

Training Tomorrow's Leaders Today

Youth and educators alike will benefit from preparing young people to be leaders.

Today's high school students are becoming more and more responsible, both individually and collectively. Not only do they perform leadership tasks in clubs and student government, but they are also capable of assuming leadership roles in conjunction with the faculty and administration. Because we believe that educators should include training in leadership skills at both elementary and secondary levels, we at Maria Center, a lifelong learning center in St. Louis, Missouri, have developed a leadership training program for youth.

Louise O'Connor, SSND, program director of Educational Leadership Services at the Center, worked with 15 educators representing urban, suburban, and rural schools, pre-school through high school, to design the program. This group determined the content and process for the training sessions and proposed priority for four skill areas: self-assessment, communication, organization and planning, and decision making.

For the pilot program, we wanted two students from 12 elementary-junior high schools that represented a wide range of cultural and economic levels. Student selection was based on recommendations from principals, parents, and students, with each candidate being interviewed before the training began.

The two adult workshop directors used techniques such as lectures, discussions, and small group experiential activities. For self-assessment, participants used a professionally published instrument that determined behavioral patterns and provided feedback on their value and effectiveness in groups. Throughout, they viewed videotapes of themselves, received feedback from their peers and guidance from the workshop directors to critique their own leadership techniques.



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Following the training events, participants spent an additional ten hours for practicum experience, working with 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders from a local school. Working in teams of two to four, they organized, planned, and implemented several activities with groups of 10 to 12 youngsters.

A follow-up evaluation coupled the trainees' self-assessment with observations made by the adult workshop leaders. In the evaluation the students reviewed goals and action plans, commented on what worked and what didn't work and why, and discussed improvements for the future.

Benefits of the training sessions have been far-reaching. Not only did trainees expand their social circles across cultural and economic levels, but they also developed resource networks among their peers. While learning practical leadership techniques, they also experienced positive relationships with adult leaders that gave them greater self-esteem and encouraged them to use their ideas in the future.

Follow Up

In our follow up studies with the pilot program schools we noted that:

- The level of interest and enthusiasm for leadership training is higher for 6th and 7th graders than for 8th graders
- Many elementary school students are willing to and capable of taking more active leadership roles but many administrators and teachers are unwilling to give them the opportunity
- There is a high correlation between self-esteem and the exercise of leadership, and building self-esteem is an important way to foster potential leaders
- Three schools without a forum for student government prior to the program started one afterwards
- A workshop training program of this type is most effective with students with diverse geographic, economic, and cultural groups and schools.

Since the initial program, the training workshop has been used in formats such as weekend seminars for junior high students, a mini-course for 7th and 8th graders in an elementary school, and a full week summer leadership institute offered with or without practicum experience.

Thirty-nine schools in Illinois, Missouri, and New York have participated in the Student Leadership Training Program, and plans are under way to hold the training at other sites in the Midwest and California. □

The Student Leadership Program enters a new phase in Summer 1983. Maria Center will initiate a training workshop for teachers that assists them in designing a leadership training program tailored to their school's curriculum development at the intermediate level (grades 4, 5, 6). For information about the program contact: Louise O'Connor, SSND, at Maria Center for Learning and Life Enrichment, 320 E. Ripa Ave., St. Louis, MO 63125. Phone: (314) 544-0600.

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New! DESIGNING LEARNING PROGRAMS AND ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS edited by **Phillip J. Sleeman, Louis V. Messineo and D. M. Rockwell**. The twenty-six articles in this book provide an encompassing review of the factors to be considered when designing and implementing instructional programs. The latest technological instructional advances and their present and future use in the delivery of instruction are emphasized. Apr. '83, about \$24.75

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