

An Assessment of the Process of Identifying Effective Student Leaders in the Schools and Their Development

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Abstract: This paper assesses the process of effective leadership identification in schools. Leadership by students is an important component of most schools' welfare policies. Students are provided with a number of opportunities to become part of the student leadership team such as prefects, SRC members, library monitors, class monitors and sports captains. As leaders in the schools, students are encouraged to develop and demonstrate social skills of leadership and responsibility, working as part of a group, supporting their peers, demonstrating pride in their school and showing initiative by the way in which they carry their duties. Identifying leaders aims at singling out the real leaders. At the same time, its purpose is to prevent pupils who are not leaders from being assigned leadership positions. It is therefore most important that the identification of leaders be done systematically and correctly. In leader identification pupils should be informed of the difference between leadership, friendship and popularity. Owing to their lack of knowledge and experience, pupils are not always able to make this distinction.

Keywords: Assessment, effective, identifying, school leaders, student

INTRODUCTION

Moulding of future leaders is the responsibility of the education system of any country [1]. Leadership responsibilities should be entrusted to young pupils early in their school lives so as to develop leaders from a young age. This idea of developing leaders from a young age focuses on helping young leaders to draw lessons from their leadership experiences and those of their teachers to nurture the seeds of leadership in them and build their leadership capacities while recognising their potential to become future leaders [2]. This process identifies and addresses a need that the formal education curriculum is not currently addressing. As Chivore [3] postulates, the idea involves nurturing, moulding and shaping young leaders so that they embrace positive values, develops their communication and interpersonal skills, decision making skills and critical thinking skills, coping and self management skills. Young leaders represent hope for better leadership in future, and therefore, there is need to help them choose positive values to guide their decisions and align their actions to these values, develop a learning attitude and critical thinking skills to be able to live productive lives and provide effective leadership in future [4].

The role of long-term identification as precondition for correct leader identification

It is important for staff members at a school to be aware of possible problems surrounding the election of leaders, such as the following [9]:

- Leaders being elected in undue haste.
- Pupils who put their best foot forward during election time, for example during a "leader identification camp".
- Pupils who suddenly pop up as leaders.
- Pupils who during an interview talk themselves into leadership positions while this is not in keeping with their behaviour inside and outside the school grounds.
- Electing turncoats who play different roles in front of teachers or when alone with their friends.

To prevent all of this, it is important to observe pupils' leadership potential on an ongoing basis. The single biggest advantage of this approach is that a personal profile can be compiled of every potential leader. The clearer the picture that emerges of the pupil's personality (in other words the longer the period over which information has been gathered) the less chance there is that the wrong leaders will be elected!

Opportunities for informally exercising leadership

The school has a special responsibility to provide adequate opportunity for children to live out their leadership qualities, for example:

LESSON	Maximum pupil involvement. Group work with pupils in control. Bright pupils giving remedial assistance to other pupils.
SUBJECT	Pupils work together on projects in teams. Subject societies with leaders in control.
CLASS	Regularly appoint class leaders. (Allocate responsibilities and encourage initiative!)

SPORT	The team chooses its captain. The captain holds team talks, motivates team members and regularly reports back to the coach.
SOCIETIES	Chairpersons and secretaries plan and lead meetings. Teachers only give advice.

More examples of informal leadership opportunities are:

- Report backs during assembly.
- Cultural evenings.
- Attending camps and courses.
- Acting as master of ceremony at certain events.

The class leader system remains the ideal opportunity for every pupil to show his or her abilities. Teachers should encourage the class leader to come forward with new ideas, suggestions and initiative.

Teachers should also realise that even if pupils make mistakes in their efforts, it is the effort that deserves recognition and not the end result. Pupils should be allowed to learn from their mistakes within the safe environment of the school. In this competitive and performance-oriented world, schools would do well to pay more attention to this principle [5].

Every teacher should receive clear guidelines on leadership identification to ensure that all staff uses more or less the same criteria in identifying leaders. Should this not be the case leaders might be chosen because of their popularity or aspects such as self-discipline or personal neatness? Often such guidelines are not available, because the school (leader guardian) itself does not know exactly where it is going to with the leaders. Unless the school can formulate clear objectives for the development of leaders, successful leader identification is almost impossible.

