in power, there may be no system of formal rules, as the only basis for authority is the leader's charisma and personality.

There are a number of leadership questionnaires used to assess the leadership skills and attributes a person possesses, which then labels the leader as displaying a particular leadership style. The Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) was developed in the 1950s by Hemphill and Coons of Ohio State University; it has been modified by other researchers over the years. Using the LBDQ, subordinates, employers, or the leaders themselves can describe the behaviour of the leaders on two scales: "consideration" and "initiating structure". The consideration component of the test focuses on the interaction between the leader and the employees and the behaviours the leader exhibits that foster friendly, respectful, trusting relationships with employees. The initiating structure component is designed to assess leader behaviours that are focused on job completion. The result of the LBDQ identifies the leader as having a particular style and places him or her in one of four quadrants: "dynamic leader,

passive leader, designated structured leader, or considerate leader" (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, p. 32).

Characteristics of leaders. The list of characteristics of a good leader is lengthy and it would be unlikely to find a leader who possessed them all. Some commonly highlighted characteristics of good leaders are confidence, courage, commitment, honesty, respectfulness, thoughtfulness, compassion, fairness, reliability, and enthusiasm. Displaying leadership attributes or characteristics does not indicate that one can lead, for "leadership demands a better-than-average ability to make sense of things and convey it" (Storey, 1997, p.19).

Two theories of leadership from the beginning of the last century suggest that leadership is a function of a certain type of personality or character. The "Great Man [Person] Theory" "postulated an inherent personality naturally inclined toward leadership" (Fairholm, 1991, p. 29). People who became leaders were believed to be born with qualities superior to those of others, who naturally became followers. A second theory, "trait theory", is based on the assumption that if superior qualities can be isolated as leadership qualities, "then it should be possible to enhance them in potential leaders" (p. 29). Studies in the 1920s and 1930s acknowledged such leadership characteristics as "social sensitivity, masculinity, appearance, and moodiness" (p. 29). However, studies proved to be inconclusive, since researchers could not identify a single trait that distinguished leaders from followers. They suggested that "a person does not become a leader

by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits" (p. 30). Many people supported trait theory until 1970s, but now is recognized as providing "limited value for defining and predicting leadership behaviour" (p. 30).

Studies in "situational leadership" followed the trait theory research to discover if there were "distinctive characteristics of the setting to which the leader's success could be attributed" (Hoy & Miskel, 1987, p. 273). The research in "situational leadership" revealed that leadership was complex, but the theories could not predict which skills would be more effective in different situations.

A central attribute which is seen to be developed when individuals work in leadership positions is commitment; the leader acquires a sense of commitment to the job and commitment to the organization. Barnard (in Greenfield, 1993) argued that commitment was "an essential value phenomenon in organizations" (p. 153). Hodgkinson (1983) believes that commitment is "an attachment of the will to a project" (p. 215). A display of commitment is not only a positive trait to demonstrate, but it is also a role modeling attribute that encourages and inspires others to commit.

As leaders are expected to remain committed to their work or organization, they are also expected to maintain the ability to communicate effectively with others in the organization. Greenfield (1993) contends that organizations "come into existence when we talk and act with others" (p.53). Burns (1978) supports this view by saying that we must see leadership "as

relationships" (p.11). Without a strong sense of communication, an organization can experience a lack of vision, commitment and success.

Values of leaders. The students who took part in discussions about their experiences as student leaders and were required them to reflect on the ways in which they value their experiences and actions. Hodgkinson (1983; 1995) does not limit the concept of commitment to a characteristic or a trait, but rather extends it to the concept of values of a leader. He teaches that leaders, as governors, are faced with decision-making each day, since "to govern is to choose" (p. 93).

Bigge (1982) distinguishes between "intrinsic and instrumental values" in his explanation of the nature of human values (p. 45). He recognizes that the intrinsic value of something is the "value it has for itself alone, regardless of its usefulness for anything else" (p. 45). He defines instrumental value as the "value that something has because of its individual or social usefulness" (p. 45). He speaks about making choices and performing acts based on intrinsic or instrumental values: "we do so either because we have decided that it is the *right* thing, so we *ought* to do it (intrinsic value)...or because it is the *best* thing to do... and it will lead to more satisfying consequences (instrumental value)" (p. 46). This echoes the nature of morality in Socrates' words, "how we ought to live" (Rachels, 1999, p. 1). Hodgkinson (1983) stresses that "nothing is more important

than values for they are the source of all meaning" (p. 227) and that values are central to decision-making.

To provide opportunities for effective discourse around values, Hodgkinson (1983) developed a model describing three levels of values, which he organizes in a hierarchical manner. At the top of the values hierarchy, Type I values are based on moral principles, things that ought to be. These values, which may require self-sacrifice, include beliefs of all kinds and are conative, or willed. Type II values are divided into two sets, IIa and IIb. Type IIa values are based on a rational analysis of the consequences of a value judgment. Type IIb values are demonstrated when we concur with the majority on a particular interest; he calls this consensus. Type III values, placed on the bottom of the hierarchy, represent our basic preferences, which are self-satisfying in nature.

In his study of axiology, Hodgkinson (1983) emphasizes that the "value paradigm subsumes and transcends motivational analysis" (p. 49) and suggests that there is interplay and overlap between the levels, in the form of conflict or blending. His intent is that this model can be applied to any value-based situation, especially to discussion about the qualities of leaders and leadership roles.

Students Learning Leadership

It is reasonable to expect leaders to portray a particular set of skills; most leadership skills courses focus their teaching on communication skills, organizational skills, public speaking skills, teamwork and problem solving

strategies (Canadian Intramural Recreation Association, 1985; Institute for Educational Leadership, 1964). While a set of skills is required to be a leader, it is not sufficient; values and character are also required.

To support the notions of moral education and social responsibility is to commit to the development of leadership through education. If leadership is a socially developed construct (Greenfield, 1993), then some may question who has the right to decide what the nature of leadership should be in a school setting. Teachers and principals are the adults working with the young leaders and as moral leaders, the teachers must question "ends and values, while assessing influencing factors and effectiveness of strategies" for transformation of social responsibilities (Storey, 1997, p. 57). Teachers must also assume the responsibility of limiting the role of the student leaders. While the students' experiences as leaders are authentic, their roles also have to be delimited, since they have to meet other responsibilities in order to academic success.

Through guidelines such as the provincial *Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (Ministry of Education, 2001), teachers are encouraged to synthesize material from several subject areas with the goal of helping students "develop a sense of social responsibility and a tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others" (p. 9). It is a sign that the provincial planners are looking for an element of moral character and principles in the school curriculum. However, the *Performance Standards* are not designed to transform the understanding of

societal values or to challenge young citizens to question the current societal values; instead, students are expected to conform to a level of behaviour. For example, according to the Grade 8-10 rating scale for social responsibility, a student meets expectations in the democratic rights category, if he or she "goes along with positive actions organized by others, but without much commitment" (p. 139). In our postmodernist society, where people are becoming increasingly aware of multiple values and roles (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 1995), to meet the minimum standard is to accept the status quo. Furthermore, to allow the status quo to go unchallenged is to reject the possibility of transforming our understanding of societal values.

Dewey (1916/1944) refers to the need for an education system which develops character, "socially responsible undertakings" and "intellectual thoroughness" (p. 177). The mandate of the British Columbia Ministry of Education states that the system is designed for students "to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society" (Ministry of Education).

Strauss and Howe (1991), two experts on generational issues, assert that more than ever before, the media and 'pop-culture' has a direct influence on today's teens, the "millennial generation" (p. 198). They suggest that the "buzz-words" for recent educational change have been "collaboration," "core values,"

"zero-tolerance," and "standards" (p. 247): they suggest that "the new three R's" are "rules, respect and responsibility" (p. 247). According to Strauss and Howe, it is expected that today's teens will be more socially conscious than previous generations. Further, they contend that such a duty in a complex and rapidly changing world will require a strong moral foundation and a deep sense of social responsibility.

Cookson (2001) argues that "to prepare students to participate in society, social ethics and tolerance should be as much part of the curriculum as reading and arithmetic" (p. 45). He supports teaching core democratic values, including "thinking clearly, taking responsibility and accepting compromise gracefully" since democracy can be attained only when "the values of a civil society and a deep respect for honest achievement prosper" (p. 45).

Noddings (1992) emphasizes the quality of caring as relational instead of as a virtue. She stresses the importance of recognizing that "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours" (p. 249). Caring, in Noddings' terms, is seen to be a socially responsible relationship. Student leaders may display their "care" by raising funds for a purpose; while this is honourable, Noddings would view it as limited for she suggests that the caring must be more relational than behavioural.

Student Leadership Programs

Most secondary schools have a system of student government in place: student council, prefects, leadership class, or school representatives. These programs provide opportunities for students to experience leadership. Students are usually elected to positions of leadership within a school community and the group of elected officials makes decisions on behalf of the student body. Student council groups have a teacher or staff advisor who provides guidance to the group of governing students.

There are many student leadership structures and leadership initiatives in existence in Canadian secondary schools: Canadian Intramurals Recreation Association (1985), Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors, and Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program (1956), as well as Student Council and Leadership Class. These practical applications of leadership are supported by goals of the *BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (Ministry of Education, 2001). The document focuses on four areas: contribution to the class and school community, solving problems in peaceful ways, valuing diversity and defending human rights and exercising democratic right and responsibilities (p. 9).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, developing social responsibility through education is a concern that is widespread in the world today. UNESCO (1998) addresses the responsibility that educators have to provide students with

opportunities to be able to practice citizenship, particularly tolerance, democracy, and peace. Programs such as International Youth Leadership, Rotary Youth Leadership and United Nations Youth Information Network work to establish ways for youths to contribute to the global community as socially responsible and educated citizens.

The Three Cs Program (Johnson, Johnson, Stevahn, & Hodne, 1997, p. 8), operating in some elementary schools in Minnesota, is grounded in the need for safe school communities and focuses on cooperation, conflict resolution and civic values. The combination of the Three Cs "represents a gestalt in which each complement, enhance and promote the other two" (p. 13).

Waldenstein and Reiher (2001) assert that community service programs in schools are "perceived as offering the possibility for personal development that will enrich the life of the individual as well as contribute toward the preservation of democratic values" (p. 8). The relevance of community service work is found in the connection between the community and the students' sense of responsibility; the goal of service programs is that students will maintain that sense of responsibility to their community (local, national or global) when they become adults.

Research into the development of student leaders is extremely limited, but recent attempts to include character education in schools may offer some insights into the development of school communities in which social responsibility is a

primary goal. Character education, as it currently exists in schools, is an attempt to focus on societal values rather than the characteristics of individuals. *Character Counts!* (2001) and *Destination Character* (2001) are two examples which illustrate the nature of character education programs currently operating in North American schools.

The Josephson Institute of Ethics (2001), a non-partisan, nonsectarian organization in California defines a person of character as someone who "is a good citizen, does his or her share, helps the community, plays by the rules, and respects authority and law" (http://www.charactercounts.org/). They market a program called *Character Counts!*, which purports to advance character education by teaching the "Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, fairness, responsibility, caring, citizenship" (http://www.charactercounts.org/). Their belief is that using the Six Pillars represents "ethical concepts that function as morals" and that using them can improve the ethical quality of decisions and thus character. While tolerance of others and civility are mentioned briefly, the focus is on each individual developing skills to become a person of character, not on developing a community of moral citizens.

Similarly, *Destination Character* provides a school program which teaches that "your character isn't just something you're born with; it's how do you choose to act" (http://www.fcPremier.com/character). The thirty lessons in *Destination Character* are meant to be inspirational and reflective activities based

mostly on characteristics, some of which include punctuality, reliability, creativity, politeness, perseverance, thriftiness, grace, ambition, courage, loyalty, sympathy, patriotism, and trustworthiness (http://www.fcPremier.com/character). The individualized program provides the motivation to "become the kind of person you want to be," but with no emphasis on a responsibility to be moral, socially responsible citizens.

Kagan (2001) cites several case studies of a number of schools in the United States whose classrooms have been transformed and revived as a result of the introduction of a character education program. He examined thirty-seven incidents of "extreme school violence" and found that incidents of bullying, school violence, stealing, and cheating rapidly declined and also that classrooms became more "caring, respectful and inclusive communities" (p. 50). Kagan's confidence in character education programs is emphasized with the point that as students worked together in groups, "the 'us' and 'them' of the in-groups and out-groups became an inclusive 'we'" (p.54). These schools seem to provide the conditions for effective communities with the potential to foster leadership.

In his critical analysis of what is currently passing for *character education* in schools, Kohn (1997) provides two definitions. First, the broader sense of character education: "almost anything that schools might try to provide outside of academics, especially when the purpose is to help children grow into good people" (p. 429). The second narrower definition, Kohn argues, is dominating the

field and is therefore often mistaken for the broader concept. It states that *character education* is a "particular style of moral training, one that reflect particular values as well as particular assumptions about the nature of children and how they learn" (p. 429). He argues that even though it is a fact that "schools are already powerful socializers of traditional values... we may fail to appreciate the extent to which this is true because we have come to take these values for granted" (p. 433).

Through an in-depth analysis of a variety of *character education* programs, Kohn (1997) concludes that "the emphasis should not be on forming individual characters so much as on transforming educational structures" (p. 437). He cites the *Child Development Project* (1996) in California, as a program whose "promotion of children's social and moral development is grounded in a commitment to change the culture of schools" (p. 437) and calls for more programs to examine their purposes.

Kohn (1997) elaborated that schools need to change in order to provide a more relational community, in which learners might develop as good citizens. This would require involvement, commitment and the valuing of moral behaviour by students and teachers. Such schools could provide a site for transformational learning (Miller & Seller, 1985) in which students are empowered.

Leadership initiatives. The Canadian Intramural Recreation Association (CIRA, 1985) leadership program provides a structure in which students

interested in athletic or recreational leadership are able to learn and practise skills in such an area. CIRA covers a variety of components, including teamwork, organization and planning, leadership styles, event management, publicity, communication and problem solving. The program is designed for teachers, particularly Physical Education teachers, to be able to provide lessons and practical opportunities to student leaders in the program.

The Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA) publishes a number of resources to be used in school leadership programs. Their main resource provides lessons in four main areas: public speaking, problem solving, listening and promotion and organization of events. CASAA hosts a variety of seminars and conferences to student leaders; provincial conferences are also held annually.

There are a number of student leadership magazines, some of which are only published online (*Canadian Spirit Magazine, Leadership, Student Leader, Youthleadership.com)*. "The voice of Canada's student leaders and advisors," (http://www.canadianspirit.ca/) *Canadian Spirit Magazine* is produced five times a year. The magazine is written by student leaders, leadership teachers and former leadership students. There are contributors from each province in the country. The magazine provides articles about nearly every aspect of student leadership: fundraising, school spirit, promotion ideas, motivating others, organizing events,

running a campaign, as well as information about leadership resources and student leadership conferences across North America.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program, is an "international leadership in action" (http://www.excel-ability.com/Models/DukeOfEdAward.html) program and requires participants to set and achieve goals in four areas: "service, expeditions, skills and physical recreation". It is designed for young people to develop a sense of responsibility within themselves and in their community and to be motivated to positively change the world.

Conclusion

While there are many student leadership programs in existence, there is extremely limited research on student leadership. Ideas from adult leadership theory are extrapolated in this research into student leadership in schools.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This case study is an exploration of student leaders' understanding of their roles as leaders. The researcher describes and analyses the perceptions of five secondary students working in leadership positions in their schools. The student leaders involved in the student were part of a group of students who were preparing to hose a provincial student leadership conference. This planning experience contributed to their understandings of their roles as leaders, yet their leadership activities in their own schools was of most interest. Stake (1994) would refer to this type of study as an instrumental case, since it provides "insight into an issue" and its expectation is to "advance our understanding of the interest" (p. 237). This research explores "situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes" (Yin, 1984, p. 25).

The purpose of a case study, as suggested by Cohen and Manion (1980) is to "probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multivarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs" (Cohen and Manion, 1980, p. 125). The experiences were described by the students themselves and naturally, there was not one single set of outcomes explored, since students reflected on their individual experiences. Creswell (1998) defines case study as, "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case over time through detailed, in-depth collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell,

1998, p.61). In this study, the 'bounded system' to which Creswell refers, was the group of student leaders preparing for the provincial student leadership conference.

The Context

This study took place in three secondary schools within two large districts in an urban centre. It was conducted in the 2001-02 school year, during a period of change to the structure of secondary schools in one of the districts. One of the schools was Junior Secondary School (Grade 8-10), one was a Secondary School (Grade 8-12) and the third was a Senior Secondary (Grade 10-12).

A cooperative program involving students from two districts was in place to prepare the students to host the provincial leadership conference. The mission of the host district reads, "committed to each student's success in learning within a responsive and safe environment" (http://www.sd61.bc.ca/index1024.htm) and supports the following goals:

- all individuals have the capacity to learn and the power to positively influence the future
- high expectations are appropriate for all students
- it is essential to treat all individuals with dignity and respect
- safe, healthy and clean environments enhance working and learning
- learning is a personal, life long experience."

The district situates this within the broad mission of the provincial school system which, as indicated in the School Act, reads:

> The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.
> (http://www.sd61.bc.ca/index1024.htm)

The Participants

The students who participated in the research were in grades nine, ten, and eleven. They were students who held designated leadership positions in one of three secondary schools from two districts within the city. They were also members of group of students volunteering their time to prepare to host the provincial student leadership conference. There were fifty students in the conference group and all were invited to participate in the study. In the beginning, thirty-five students indicated that they were interested in taking part in the research and each of those students took a questionnaire. I was encouraged by the large number of students that said they were interested, but the final number of students who returned the questionnaires was ten, of whom five chose to be interviewed.

The low level of interest in the study proved to be a challenge. I was surprised by the lack of participation and I became interested in the reasons why

students indicated an interest, but were then unable to commit. In the interviews with the five participants, I asked them why they thought there was a lack of interest amongst their peers. All were surprised at the low level of involvement and they reported that they had heard a number of students saying they wanted to be involved in the research when it was first introduced.

Two participants reported that student leaders were already very busy people and that there were many things going in schools that they had to organize: however, they also acknowledged that they themselves were busy people and had found the time to participate. They reported that some students would have had difficulty fitting one more thing into their schedule. Immediately after reporting this, both students indicated that it was a shame that their peers hadn't found the time to take part in the research, for "it was a rewarding experience and it didn't take that much time at all." One student suggested that people may have had good intentions, but may have lost their forms and then forgotten about it.

Two students, disappointed in their peers for not participating in the research, cited "laziness" as the reason for lack of involvement. One apologized on behalf of her peers and then stated that, "the envelopes were already stamped and addressed, plus they were allowed to drop them in inter-district mail if they wanted to, so it just comes down to laziness, I think."

One student surmised that her peers were not interested in being involved because they felt that taking part in the research would not directly affect them.

She then stated, "if they really think that then they're wrong, because this has been a great time of reflection for me."