Procedures for correct leader identification

Election procedures

Election procedures should be fair and democratic. Maronda [6] suggests that the proposed election procedure can be in one of two ways either **only the teachers** elect the leaders, or **pupils also** take part in electing leaders. Most schools prefer the latter. If a school should decide to give pupils a say in the election of leaders, it **should** be done in the following way to ensure success:

- Pupils need to be thoroughly informed **beforehand** of the principles involved in leader identification. Flippancy or clowning should not be tolerated.

- Pupils should fully understand the reasons for leadership – and be clear on what is expected of leaders.
- The pupils then receive a list with the names of all the candidates in alphabetical order. Alternatively, a short list of for example, fifty names (boys and girls) can be compiled of the names of pupils nominated by their fellow pupils.
- If the latter option above is preferred, the names are also listed in alphabetical order and then submitted to the pupils to vote. (Schools can decide whether they wish boys only to vote for boys, and vice versa).
- After this, every candidate's votes are counted to see who got most votes.
- It is then every school's prerogative to decide whether to accept the leaders elected by the pupils, or whether staff should also vote (in order to veto unrealistic choices).
- Lastly, the names of pupils elected are submitted to the school principal for final approval. The principal has the right to make changes if these can be justified on **educational grounds**.

Announcing the leaders

The names of the newly elected leaders should be announced as soon as possible after the election. The reason is obvious:

- This will prevent speculation and rumours which could create expectations in pupils or parents and which might never materialise.
- It is only fair to the pupils involved, since it is a period of much excitement and great anticipation.

Announcing the leaders can be done in either of the following ways: During school time at assembly when the whole school is present, or at the annual prize giving function. The advantage of the first is the presence of the whole school when the new leaders are announced. In the latter case the advantage is that the new leaders' parents will be there, but that means not all the pupils in the school can be part of the proceedings.

It is the task of the school principal and the teacher who is leader guardian to see to it that in announcing the new leaders their achievement is duly acknowledged - **but never in a way that would harm the dignity of those pupils not elected**. In appointing leaders the school thus has a special responsibility. In some schools new leaders take a leader's oath or code of honour at the ceremony where their names are announced. It would be a good idea to revise and if necessary adjust this code every year.

A few suggestions for the identification and nomination of leaders

Every school should organise its school leadership system in such a way that it will be well suited to the school's specific circumstances. Examples of how a school can give its system of school leadership a dynamic character, are aspects such as the following:

- Identifying and nominating leaders is not a one-off event. A pupil may reach the ability to act as leader in a certain phase of the school year.

It can for example easily happen that a pupil who has done well in a sporting event or examination gains so much confidence that he or she for the first time reveals very special personal ability.

When a pupil displays leadership qualities, he or she must be given the opportunity to become a leader. Smith [7] refers to the openness principle in this respect.

This means that any pupil in the last year of school can become a prefect without another pupil having to give up his position.

- Staff members cannot identify leaders in a weekend's time (or even during break!). The custom to have teachers use a name list to discuss the good and bad qualities of every pupil among one another can only be detrimental to the dignity of both pupils and teachers. It is simply not becoming that teachers should "auction off" the pupils' personal characteristics.
- Some schools make use of a system of electing a certain number of leaders from a younger group. The biggest disadvantage is that this puts much pressure on the junior leaders (or creates expectations) to attain a senior leadership position in the following year, and these pupils may experience a strong sense of failure if they are not elected then.
- Some schools (especially primary schools) prefer electing leaders at the end of the year, but to elect head prefects at the end of the first term of the following year. This ensures that the wrong choice of pupils' leaders does not become an embarrassment later on.
- The custom of nominating a new group of leaders every term in the first three terms is also no longer an unfamiliar practice. This gives more pupils the opportunity to be exposed to a more intensive leadership development programme. These leaders also do not lose interest in their leadership function during the course of the year. Those pupils who prove to be

exceptionally good leaders during their term of office are again elected to serve as leaders in the last term.