It is possible to speculate the other possible reasons why there was a low level of interest in the research. It is probable that some students were uninterested in spending time working on something when a grade or mark is not attached to it. The students who were invited to participate were already committed to many activities both in and out of school, so to agree to take on another responsibility may have been too demanding. It is also possible that a researcher with more frequent contact with students would have had more interest from participants. I saw the students once a month at a meeting to prepare for the conference. If they had seen me daily at school, they may have been more inclined to take part in the research.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee before students were approached to be involved as participants. It was critical that participants fully understood what was expected of them before they chose to be involved in the research study; the "principle of informed consent is important in any type of human research" (Morse, 1994, p. 343). Involvement in the research study was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at anytime without negative consequences. All participants who completed the questionnaire or took part in an interview were provided with an information letter which outlined the

purpose of the research study, the expectations of the participants, the risks and benefits of participating in the study and issues surrounding anonymity and confidentiality. Interviewees were required to sign a letter of consent; they were also asked before and after the interviews for their consent and were reminded that they had the right to withdraw without negative consequences.

The level of risk in research study was minimal; there was no physical, social, psychological/emotional, or economic risk for the participants. Students were not made to feel insecure or anxious about their position in the school community and participants were made aware that interviews and questionnaires remained confidential. The student leaders who participated in an interview were asked questions about their own experiences as student leaders; they were not asked to discuss sensitive issues.

There were no inconveniences associated with participation in this research study. Questionnaires were completed on students' own time and were returned in a sealed envelope. Interviews took place at lunchtime or after school and did not interfere with the students' program of studies in any way.

Anonymity and confidentiality were protected throughout this study. Participants who agreed to take part in this research study maintained complete anonymity. To protect anonymity of the interviewees, pseudonyms were used to label the raw data. Confidentiality of the participants and the data was protected by keeping the data in a locked filing cabinet; computer files were password

protected and access to the raw data was restricted to the researcher and the supervisor. Data from the study was destroyed; questionnaires and interview transcripts will be shredded and tapes of the interviews were magnetically erased.

Data Gathering Methods

Two methods of data collection were used in this study: questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires provided a broad perspective on the experiences of student leaders and also gave them the opportunity to agree to be interviewed. The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews, defined by Kahn and Cannell (1957) as, "conversations with a purpose" (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p. 149). This purpose is described by Kvale (1996) as obtaining "descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6). In addition, a researcher journal was kept throughout the data gathering and analysis process.

Questionnaires. The process of data collection began with a carefully constructed questionnaire (Appendix A) that was completed and returned by ten student leaders. The questionnaire was formed by drawing from three main sources: the relevant literature, my own observations and experiences, and suggestions and comments from three experienced teaching colleagues who work in the area of student leadership. Prior to the distribution of the question, it was reviewed by colleagues and students not involved in the study for ambiguous

questions and clarity. Minor changes were made to the questionnaire based on comments from colleagues and students.

At a regular meeting of students preparing for the provincial student leadership conference, students who agreed to participate in the study were given the package including the questionnaire to complete at home and a stamped envelope to return the completed questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to reveal the experiences and responsibilities of student leaders as they understand them. The advantage of using questionnaires in this stage of the research study was that obtaining specific information from participants in a short amount of time was effectively completed. The structure of the questionnaire comprised several questions that had "structured response categories" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 96), which supplied demographic information. The questionnaire also included some open-ended questions requiring a written response.

Students commented on their academic preferences and successes in school. Each of the ten survey participants indicated his or her favourite subject(s) and his or her most successful subject(s) at school. It was of interest to me as a teacher of English and Drama, to note the focus in the humanities subjects. As shown in Figure 1, nine of the ten participants reported that one of two subjects in the humanities, English or Social Studies, were their most successful academic

subjects. Seven of the ten participants indicated that either English and/or Social Studies were also their favourite subjects.

Figure 1. Student leaders' favourite subject(s) and successful subject(s).

Gender	Grade	Elected or L-class	Favourite subject(s)	Most successful subject(s)
F	9	L	English and Socials	English and Socials
F	10	L	Socials	Socials and Science
F	11	L	Theatre, Photography	English
F	9	L	Socials and Math	Socials and Math
M	9	L/E	English and Socials	English and CAPP
F	11	L	Socials and PE	Socials
F	11	L	Chemistry and Math	English and Math
M	10	L/E	English and Socials	English
F	10	E	Math, Art and Music	Science
M	10	L	English and Math	English and PE

Interviews. The responses in the questionnaires provided probes and ideas were used in the subsequent interviews (Appendix B). The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the experiences of student leaders. In the interviews, I sought as authentic dialogue as is possible since this gave the students the opportunity to truly share their experiences. The data compiled from the questionnaire served as a basis for some of the interview questions, but since the interviews were conversational in style (Kvale, 1996), other issues were also raised and explored.

Students who were willing to participate in an in-depth interview about their leadership experiences supplied their contact information on the questionnaire. It was intended the six students would be randomly selected to

participate in an individual in-depth interview. However, since the number of students who agreed to be interviewed was low (five), I interviewed all five. Four were female and one male; two were in Grade 9, one was in Grade 10, and two were in Grade 11. Interviews with the student participants were conducted during non-instructional time at their own school sites. Interviews were 40-55 minutes in length. The designated or official roles the participants held at their schools ranged from elected representative to committee member to leadership class student. The participants, who agreed that they were also role models to fellow students, were in designated or official leadership roles in their schools.

Bridget and Lindsay were two good friends and both in Grade 11, were in leadership class at a school at which elections were not part of the student government organization. Their elective class was held outside the timetable. They both became involved in leadership at their school in Grade 10, but reported that they had held leadership positions on sports teams prior to their involvement in school leadership. Their school was a very large senior secondary school; there were 1500 students in grades 10, 11 and 12. In the main foyer of the school was a large sign indicating the goals of the school, one of which was "to build a positive school community that embodies an attitude of personal and social responsibility" (Field notes, May 21, 2002).

Bridget, who was dressed in stylish, but practical clothes, had arranged for me to meet her in the main office on the day of her interview; we met over her

lunch period. She carried an overflowing school bag in one hand and her lunch in the other. She introduced me to the vice-principal who offered us a room to use, but Bridget informed her that she had already arranged to use a classroom. She led me to the gym where I met her leadership teacher, who unlocked a spare classroom for us to conduct the interview. Bridget was confident and talkative; our interview lasted until the bell went for her next class.

Lindsay also met me in the office for the interview, which we held after school. The vice-principal had suggested that we use the counselling room, but since it was booked, we conducted the interview in one of the offices next to the main office. Lindsay, who had fashionable glasses and a trendy haircut, wore a sweatshirt with the name of her school in large letters on the front. She told me the time at which she would have to leave in order to get to her baseball game. Lindsay, like the other participants, was very comfortable and talkative when discussing her experiences as a student leader at her school.

Hannah and Elise were students at a Junior High School (grades 8, 9 and 10) that had a Leadership class and a Leadership Board. Hannah, a Grade 10 student, held multiple leadership roles at her school: Leadership Board, Leadership Class and Peer Helping. She became involved in the students' council in Grade 8 when she was elected as the Division Representative. Hannah met me in the main office to get the key for the Leadership Room. She carried a very heavy school bag and her lunch. We walked to the Leadership Room and she

pointed out the new sign that had been made for the Leadership Room; it was made to look like the other major signs at the school above the office, library, and gym. Hannah told me about the history of the Leadership Room. It was once a teacher meeting room, but because it was not used often and the student leaders had requested a room in which to meet, the room was given to the Leadership Board. It was about half the size of a regular classroom and was set up like a boardroom with long tables and comfortable chairs. Hannah was proud to tell me that the principal had retrieved the chairs from a bar that was remodeling; she told me that it taking many cleanings to get the smoky smell out of the fabric. On the bulletin board in the Leadership Room were a variety of posters, schedules, phone lists, and quotes. Some of the quotes were as follows: "real leaders are ordinary people with extraordinary vision"; "leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality"; and "we are not the leaders of today, but the leaders of tomorrow" (Field notes, May 15, 2002).

Elise, a Grade 9 student, arranged to meet me for her interview in the Leadership Room at her school (described above). She rushed in and said that her track event ran late and she apologized for being late, even though she wasn't. Elise was quiet and confident throughout the interview. She commented on why she liked the role she had at a student leader at her school: "I'm on the Leadership Board as Division Rep. I like not being tied down to one thing, like events coordinators. This way I'm involved in lots of things. I bring my Division

information and I get involved." Elise had been involved in service and fundraising activities in elementary school and felt she was already an experienced leader when she was elected to the Leadership Board in her Grade 8 year.

Oliver, a confident Grade 9 student with a great sense of humour, had multiple roles as a student leader: "I'm in Leadership class, Athletic leadership and Students' Council. Leadership meets before school, athletic leadership meets on Mondays at lunch and Students' Council on Wednesdays at lunch." Oliver chose leadership as an elective in his Grade 8 year. We met for the interview in the Foods Room at his school. There was a small portion of the classroom divided from the rest which is the area for the leadership students. He was eating his lunch when I arrived and informed me that their lunch hour had changed because of an accreditation meeting. A few minutes into the interview, a buzzer from one of the ovens sounded. In the middle of his sentence, Oliver wheeled his chair over to the oven, turned it off, checked inside and wheeled back over to the table. Several times during the interview, students interrupted us at the door looking for teachers. Each time Oliver informed the students of the teachers' whereabouts. Towards the end of the interview, he went to the leadership area and brought back a few papers to show me. He told me about his upcoming student leadership trip to Holland and showed me his acceptance letter. Oliver had to raise funds to take

part in the program and was planning to approach various local organizations for sponsorship.

An advantage to in-person interviews is that the researcher is able to steer the interview by having a line of questioning (Creswell, 1994, p.150). Another advantage to using interviews as a data-collection method is that the researcher is able to gather large amounts of data in one interview. During a qualitative in-depth interview, the researcher, as highlighted by Marshall and Rossman (1995), is able to explore "a few topics to help uncover the participant's meaning perspective, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 80).

However, there are also some limitations to this method of data collection. Information is filtered through the views of the participant and may be limited (Creswell, 1994, p.150), but it is important to recognize that this type of interviewing is looking for the perceptions of the participants. For example, a student who is interviewed about a student leadership program may not be fully informed or aware about the structure of the program. That participant still has a perception or an understanding about how the program is facilitated; his or her perception is what is of importance to the researcher. Another limitation is that interviewing requires cooperation from the participant and some participants may not feel comfortable enough sharing truthful accounts of the topic being researched (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 81). It is not only important that the

researcher make the participant relaxed in the interview, but also that the researcher ask questions that will invoke a comfortable discussion.

As mentioned above, the line of questioning must be comfortable for each participant. Many participants would not feel entirely comfortable revealing their perceptions and views at the beginning of an interview; they need to trust the researcher and know that when they share their views, the views will be valued. I structured my line of questioning so that there were concrete, factual questions at the beginning of the interview. Answers to these questions were easy to share, as they are based on specific experiences; this ensured the comfort level of the participants. The participants shared their 'stories' and experiences before moving into questions that are more abstract. In these types of questions, the views of the participant were reflected. Kvale emphasizes the following types of interview questions: introducing, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, and interpreting (Kvale, 1996, pp.133-135).

Interpreting the meanings

Data collected from the questionnaire and the student leader interviews were analyzed to reveal recurring themes and ideas. The interpretation derived from the meanings was either by eliciting new themes or by eliciting themes and ideas that are already in existence in the literature (i.e. the researcher's conceptual framework around the concept of leadership).

Judging the quality of the research

Credibility and transferability. The research is credible due to the scope of the literature review and the multiple perspectives on the phenomenon (triangulation). Additionally, the researcher's interpretations were based on close adherence to the data generated and were grounded in the data and the literature. Therefore, the research is credible to other researchers, other members of the profession and to lay audiences who may be attracted to this educational issue.

Transferability is closely connected to credibility in that it suggests that findings and ideas generated may be applied to other settings. A teacher reading the study will be able to judge whether it is consistent with his or her philosophy of leadership and will be able to determine whether the data reflects the voices of teachers and students. Based on this judgment, the teacher will be able to decide whether some of the ideas might be used in his or her own work.

Limitations and delimitations

The interviews with student leaders and the questionnaires completed by student leaders in this research study were delimited to the students who were preparing to host the provincial conference. The number of participants was restricted to a feasible number six as interviewing was a time consuming process; since interest was lower than expected, interviews were conducted with the five students who agreed to be interviewed. The number of questionnaires returned

was far less than the number of questionnaires distributed; this is another difficulty in the research.

In the data analysis, the researcher identified categories and themes based on the perceptions of the participants. An audit trail of the raw data, analysis notes, process and personal notes is be provided to allow the reader to decide the confirmability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 320-321).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose this study was to explore how secondary school student leaders understand and experience elected or designated student leadership positions. Questionnaires were designed to determine the understanding that secondary school student leaders had about their roles and responsibilities as leaders and their skills as leaders. Interviews were conducted to ascertain how student leaders recognized their successes and challenges and how they defined and describe leadership. This research was conducted to uncover understanding that will better guide students though student leadership programs in secondary schools.

What is leadership?

All interviewed participants found it difficult to define the term leadership. Hannah provided her definition of leadership: "Leadership isn't a one-man show. It's not really "leader" and "follower" which you might get from the name, but there are a lot of people who are driving things forward. Leadership is about making things happen."

Rather than defining the term, the other four students described how one would know when one was leading. Their comments characterized two main areas: representing others and creating change.

Representing others. All interview participants discussed their role as representatives of the student body. They saw representatives as high profile

leaders. Elise and Lindsay commented that people "pay attention" to leaders. They emphasized the high profile that leaders have: "A pretty obvious sign of someone leading is that everyone is looking to you for what to do." Hannah elaborated on the energy necessary to be a leader: "They're confident and they're up there. They're getting across what they want to say. And they're exuberant and they're not afraid to express what they're trying to do." The students reported that the representation of others involves being well known to those being represented.

Oliver reported how it felt to lead others: "It feels like "Yes! I got through to them!" It's good and it's fun. That's why I want to be a group leader next year – the help the younger leadership students." While this student recognized the personal reward in his work as a student leader, he said the most important thing was "representing others in a positive way."

Creating change. All interview participants reported that creating or facilitating change is part of a leader's job. Bridget, when searching for a definition of leadership said, "I like to think that it's not defined as a role, but it's what you do to try and make a change." Hannah explained how she saw her role as a student leader:

> When I'm changing something – it can be very little. Leadership isn't necessarily about changing the world but it's about doing something. You may not be telling everyone what to do, but people are looking to you to do something. You're not being a student leader when you decide to do

> something all by yourself and you shut out all help. It's when you take a project and delegate it out. You sort of say, "OK, let's get this thing on the road." You motivate. There are a lot of people who will do something if you ask. They're waiting to be asked and given the chance. Giving them the chance is part of being a leader.

The participants understood that a variety of leadership styles existed within their student leadership program and respected the contributions each student leader made to the school community. They also acknowledged that their experiences as student leaders had changed their understanding of themselves and their peers and anticipated that each experience to come would deepen that understanding.

Responsibilities and Attributes of Student Leaders

The survey participants and the interview participants discussed their extensive student leadership responsibilities. When the student leaders spoke about their responsibilities as leaders in their school, they identified the majority of their work as organizing events and functions within their school community.

Responsibilities. All students reported that their main responsibility as a student leader was to get the student body involved in school activities and community events. The surveyed participants identified the responsibilities the student leader groups had in their respective schools and the interviewed students elaborated on the roles and responsibilities of the student leaders in their schools.

Table 1 displays the number of students who indicated that a particular function was the responsibility of student leaders at his or her school. The functions for which all students assumed responsibility were school dances, special events and school spirit/pride activities. Nine of ten students reported that organizing the graduation ceremonies and supporting or organizing student rights programs (e.g. anti-bullying campaign) were the responsibilities of the student leadership group. Seven out of ten students reported that organizing community service projects and fundraising for school groups were the responsibility of the student leadership group. For many of their responsibilities, the students reported that they worked in partnership with a sponsor teacher (sometimes a sponsor parent), who provided support and advice. One student reported that there was often no adult available to provide support.

One survey participant described the responsibilities of student leaders at his school and how he has explained them to his fellow students: "They say, 'what's the point of leadership because you guys don't do anything?' We tell them that we are the ones who organize the dances and basically everything in the school – special events, assemblies, prom, school end barbeque, Christmas events. Basically everything."

Table 1
Responsibilities of Student Leaders in Secondary Schools

Responsibility or Function	Number
Organize Graduation Ceremonies	9
Peer Counselling	6
Community service projects	7
Mentor newly elected/designated student leaders	3
Support or organize student rights programs	9
Organize school dances	10
Organize special events/assemblies	10
Fundraise for school groups	7
Organize school spirit/pride activities	10

Note. The number of students surveyed was 10.

Leadership Attributes. Survey participants identified a variety of skills and qualities that they had discovered in themselves since being involved in leadership activities:

- I am good with people.
- Tolerance and the ability not to judge others.
- I listen to others. And I'm committed.
- I am dedicated to doing my job.
- I can communicate freely with people.
- Organization and being personable.
- I am confident and I take initiative.
- Respect for others.
- Open-mindedness and friendliness.
- I am self-motivated and reasonable.

Interview participants highlighted organization, respect for others, and confidence as skills they had developed as a result of being involved in leadership activities.

First, the importance of organizational skills was reported by four of the five interview participants. Bridget attributed her academic success partly to her ability to be organized:

> I'm an honour roll student. I'm organized and I think that has something to do with it. For example, it's been proven that if you use your agenda, your grades increase. People in leadership have to do that because they take on so many things. They learn to manage their time better because they just have to. It's a necessity. Usually if you have an identity in the school, teachers kind of expect more from you and they know you're going to get everything done. A lot of getting good grades is being organized.

Second, four interview participants recognized that respect for others was a crucial attribute for leaders to embody. Lindsay commented on the most important thing she had learned as a result of being in involved in student leadership: "You need to treat everyone with respect and you need to listen to them." Hannah reported that tolerance and respect were the two most important qualities a leader should have. She explained that "we can't discriminate or exclude. When you're in the role of a leader, you have to step beyond that. You

have to be tolerant and respectful." Oliver placed a particularly strong emphasis on respect for others: "If you can't respect people, then you shouldn't be leading them in anything!"

Third, four interview participants discussed the importance of confidence when one is leading. All participants reported that their confidence had increased with each leadership activity in which they were involved. Hannah said, "I'm not nervous and I know what I'm doing. Not down to the millisecond, but I have a general idea of where I'm going." All students reported that they felt confident when others showed interest in what they were doing as student leaders. They acknowledged that others showing interest gave them more energy and more confidence to take new risks as leaders.

Experiences of Student Leaders

Interview participants discussed their experiences as student leaders. They spoke about the structure of the programs in their schools, the successful experiences they had had in their leadership roles, the leadership programs they participated in outside of the school structure, and their role models.

Relevance of structure. All interview participants were first introduced to a formal leadership opportunity in school, where they either chose it as an elective course or were elected to a council or board.

Oliver began leadership class as an elective in Grade 8. He discussed the first time leadership was offered as an elective:

> In Grade 7 when we were choosing our courses, I saw leadership as an elective and I thought it would be fun. So, I started in Grade 8. It was so much fun. I had the best group leaders and we did awesome projects. I always wanted to be on Student Council in Grade 7, but nobody voted for me. It was a really bad system for electing student council members. Basically if you were nominated, you just got on. Two people were nominated and they both went on. So I didn't get to do any leadership in Grade 7.