The Development of Pupil Leadership

It serves no purpose to identify and nominate pupil leaders if there is no deliberate development programme. Too many schools neglect to develop youth leadership, so much so that the potential of these young leaders is never realised. The child then has to fulfil a leadership role without having received any support or guidance with respect to the how and why of the leadership role [7]. Two important reasons why leadership development is often neglected are:

- Teachers' (especially the leader guardian teacher) lack of formal training; and
- A too full school programme.

The successful development of youth leaders will only be possible if there are set aims and objectives in this regard. Schools will also need to give more attention to a continuous training programme where the many aspects of leadership development are dealt with intentionally.

Objectives in leadership development

The concept of "development" refers to a dynamic process. Development is non-static; a forward movement in the direction of a predetermined goal. Development is change, but always changes for the better.

The aims and objectives of a development programme are **closely linked to the educational aim**, namely the meaningful accompaniment of the total child on his way to adulthood. This is not a fortuitous but a purposeful event which includes specific learning contents within a given teaching and learning situation. The following objectives should be included in a school's leadership development programme:

- To fully develop the potential of pupil leaders in order for them to be able to perform their leadership tasks with success.
- To stimulate critical and creative thinking.
- To promote leaders' sense of responsibility.
- To encourage leaders toward meaningful involvement in projects and the problems of their time.
- To prepare leaders for their role as future leaders in society; and
- To equip young leaders with fundamental values in life.

Put differently, the following question may be asked: what should the leader be able to do at the end of

his term as leader? Most leaders should be able to do most of the following:

- Applying basic leadership knowledge.
- Independently organising certain school projects (and seeing them completed with a reasonable measure of success).
- Conducting orderly leadership meetings.
- Enlisting the co-responsibility of fellow pupils by means of delegating responsibility.
- Identifying and solving lesser problems without adult assistance.
- Handling interpersonal and inner conflict and criticism.

- Comfortably handling individuals or smaller groups of pupils.
- Effectively using the right channels of communication.

Leadership development at the school is concerned with the total development of the child as a person. Leadership – like taking part in sport, debates or choirs, and joining clubs and societies – afford pupils the special opportunity to realise their God-given personal potential within a safe environment. By doing this, the pupil leader approaches his or her ultimate call in life, namely achieving personal goals and serving others in the broader community as an adult after school.

Identifying leadership behaviour and orientation is thus an ongoing process. It should not end as soon as the child has been nominated as leader! Leadership development indeed implies that the hidden potential should be brought into the open. That which is not obvious to everyone should be made visible by the intervention of the leader guardian teacher. **Put differently, if the leader guardian teacher had not stepped in, the child would not have revealed the quality of his leadership behaviour so soon.**

Aspects of the development programme

Requirements for effective development

Most researchers identify the following requirements for the effective development of pupil leaders:

A balanced upbringing by parents in a loving family.
Self-determination, especially with respect to making independent choices between right and wrong, should be encouraged.
A successful programme should be based on suitable learning content which is presented in a specific manner.
The programme should preferably be coordinated by only one person to prevent confusion and discord.
The programme should pose a challenge to the child’s abilities, willpower and determination.
The programme’s progress should be evaluated continuously – involving as many role players as possible.
Youth leaders should be involved in a significant way in putting the programme together.
Contents and style of presentation should be varied, and should at all times be educationally sound.
The success of the programme greatly depends on the positive attitude of every participant!

Leadership development methods

Most leader guardians are quite uncertain as to the correct methods of leadership development in a development programme. Finding the right methods for

leadership development is hard work. The leader guardian should however feel free to experiment with a range of methods until finding the most effective ones.

Experience has taught that the following give the best results:

Formal lectures (e.g. leadership theory)
Taking on practical projects.
Using audio-visual aids (videos etc).
Leadership camps (where leaders organise most things themselves).
Visits to the student councils of other schools.
Attending youth leadership conferences where possible.

More methods which may be used are:

- Self-development by studying the literature on leadership.
- Seminars on leadership.
- Simulation (e.g. case studies and role play).
- Group discussions, for example buzz groups (not more than 4-6 pupils per group).