Hannah was elected to the School Council in Grade 8. She reported how she came to be involved in leadership and student council at her school:

> We have Division Reps, so each homeroom is a Division and you elect a division representative that serves on the School Council and from there, you make up the Executive Council. In Grade 8, we had a homeroom of mostly guys and a few girls. The person behind me thought that a girl should run and she nominated me because mine was the only name she knew. So, I just kind of got hooked from there.

Bridget and Lindsay were offered leadership as an elective choice for the first time in Grade 10. Bridget reported that the Grade 10 leadership program helped her discover her strengths as a leader: "the program was based on who you are, what type of person you are and what kind of leader you are. I was really into it." After a successful year in the Grade 10 leadership class, Bridget and Lindsay both opted to continue in the Grade 11 leadership class.

One student, Elise, undertook her first leadership position in elementary school: "In Grade 5, our principal ... sort of singled people out and asked people, "would you like to be involved in this, would you like to be involved in that?" I decided that I'd like to and then later I was nominated for Division Rep in Grade 8 and 9."

The students identified formal structure as important in introducing them to leadership experiences. The comments made by the participants about their involvement in structured leadership programs in school suggested the value of formal leadership experiences; not only so that planned experiences occur, but also that students identify those experiences as leadership experiences (and identify themselves as leaders).

The structure of the leadership programs varied from school to school. The five interview participants represented three secondary schools in the city: one Junior Secondary (Grades 8-10), one Senior Secondary (Grades 10-12) and one Secondary School (Grades 8-12). All three schools offered a leadership course as an elective choice and two of the three schools had students' council running as a separate activity from the leadership class.

Elections. One of the schools recently moved from having a students' council to having a leadership board to encompass all leadership endeavors within the school community. Hannah observed that the change did not solve the issue of elections being popularity contests:

Our teacher thought that we should change the constitution and I brought forth some ideas. Like that we should move away from being a students' council to a "leadership board". That's what we are now and it encompasses all sorts of leadership within the school. It includes more people and it's moving towards making it not a popularity contest. We have elections, which end up being popularity issues. We hold elections... for grade 9 and 10 students... in the May of the year before. And we appoint Grade 8s to the board; they apply and we select them. In the past there have been people who have been really enthusiastic, but not really popular and they don't get in and that's not beneficial. We really want them to be involved and not just make them a member-at-large because then they know it's just a courtesy... Elections in high school, BC or in Canada – it's doesn't matter - they're all popularity contests. So, that is a problem in student leadership, but I think most advisors are trying move away from that. When you have elections, not necessarily who you want to win wins. I don't think it matters what your title is. You might have the title of President, but it doesn't mean that you're doing anything more than anyone else. When it comes down to our leadership board, it's not like we have a hierarchy. Everyone is equal.

Nine of ten survey participants wrote that elections in secondary schools are popularity contest and also agreed that a student leadership system without elections meant that the participants in the system were more dedicated to being there. Lindsay elaborated on the issue of elections and commented on the results in the system at her school that involves no elections: "I think it depends on how leadership is in a school. If the school population elects it, obviously (or to me) it's just a popularity contest. My school is strictly elective [optional] and anyone can take it. I believe that this is more successful and perhaps more productive."

The interview participants acknowledged that a formal structure needed to be in place in order to encourage students to take part in student leadership. They all commented on the need to exclude elections from the student leadership program, since they inevitably become popularity contests.

Students' perceptions of successes. Interview participants identified activities or events that fit into three categories as their most successful projects as student leaders: dances, sports events, and service/community events. The students identified an event as a successful one if it generated a lot of interest in the school or if it raised money for a charitable organization.

Most secondary schools host dances for their students. Student leaders were responsible for organizing school dances at the three schools in this study. At each school, students were supported by a teacher supervisor. Depending on the school, participants indicated that between 25% and 50% of the student body

were in attendance at their most recent school dance. Bridget attended a school that had a consistently low attendance rate at school dances. She speculated on the reason why dances have been unpopular at her school:

> We get 400 to dances. It would be good to get more because 400 out of 1500 is a small percentage. The leadership class really tries to get more people involved. Dances are hard because people have other things to do and they're kind of "middle school".

She further explained that her secondary school was highly sports oriented and that athletic events were more popular than dances. She chose to organize a fund-raising activity around an athletic event since it would likely generate enthusiastic involvement from a large number of students:

> The 3-on-3 Basketball Annual Tournament was great. More people come to sporting events. About 600. It's more than dances because basketball is at lunch. We put up posters. Went to people we knew would be interested. Word of mouth. Announcements. Most of it was going into the gym and talking the basketball players and getting them interested. We had almost 20 teams. There were three to a team which is a lot of people. Then the gym was full of people. We had music going. It was awesome and then at the same time, we were raising money for something else. Proceeds were $250 and they went to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Service activities or community events were also identified as successful areas for student leadership projects. Elise said that she was moved so deeply by a story on a news program, that she was motivated to do something about it:

> In Grade 6, I'd seen something on the news about Kosovo and I went to my principal and I said that I thought we should do a toy/clothing and coin drive and she agreed. So, I talked to my best friend and we put it on. We had so much stuff – it was very successful. We did it through an agency and we dropped off everything at a little church and they sent the stuff over. It felt really good to do something for the people of Kosovo. All those people were foodless and homeless and had lost their possessions.

The interview participants were eager to discuss their successful projects. They reported that they felt a "responsibility" to provide opportunities for their fellow students to feel connected to the school community. The participants spoke of their successes with pride and animation.

Out of school programs. All interview participants said that not only were they busy at school, but they were also committed to at least two other activities outside of the school community: sports, music, volunteering, church, dance, or work. Bridget, Hannah, and Lindsay said they held leadership positions in their out of school activities: captain/manager of a team, supervisor at work, or coach to younger students. Elise and Lindsay identified specific out of school leadership

programs in which they were involved. Oliver was excited about taking part in an international leadership retreat and recounted the story which sparked his interest in the program:

> We were in leadership class and we were between projects so things were slow. One of our advisors told us if we wanted to go to a presentation to head upstairs… He was a great speaker. He explained the trip that is … for students aged 14-18. They go to a two week seminar in Kenya, Holland or Brazil. He told us a story. He took a girl who was 17 years old and her parents were quite wealthy. She went to Kenya and worked with starving children and street kids. Just before she had left, her parents had bought her a new, bright red, shiny, convertible sports car. She came back from Kenya and her parents had a welcome back dinner for her. She asked them, "Is that car really mine?" They answered that they had bought it for her. So, she sold it and sent the money to Kenya. The best story I've ever heard. I was like, "wow, I wish I could do that." The program sounds fun and I'll be on a boat for two weeks in Holland. I'll learn more about leadership and improve my skills. That's what the trip is all about. I also feel a responsibility to use the skills that I've developed. That's why I want to be a group leader next year – to help younger leadership students.

Lindsay reported that her mother had suggested she become involved in an organization that provides a crisis phone line for teens in need. She described why the experience was a rewarding one for her: "I'm a volunteer. There are tons of hours of training. It's exciting to help people. Right now I'm part of the 'behind the scenes' group and we're doing all the advertising and recruitment for the next group of volunteers for training."

The interview participants remarked that they were aware that their confidence and skills would develop with each event or activity in which they were involved and that their experiences, challenging and rewarding, had enabled them to make meaning of their lives as leaders.

Role models. The participants discussed the adults in their lives who were leaders and who had been role models to them. The participants credited adults (parents, teachers, coaches, community members) for motivating them not just to be leaders, but to be good people. Hannah credited her parents with providing a "strong moral foundation" which she believed was the basis for all of her decisions. Elise recognized certain skills her parents taught her as a child: "My parents are very moral and organized people and so it was hammered into me from an early age!"

All participants identified their teachers as being excellent role models. The students credited their past or present teachers with teaching them

knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to be a leader. Hannah used a metaphor to describe a teacher: "She motivates us – she's a navigator. If we're going east and we should be going west, she sort of turns us a bit to the west in the hopes that we'll have a better idea of what's over there."

Oliver highlighted the positive example an older student had provided to the younger student leaders:

> He was patient, cooperative and listened to peoples' ideas. He was nice too. I couldn't think of anything about him that was negative. Even when things were rough, he kept people motivated and excited. I don't think I saw him grumpy all year. I don't know how he stayed positive the whole time.

The interview participants indicated that they understood their leadership experiences in two ways: skill building and responsibility. First, the students reported that the skills they had developed as a result of being involved in a leadership program were life skills: communication, organization, and accountability. They reported that such skills would be beneficial to them in their adult lives, in their careers, families, and communities.

Second, students indicated that they felt they had a responsibility to organize and support school based activities. Oliver reported that he felt it was his responsibility to use the skills he had learned, while Hannah recognized the importance of 'giving back' to others.

Challenges and Tensions

All survey participants and all interview participants identified leadership challenges that fall into the following categories: lack of commitment and participation, negativity, and (personality) conflict.

First, four of ten survey participants reported that lack of commitment was the biggest challenge when working in a leadership role at school. Each student described situations or events in which fellow students ignored their responsibilities and others were required to take over in order to insure success. One student described her view on commitment: "Sometimes you're working with a big group or with other people and they commit to getting things done, they don't end up doing them. Organization and commitment has to be in any project and received by all members of a group."

The interview participants elaborated on the challenges identified by the survey participants. Elise described the lack of commitment and participation from the student body during student run activities. She said that it was a combination of lack of commitment and miscommunication that led to poor attendance at a school dance: "This year we did a school dance called Hoe-Down and nobody showed up because they thought they had to dress up and listen to country music all night."

Hannah reported what the realistic expectations were at her school with reference to student participation in school events:

> We know we're not going to appeal to 100% of the people and that's kind of hard for us to see, but we're doing quite well when we're getting 60% or 75% of the people. You can't cater to the people who are never going to show up because then you're sacrificing other people. It's a fine line to draw when you're giving maximum enjoyment and where you're starting to push people out.

Second, three of five interview participants reported that negativity from fellow student leaders or from the student body was a challenge. Oliver attempted to invite the negative students to join the leadership group thinking their negativity could be harnessed into a positive attitude: "I've asked some complainers to join, but they won't. They're lazy."

Lindsay reported that the problems surrounding negativity from the student body at her school were stemmed from student leaders' attitudes:

> Students saying "that's stupid" or "I'm not in elementary school anymore" or leaders saying "Yeah, I'll do it tomorrow", "I'm too busy" or "That's far away, we have enough time". To get rid of the first set of comments, you need to get rid of the second set of comments.

Third, four out of ten survey participants explained that personality conflict between members of students' council or leadership class was a challenge. One student wrote that it was difficult working with other student

leaders who appeared to be involved in leadership for selfish reasons: "Some people are there just for show and try to draw particular attention to what they are doing (which isn't much) in order to make themselves look good." Hannah described the challenge of an unbalanced work load:

> Well, often times the people who do the most work aren't in the limelight at all. But then there are people who want to better their self-image and sort of take credit for everything. There's nothing you can really do without making yourself look bad, but usually people soon figure it out that people aren't really doing as much as they say they are doing. And so it just comes back to them.

Delegation. All participants reported that as student leaders in their school, they had a wide variety of responsibilities. Seven of ten survey students indicated that delegation was a difficult, but necessary part of their job as a student leader. One survey participant reported that it was often easier if they finish a job herself rather than delegate the responsibility to another person: "I can delegate to my peers, but I find it is often easier and quicker to do much of it myself. This is because I know exactly what I want done and I know that it will get done in time." Hannah discussed the important lesson delegation had taught her:

> Delegation is a challenge. You can't just delegate out the 'bad' work; you have to get others doing the 'good' work too. Delegation forces

you to accept the fact that you do not have super mutant capabilities that allow you to do everything and others can manage some of the tasks you feel you need to do.

All survey and interview participants identified organizational activities as their primary responsibility. They reported that they organized events for the benefit of others. In their organizing roles, they encountered challenges which sometimes resulted in tension between groups of people. These relational tensions required thoughtful consideration of the values of individuals, respect for others, and practical goals for the organization of an activity.

Conclusion

The student leaders in this study completed a questionnaire and participated in an in-depth interview. They discussed their experiences and understandings of their roles as student leaders in a secondary school student leadership program. Their understandings and experiences can be further examined by sorting them into three categories: leadership as an organizational process, leadership as a relational process, and values in leadership. These categories, or themes, will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how secondary school student leaders understand and experience designated student leadership positions. The questionnaire and interview data collected from the participants in the study was presented comprehensively in Chapter Four and represented the meaning they had made from their experiences as student leaders in secondary schools.

The final chapter examines the findings to determine these meanings and makes recommendations for student leadership programs in secondary schools. Conclusions and interpretations are based on the study findings; these have led to the researcher's recommendations. This chapter arranges the findings into three themes that arose during the analysis of the data: leadership as an organizational process, leadership as a relational process, and values in leadership.

This chapter will discuss the three themes in relation to the literature in educational leadership and the experiences of the student leaders involved in the study. While the literature in this area concentrates on principals and other adult leaders in schools, the premise on which the study was based was that it would be useful to look at how student leaders perceive their leadership experiences and to determine how the concepts link to the literature on adult leadership.

Leadership as an Organizational Process

The students involved in the study described their leadership roles as having a considerable organizational element. They identified program structure, authority, and leadership skills as the main organizational elements of student leadership.

Program structure. The study findings revealed that a formal structure was important in introducing students to leadership experiences. The leadership program structures differed at each of the participants' schools. All interview participants reported that if a system of electing student leaders were the only one in existence at each of their schools, then it would be unlikely that they would be involved in leadership activities in their schools. All recognized that the student leaders were representatives of the student body, whether or not they were elected. The leadership experiences of the students differed from those of adult leaders partially due to the fact that the student leaders were teenagers. As teenagers, they would be coping with the everyday challenges of growing up, socializing, reaching academic goals, and perhaps peer pressure.

Bridget and Lindsay attended a school that did not have a system of electing student leaders or representatives. Instead, students opted to sign up for an elective leadership class, which was scheduled outside of the regular timetable. The students in the class volunteered to work on committees that organized and hosted various school and community projects throughout the school year; there

was no hierarchical system in existence. Both Bridget and Lindsay reported that while some classmates who enrolled in the class were not "pulling their weight", the class was still productive. They appreciated that there was no system of hierarchy and both of them reported that they would unlikely be involved in leadership activities if a system of electing student leaders were in place.

Hannah and Elise's school had two distinct leadership programs: Leadership Board and Leadership class. The students on the board were elected by peers or appointed by a teacher, depending on their position. The students in leadership class chose to be in the course and attended classes outside the regular academic schedule. Hannah reported that the majority of students on the Leadership Board were appointed, not elected. They liked the fact that only a few positions were elected ones, since "elections are always popularity contests." She felt that appointed members of the board were more committed to working to improve the school.

Oliver attended a school that had a number of leadership programs: Athletic Leadership and Students' Council to which students were elected or appointed and Leadership class, an elective course run inside or outside the timetable, depending on the grade level. He was a member of all three programs, all of which had a different selection process. He applied and was appointed to a position in Athletic Leadership; he was elected to Students' Council; and he opted to take Leadership Class as an elective course. He believed the system for electing

leaders was a good one, since the elected candidate "represents the views of others." He recognized that some students in Leadership class would not be elected by their peers, but are very committed and dedicated to their work in the class.

Leaders' authority. When discussing the authority and styles leaders have in schools, students spoke of themselves, their role models or teachers, and their peers. All participants reported that the student leaders in their schools have a title. In one school, the title is a general one of 'leadership student' or 'student leader', but it was more specific in two of the schools: Committee Member, Council President, or Grade Representative.

All students involved in school leadership had some form of authority within the system of their school organization. Storey (1997) argues that "authority is granted as a function of position or mandate" (p. 13) and Hodgkinson (1996) teaches that "authority is legitimized power" (p. 71) and "power is the ability to gain ends". Student leaders, therefore, have power and authority in their roles at school. They fulfill their responsibilities as leaders (function of position or mandate) and work together to attain goals (ends). Hodgkinson (1996) and Sergiovanni (1984) would both contend there is a moral aspect to their work because student leaders make decisions on behalf of others, the student body. This issue is addressed in the second section of this chapter, Leadership as a Relational Process.

Morgan (1997) argues that the source of power for the student leaders is "formal authority" and "control of decision processes" (p. 171), since they hold a designated position within the school and make decisions on behalf of the student body. In his discussion of power and authority, specifically formal authority, Morgan emphasizes Weber's (1947) three types of authority: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the first of Weber's (1947) types of authority, rational-legal, is grounded in rules that have been legally established and clearly defined hierarchy exists. His second type of authority is traditional in which power is handed down from the previous leader to the new leader. Third, Weber's charismatic leader is qualified to lead by virtue of his or her heroic or exemplary character. He further explains that when a charismatic leader is in power, there may be no system of formal rules in place, as the leader's charisma and personality are the basis for authority.

In rational-legal authority, a clearly defined hierarchy exists and rules have been legally established. In secondary schools in which elections take place, the winner of the election is appointed to a specific title; a hierarchy will exist when titles and responsibilities are assigned. It is difficult to argue that a hierarchy would not exist if an election has been held, however in secondary schools, the members of the student councils are peers and often classmates. These pre-existing relationships combined with a lack of experience in leadership positions

may flatten the hierarchy to one allowing more inclusion and discussion. Weber's second form of authority, traditional, is handed down from one leader to the next. This is not in existence in secondary schools.

In schools where student leaders are elected by the student body, it is possible that a charismatic leader, Weber's third type of authority, would appeal to the electorate. This was not the case in the schools involved in this study, but it may occur in a school in which student voters "respect the qualities of an individual and see those qualities as defining the right of the individual to act on their behalf" (Morgan, p. 172). Students reported that elections are often "popularity contests" and while the winner may be popular, he or she may be lacking in charisma or leadership skills. Students reported that it could be an asset if a student leader is charismatic because it would mean motivation would be high and the student leader would have an easier time maintaining his or her position as a student leader.

When discussing their own styles as leaders, the students were reluctant to label themselves as having a specific style, although four of five interview students labeled themselves as "extraverts". They commented more on the skills they possess as leaders in their schools.

Leadership skills. Within the varied structures of their programs, the students reported that they developed skills and strategies that allowed them to facilitate meetings with students, teachers and community members. Students

spoke of 'organization' in two ways: organizing for others and developing organizational skills.

First, the students saw their main function as organizing events and activities for other people, especially the student body. Their comments are supported by Fiedler's (1967) definition of leadership, which was mentioned in Chapter Two: "the individual in the group given the task of directing and coordinating task-relevant group activities" (p. 373). Lipham's (1973) definition of a leader is also reflected in the participants' comments. He states that a leader is an individual who "initiates a new structure in interaction within a social system" (p. 5). This final definition reflects how Hannah perceived leadership: "I like to think it's not defined as a role, but it's what you do to try and make a change."

Second, the students reported that they viewed the management and organization skills they acquired as a result of being involved in leadership activities as invaluable. They all highlighted communication, planning, organization, and public speaking as valuable skills they had learned or developed.