- Meetings (to build self-confidence).
- Experienced speakers or course leaders are worthy replacements for leader guardians who do not always have the time to study a theme, for example strategies for successful problem solving.

Learning content for development programmes

Learning about leadership, leadership skills, leadership direction, and inculcating certain attitudes, norms and values in life are important. The development programme should also include learning content which is task centred. This is in other words content which will assist the leader in performing his leadership task with success, such as knowledge about organising, planning, guidance and control.

According to Basson and Smith [8] the following aspects should receive special attention:

- **Policy design** as instrument in management for the purposeful development of pupil leaders.
- Determining the **ideological foundations** of the development course to serve as point of departure for the direction in which to lead.
- Establishing an **overall aim** to serve as guiding and harmonising factor in the comprehensive training programme.
- Establishing relevant **areas of competence** (in other words: what the school wants the leaders to be able to do).
- Determining **course content** – specific knowledge to be mastered and attitudes, values and norms to be inculcated in the leaders.
- Assigning **responsibility** with respect to the training course.
- Scheduling the training programme as a **facet of the school programme as a whole**.

With a view to the above it is obvious that the development of pupil leaders cannot be a haphazard affair. Offering leadership courses on a weekly or monthly basis is thus unavoidable if the school wishes to do its duty where its youth leaders are concerned.

The leadership camp

Not all schools are in favour of a training camp for newly appointed leaders. Educators who are against the idea are of the opinion that the young leaders will be too far removed from reality (the so-called island situation) if they are isolated into an artificially controlled situation. Fortunately these educators are in the minority. Most schools have long since realised how valuable leadership camps can be and they use this special opportunity to launch the leadership year. Inexperienced leader guardians would do well to take to heart the following suggestions with respect to leadership camps:

- Pupil leaders should preferably be taken on a leadership camp **as soon as possible after their nomination** so that their new responsibilities may be discussed in depth. (Reason: At the beginning of the leadership year the young leader is most

receptive with regard to setting objectives, motivation and eagerness to learn).

- Decide on a suitable **theme** for the camp e.g. **“Leadership is lekker!”** Build on this theme for the rest of the year.
- To ensure a healthy team spirit it is important for every leader to attend.
- Leaders should be **involved** in as many activities as possible. For example, if the pupils prepare their own food on gas braais this will not only bring a convivial atmosphere but will also, without their being immediately aware of it; build the team spirit and group cohesion. It also makes the catering easier.
- The emphasis should be on **determining objectives, planning projects** for the year and promoting **group cohesion**.
- **Evaluation** should be done of the previous year’s leaders to avoid making the same mistakes. (It would be a good idea to also evaluate the camp itself afterwards).
- The leader guardian should do everything in his or her power to establish a **trustful relationship** with the new leaders.
- Schools are more inclined nowadays to run **short camps** – not from Friday to Sunday any longer. Camps which are concluded on a Saturday afternoon at a high point have more impact than one that drags on and could become boring. The **camping site** should preferably not be too close to the school. (Don’t choose a site too far away, though – getting there could take up valuable camping time). Facilities such as swimming pool, conference hall, hiking routes and hot water are recommended.
- Should the school not have sufficient funds; an equally successful camp can be done **on the school grounds**. It is in any case much better than not having a camp at all.

It is very important that the leader guardian do **follow-up** work after the camp. A mistake often made is that a very successful camp is held but not followed up on, with the result that leaders start losing interest. It is the follow-up work more than the camp itself that is valuable. It also lends credibility to the leader guardian since the leaders feel that he or she really has their interest at heart and believes in what they still want to plan and do. Leader development cannot be done in one weekend or leadership course [7].

The leadership camp thus only serves as **point of departure** for the leadership development programme. Should the leader guardian not be able to

handle this matter (either because of ignorance or for a lack of interest), the school should get expert outside help to do justice to the development of leaders.

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the significance of identifying effective student or pupil leaders at a tender age. It is important to effectively identify leaders at a young age so that they can be groomed to take up leadership positions in future. All countries need a constant supply of leaders in various spheres of life to replace or join those who leave leadership positions due to a variety of reasons. Schools, therefore should effectively select leaders and develop them properly so that society is assured of having quality leaders at any given time.

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