All survey and interview participants reported that they had improved their communication skills by being involved in leadership at school. At their respective schools, the student leaders worked in groups to organize events and activities; the groups ranged in size from two students to twelve or more students

and a teacher. All participants agreed that the dynamics of a group can be challenging and that listening to and respecting the ideas of others is imperative. Bridget and Hannah reported that they had both become better at explaining or describing their ideas; Hannah said this happened out of necessity. Oliver reported that one of the best communication skills he learned was "telephone skills." He said that when he started as a student in Leadership class, he was nervous to make phone calls to inquire about the price of renting equipment or arranging a speaker for an assembly. He reported that since he was making regular phone calls for his projects in Leadership class and so developed his skills on the telephone "out of necessity."

Four of five interview participants said that they were very organized people. Bridget, who cited some research done by Premier Agendas, maintained that she had always been organized as a student and that she had always used her student agenda to help her stay well organized. Elisa and Hannah credited their natural organization skills to their parents who they described as "very organized people." Elisa reported that she had found it challenging to work with peers who were not very organized, so she had taken the responsibility of keeping track of records and materials for the projects at her school. All participants were very organized when I contacted them to arrange interview times. The interviews took place at the participants' schools at lunch or after school. Not only did each of the students provide two or three possible times that would be convenient for an

interview time, but they also organized and booked a meeting room in which the interviews would take place.

Leadership as a Relational Process

As revealed in the previous section, the findings indicated that students became involved in student leadership because there were established programs available in their schools. The participants reported that another reason they became involved in student leadership was because they felt they had a responsibility to contribute to the school community. McGregor (1960) who formulated the concept of Theory X and Theory Y, extrinsically and intrinsically motivated leaders, asserts that leadership is "humanistic" (p. 61). A sense of responsibility reveals an "intrinsic" motivation. For example, Oliver reported that he felt he had "a responsibility" to use his skills "to help younger students." Elise stated that she felt a responsibility to "give back to the school." These explanations about responsibility indicate a sense of caring about the school community as an organization.

Hargrove (1995) addresses the terms social responsibility and social consciousness as "stewardship," which is "taking a stand for the future of the people, communities, complex systems, and the world we care about" (p. 18). Noddings supports Hargrove's notions of stewardship; as mentioned in Chapter Two, Noddings asserts that caring should be viewed as relational, not as a virtue. This supports the students' motivations to become involved in representing their

fellow students leading activities for the student body. Caring, in Noddings' terms, is seen to be a socially responsible relationship.

Bianco-Mathis, Nabors, and Roman (2002) highlight a number of companies that can be seen as stewards because of their dedication to social issues such as protection of animals (The Body Shop), peace and justice (Ben and Jerry's), and youth at risk (Frontline Group) (p. 198). Student leaders in schools are acting in the same manner as these companies through the work they do in CARS (Counter Attack and Road Safety), SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving), Terry Fox Run for Cancer, and various other organizations.

Both UNESCO (1998) and the *BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (2001) support this notion. UNESCO addresses the responsibility that educators have to provide students with opportunities to be able to practice citizenship, particularly tolerance and peace. The *BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (Ministry of Education, 2001) also expects students to conform to a standard of behaviour. They were intended "to assist in monitoring and evaluating a variety of school and classroom programs that aim to enhance how students get along and develop responsible behaviours" (p. 9). While the *BC performance standards* (Ministry of Education, 2001) outline their expectations as "contributing to the class and school community; solving problems in peaceful ways; valuing diversity and defending human rights; exercising democratic rights

and responsibilities" (p. 9), they do not provide students with opportunities to make value-decisions based on their own experiences and beliefs.

All participants reported that their role as a leader was to represent the student body and to encourage them to participate in school and community activities. They identified 'communication' as the primary relational skill needed to represent others. The participants maintained that they had developed effective communication and collaboration skills in order to work positively and productively in their peer relationships. Such skills were necessary since the findings showed that students most often worked in groups when planning school activities and events.

The students stated that within their leadership programs, they had received very little, if any, formal training to improve their communication skills, but they had developed them out of necessity by looking to others with more experience. This was crucial for them to do, since most of their work was done in small groups. Supporting the importance of communication in organizations, Greenfield (1993) teaches that organizations "come into existence when we talk and act with each other" (p. 53). The nature of the participants' work as leaders in their school was to talk and act with others while working towards a goal. Burns (1978) supports this since he argues that we should view "leadership as relationships" (p. 11).

As mentioned in Chapter Three, nine of ten survey participants reported that English and/or Social Studies were their most successful subjects at school. This is of interest when examining leadership as a relational process, as those subjects are more relational in nature than the sciences. The curricula in the humanities allow for more relational activities in the classroom.

Values in Leadership

Hodgkinson (1983) teaches that it is essential to understanding that "values do not exist in the world" (p.31). He stresses that they are "utterly phenomenological, subjective, facts of the inner and personal experience" (p. 31). It is critical to understand that we, as humans, are the ones who assign value to objects or issues. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the moral aspect of a student leader's job exists because decisions are made on behalf of others (Hodgkinson, 1996). Sergiovanni (1984) would support this argument, for he contends that "what a leader stands for is more important than what he or she does" (p.--).

It is necessary to address the values associated with student leadership for "nothing is more important than values for they are the source of all meaning" (Hodgkinson, 1983, p. 227). Hodgkinson (1996) also contends that "power has valence" and that it would be erroneous to consider it as "value-neutral" (p. 76). As discussed in the previous section, student leaders have power within their schools because they have formal authority and make decisions on behalf of

others. Therefore, the interview participants were asked to discuss the values they associated with their work as student leaders. The participants in the study, student leaders in their schools, spoke of things that were important to them as the things they valued. All students reported that the most important quality they valued themselves and in their fellow student leaders was commitment.

First, the interview participants agreed that if the leader expected to make a difference and lead effectively, it would be essential to value commitment. Students indicated that a leader is committed to an activity when his or her "heart is in it." This statement is echoed in Hodgkinson's (1983) work: "commitment is the attachment of will to a project" (p. 215). The students whose "hearts are in it" are attaching will to their service fundraisers, school dances, and sports events. The importance of commitment is supported by Barnard (in Greenfield, 1993) who argues that commitment is "an essential value phenomenon in organizations." (p. 153). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hodgkinson (1983; 1995) does not limit the concept of commitment to a characteristic or a trait, but rather extends it to the concept of values of a leader. Greenfield (1993) supports this argument, for he contends that commitment is not a characteristic of a leader, but it is part of a leader's character.

Second, the students discussed the understanding that student leaders had in their schools. Hannah reported that they generally "have a good understand of the way things work and have a good idea of where they're going." This

leadership attribute is supported by Storey (1997) who writes that "leadership demands a better-than-average ability to make sense of things and convey it" (p. 19).

The participants also stressed the importance of the "responsibility" they felt to lead their fellow students. They recognized that they had the necessary skills to be leaders and therefore had the responsibility to assume such a role. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Strauss and Howe (1991), two generational experts contend that "the new three R's" are "rules, respect and responsibility" (p. 247). The students, members of the "millenial generation" (p. 198) highlighted responsibility and respect as two necessary qualities for leaders to embody. Cookson (2001) supports the teaching of core democratic values, including "thinking clearly, taking responsibility and accepting compromise gracefully" (p. 45). He might also agree that students taking part in leadership activities will be best able to "participate in society" (p. 45) since they have experienced such lessons in their formative years.

Implications for Development

In some schools, the role of the student leader requires excellent public speaking skills, for their responsibilities include facilitating assemblies and special events. With this in mind, the student bodies in these schools elect or select a confident and outgoing person who is known to be capable in the area of public speaking. However, in some schools where the student leader's primary

responsibility is the organization of dances and graduation festivities, the students will likely elect a person known to be creative, social and popular. Regardless of the role the student leader assumes in a school, each of them is expected to meet the "job description" of student leader prescribed in their particular school.

In any other "job" circumstance, the applicant would have either training before assuming their leadership position or training upon entering the position. Most student leaders enter their position of leadership without special training in being a leader and receive little (if any) training while in office. They are often left to their own devices, which is pedagogically questionable. In other circumstances, where skills and knowledge are required to succeed, we do not let students just figure it out: learning how to drive, hiking the West Coast Trail, applying for university. They are supplied with skills and knowledge before embarking on a journey so significant. Students entering leadership positions must be supplied with training in the area of leadership. By no means should training be a prerequisite for a leadership role, for this might eliminate the natural, charismatic leaders of the school. However, if we are to expect all student leaders to lead effectively and possibly make a difference, then we have a responsibility to provide them with some knowledge, skills and guidance prior to and during their leadership experiences.

Student leaders work cooperatively in teams or groups; Schein (1992) stresses the importance of a group learning how to exist as a group (p. 71).

Student leaders would also benefit from an understanding of the school organization. They have power and authority within the school community, for they influence the behaviour of others.

Teachers and organizers of student leadership programs can learn from the participants' experiences and understanding of their work as student leaders. They have acknowledged that student leaders need to develop their relational skills and values as well as their organizational skills.

Researcher Reflections

Conducting research in the area of student leadership has influenced the way in which I approach my work with student leaders. Shortly after my research, I was the teacher organizer of the spirit program at my school; I worked with four elected Grade 11 and 12 spirit leaders who ran the spirit activities at the school. Since there were only two years of spirit leader predecessors, the program lacked maturity and organization and because of the young age of the program, there was not an overwhelming amount of student support. These organizational characteristics provided some challenges: low motivation and very few prior examples upon which to rely. The strategies I used to face these challenges were influenced by my research into student leadership.

The four spirit leaders felt it was important to begin the school year with a tremendous amount of energy; they wanted to give the program a "jump-start." I applauded their efforts and spent a great deal of time planning with them at the

beginning of the year. Previous spirit leaders had been unable to plan well enough in advance to run successful activities; they had lacked organization and confidence. The spirit leader with whom I worked, had a great amount of energy, but they were also overwhelmed; they did not know where to begin. I provided the students with a binder containing a variety of sections: homeroom lists, teachers' room numbers, photocopies of resources used by participants in this study, budget details, and a detailed school calendar. They said they felt "important" to have access to such information; I felt it was important for them to know details about school population and school events since they would be making decisions on behalf of the student body. Having access to such resources allowed them to give the program the "jump-start" it needed.

I continued to guide the spirit leaders in their planning for events. My role began to change after about two months of school. The spirit leaders had become more confident in organizing and running activities within the school; they were able to generate ideas more readily, and their execution of their ideas was greatly improved. They had adopted the planning and organization strategies I had modeled early in the year and they planned independently. At this point, they needed me to provide access to resources (photocopying, equipment) and they needed me to help them communicate to the teachers and students, a skill they were still developing.

By the end of the first term, the spirit leaders were known in the school as the senior students who ran successful spirit events for the entire student body. They were confident speaking in an assembly and on the PA system. They were keeping accurate records of all of the activities they organized, including all details necessary for future spirit leaders.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are many possibilities for further research in the area of student leadership. First, it would be interesting to study students' council models or structures and how they work when different styles of leadership are in office. Another suggestion for further research is studying the differences in how leaders are produced in school leadership classes compared to students' councils, athletic programs, or out of school programs such as Duke of Edinburgh Award Program or Rotary Youth Leadership.

Research in the area of values in student leadership would be beneficial for teachers and adults organizing leadership programs for young people. Not only would be useful to identify the values of leadership programs and student leaders, but it would be also be useful to determine the ways in which teachers instruct values in leadership.

A longitudinal study in the skills, attitudes, and experiences of student leaders throughout their secondary school years would identify their growth as leaders and also in understanding. It would also be interesting and reflective to

study what types of careers student leaders pursue. The examination of students' understanding of their experiences will be useful for the development of various student leadership programs in schools.

References

Bennis, W. G. (1989). *On becoming a leader.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bianco-Mathis, V. E., Nabors, L. K., & Roman, C. H. (2002). *Leading from the inside out: A coaching model.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Bigge, M. L. (1982). *Educational philosophies for teachers.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors. Retrieved November, 10, 2001, from www.casaa-resources/net/about

Canadian Intramural Recreation Association. (1985). Retrieved November 10, 2001, from www.intramurals.ca

Cookson, P. W. (2001). Fostering moral democracy. *Educational Leadership, 55*(2), 42-45.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1916/1944). *Democracy and education.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Enrollment Numbers. (2001, September 30). Retrieved October 31, 2001, from www.sd61.bc.ca

Fairholm, G. W. (1991). *Values leadership: Toward a new philosophy of leadership.* New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

Fiedler, F. E. (1967). *A theory of leadership effectiveness.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Greenfield, T. B. (1984). Leaders and school: Willfulness and non-natural order in organizations. In T. J. Sergiovanni & J.E. Corbally (Eds.), *Leadership and organizational culture.* Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Greenfield, T. B. & Ribbins, P. (1993). *Greenfield on education administration: Towards a humane science.* London, UK: Routeledge.

Gronn, P. (1999). *The making of educational leaders.* London:, UK Cassell.

Hargrove, R. (1995). *Masterful coaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hodgkinson, C. (1983). *The philosophy of leadership.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publisher Limited.

Hodgkinson, C. (1995). *Educational leadership: The moral art.* New York, NY: SUNY Press.

Hodgkinson, C. (1996). *Administrative philosophy: Values and motivations in administrative life.* Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science Ltd.

Hoy, W. K. & Miskel, C. G. (1996). *Educational administration: Theory, Research, and Practice* (5th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., Stevahn, L., & Hodne, P. (1997). The three Cs of safe schools. *Educational Leadership, 55*(2), 8-13

Josephson Institute 2001, *Character counts: The six pillars of character.* (n.d). Retrieved March 9, 2002, from http://www.charactercounts.org/defsix.htm

Kagan, S. (2001). Teaching for character and community. *Educational Leadership, 55*(2), 50-55.

Kahn, R. & Cannell, C. (1957). *The dynamics of interviewing.* New York, NY: John Wiley.

Kohn, A. (1997). How not to teach values: A critical look at character education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 78*(6), 428-439.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lipham, J. M. (1973). Leadership: General theory and research. *Leadership: The Science and Art of Today,* 1-15.

McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mazarella, J. (1981). Leadership styles. In Smith, S.C., Mazzarella, J., & Piele, P. K. (Eds.), *School leadership: Handbook for survival.* (pp. 58-87). Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Ministry of Education (2001). *BC performance standards: Social responsibility.* Victoria, BC.

Morgan, G. (1997). *Images of organization.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morse, J. M. (1994). *Critical issues in qualitative research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Premier 2001, *Destination character.* (n.d). Retrieved February 18, 2002, from http://www.premieragendas.com/supplements/

Rachels, J. (1999). *The elements of moral philosophy* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College.

Sergiovanni, T. & Corbally, J. E. (1984). *Leadership and organizational culture.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Schein, E. H. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership*(2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Spirit House Publications (2001). *Canadian Spirit Magazine.* (n.d). Retrieved March 31, 2002, from http://www.canadianspirit.ca/

Stake (1994). Case Studies. In Denizen, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Storey, V. J. (1997). *In the real world: Leaders and the political fact.* Edmond, OK: EduServe Inc.

Strauss, W. & Howe, N. (1997). *The fourth turning: An american prophecy.* New York, NY: Broadway Books.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Office. (2001). *Youth Impact* [Brochure].

UNESCO (1998) *The practice of citizenship: Basic learning materials on peace, human rights, democracy, and tolerance.* UNESCO Publishing.

Waldstein, F. A. & Reiher, T. C. (2001). Service-learning and students' personal and civic development. *The Journal of Experiential Education, 24*(1), 8-13.

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organizations.* (A. M. Henderson, Trans.). London, UK: Oxford University Press.

Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A

Student Leadership in Secondary Schools - May 2002

Part I

1. Indicate grade level. Gr. 10 __ Gr. 11 __ Gr. 12 __ Gender: M ___ F ___

2. Which subject(s) would you identify as your "favourites"? _____

3. Which academic subject(s) would you identify as your most successful?

_____

4.List the extra-curricular activities (school-based or outside of school) in which you are involved and indicate how long you've been in them.

Competitive (e.g. basketball, debating) _____

_____

_____

Non-competitive (eg. choir, drama)_____

_____

Part II

5. What kind of leadership program is established in your school (e.g. students' council, leadership class)? _____

6a. What roles does this group perform (if your school has more than one leadership group, please indicate the one to which you are referring when answering)? Check those which apply.

_____ Organize Graduation ceremonies

_____ Peer counseling

_____ Community service projects

_____ Mentor newly elected/designated student leaders

_____ Support or organize student rights programs (e.g. anti-bullying)

_____ Organize school dances

_____ Organize special events/assemblies

_____ Fundraise for school groups (e.g. band)

_____ Organize school spirit/pride activities

Others? _____

6b. In which of the above activities have you been involved and in what capacity or role (e.g. heading of school dance committee)?

_____

_____

_____

Part III

7. In reflection on your involvement outlined in Question 6, list the leadership skills or qualities you have discovered in yourself?

_____

_____

8. Based on the above answer, please select the three qualities that you believe are the most important in being a leader in a secondary school community. Describe your understanding of these qualities. If you need more space, please write on the back of the page.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Do you believe these qualities will be helpful to you in your future? _____

9b. If "yes", in what ways will they be helpful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. What have you learned about *leading* through your experiences as a student leader?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. In your opinion, which of your leadership projects was most successful? Why?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Are you able to delegate to your peers? If so, what are your experiences with this?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. What challenges or tensions, if any, have you encountered in your role as a student leader? _____

14. Are there students at your school that take on "non-official" leadership roles (e.g. taking the initiative to include new students or grade eights)? What are their roles?

15. Many people in student leadership positions are also academically successful in school. If this is true in your school, how do you understand and explain this?

16. Do you think female and male students hold different attitudes about leadership? If so, in what ways?

17. How do you think the concept of leadership and the concept of popularity are linked?

18. Do you think voluntary activities/service activities are a kind of leadership? Explain. _____

19. In your opinion, should all students have opportunities to experience leadership activities? Please explain your answer. _____

20. What advice would you give to a student about to enter into a student leadership program at school? _____

21. If a teacher were developing a new leadership program or course in a secondary school, what would be your recommendations? _____

22. If you are interested in and would be willing to participate in a 45-60 minute interview about your personal leadership experiences in your school, please supply your name, telephone number and email address in the space below. The interview will not disrupt your academic or extra-curricular schedule. Six students will be randomly selected to participate in the interviews.

23. Do you have any other comments or thoughts about student leadership that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Student Leaders

1. Describe the role you play as a student leader at your school?

2. How did you get involved in the leadership program?

3. Why do think it's important to be involved in the leadership program?

4. What qualities do you possess that you think make you an effective student leader?

5. Explain how these qualities were acquired or developed?

6. What is your sense of what your peers are looking for in a student leader?

7. What unique initiatives/programs have occurred while you've been a student leader at your school? How were you involved?

8. What is challenging about being a student leader?

9. How does one lead? How do you know when you're leading? What does it feel like/look like? What is leadership?

10. Can you give an example of a good leader that you know personally and identify what characteristics he/she has that make him/her a good leader? Does he/she have a particular style?

11. What role does collaboration/cooperation play in effective leadership?

VITA

Surname: Robertson Given names: Elizabeth Ann Helen

Place of Birth: London, Ontario, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1991 to 1997
University of Victoria	2002 to 2003

Degrees Awarded

Bachelor of Education (with Distinction)	1997

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in a response to a request from the Library or any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain by the University of Victoria shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis: Student Leadership in Secondary Schools

Author: [redacted]

Elizabeth A. H. Robertson
April, 2003