Leadership Seven—Impacting Student Behavior
and School Culture

by

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Leadership Seven Impacting Student Behavior

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Abstract

This paper presents a description of the development of a Leadership Seven Course at Hatzic Middle Secondary. Through research it considers literature pertaining to effective principals and practices of effective leadership programs. This paper also relays several of the trials and errors made during the course of the year and conveys numerous adaptations made to ensure the success of all students. Finally, this author speaks about the growth of a school culture and the subsequent effects it has had on the entire school community.

Keywords: Leadership, curriculum, adolescent behaviour, character education, student input, bullying, school’s climate/culture.
# Table of Contents

**Approval**: ......................................................................................................................... ii  
**Acknowledgements**: ........................................................................................................... iii  
**Abstract** .............................................................................................................................. iv  

**Chapter I: The Problem** ....................................................................................................... 1  
- Introduction: ......................................................................................................................... 1  
- Background to the Problem: .................................................................................................. 2  
- Statement of the Problem: ...................................................................................................... 2  
- Purpose of the Study: ............................................................................................................. 3  
- Statement of Research Question: ......................................................................................... 4  
- Importance of the Study: ........................................................................................................ 5  
- Scope of the Study: .................................................................................................................. 6  
- Summary: ............................................................................................................................... 6  
- Outline of the Remainder of the Paper: ................................................................................ 7  

**Chapter II** ......................................................................................................................... 9  
- Review of Related Literature ................................................................................................... 9  
- Introduction: .......................................................................................................................... 9  
- Leadership: ............................................................................................................................ 9  
- Rationale: ............................................................................................................................... 10  
- School Climate: (All Within the Walls) ................................................................................ 11  
- Bullying: ............................................................................................................................... 14  
- Teachers Responsibility: ........................................................................................................ 15  
- Goals of Education: .............................................................................................................. 17  
- Character Education: ........................................................................................................... 19  
- School Climate: ..................................................................................................................... 23  
- The Administrator’s Vision: ................................................................................................. 24  

**Chapter III** ....................................................................................................................... 27  

**Methodology and/or Recommendations** ......................................................................... 27  
- Introduction: .......................................................................................................................... 27  
- Connections: ......................................................................................................................... 28  
- Necessary Changes: .............................................................................................................. 29  
- Easing into Ethics and Values: ............................................................................................... 31  
- Technology Use: ................................................................................................................... 33  
- Engaging Hallways: .............................................................................................................. 34  
- Community Efforts: ............................................................................................................. 35  
- Student Voice and Recommendations: ................................................................................ 36  
- Conclusion: ............................................................................................................................ 38  

**Bibliography** ...................................................................................................................... 41
Chapter I: The Problem:

Introduction:

In 2012 members of the Board of Education of Mission School District #75 made a difficult decision to move grade seven students from elementary to high school. This transition had to be made due to the inclusion of all day kindergarten into the system and the resulting lack of classroom space. Concerned parents and educators immediately raised the alarm when this financial non-pedagogical decision was made and questioned the impressionable impact an environment such as this would have on these budding adolescent students. After two years of district mandated integration among older students, grade seven data has indicated a dramatic rise in disrespectful misbehavior towards teachers and administration, reaching a boiling point for which administrators are looking to add a leadership component into the grade seven rotation as a means to proactively curb this unwelcome conduct. Although this path may lead to better behavior, a question of what curriculum should be implemented and its delivery method remains to be answered.
Background to the Problem:

A survey administered by the Mission School District in late June 2012 indicated students having to make this early transition into high school were feeling overwhelmed, anxious and upset. There was a general feeling of disappointment that their year of being “Rulers of the School” had been taken away only to end up at the bottom of the totem pole. Rather than becoming the respected leaders of their elementary school, these students are now continually observing the inappropriate behavior of older students, which over time has become the norm for these adolescent twelve year olds. In the spring of 2014 the administrative team at Hatzic Middle School made the decision to insert a leadership module into the grade seven fine arts rotation taking the place of an outdated drafting course. It was felt that a leadership course addressing social responsibility, ethics and character development might lead to improving these behavioral concerns.

Statement of the Problem:

Can a curricular course in leadership taken by all grade 7 students positively impact student behaviour?

As the teachers’ strike headed into full implementation in 2014 my Principal asked if I would be interested in teaching this grade seven Leadership course. I have taught Senior Leadership at Hatzic Middle Secondary for the past ten years thus making me the prime candidate but soon became aware that I would be on my
own to develop its curriculum, method of delivery and assessments. Past experience taught me that provincial government websites so widely used and accepted for other courses, could not be depended on for leadership curriculum and board authorized courses can only be used as a guide as they lack assessment practices and learning outcomes. Without a prior course outline to use as a guide the question was, where does one turn to when attempting to create effective, efficient curriculum for a grade seven leadership course that rotates in a new class every two and a half months? I accepted the challenge and thus began on my quest to create curriculum that was both “nimble and flexible, meeting the needs of the twenty first century learner”(Abbott, 2012 p.2)

Purpose of the Study:

This paper will examine literature pertaining to: adolescent behaviour, acknowledging student input, bullying, how a school’s climate/culture is related to classroom behaviour, and character education. It is hoped this research will be used in producing a practical grade seven course syllabus which is interactive yet effective, that will create “a learning environment for students to discover, embrace, and fulfill their passions”(Abbott, 2012 p.3).
Statement of Research Question:

Suggesting that leadership curriculum can be easily found on the Ministry’s website quickly leads to frustration as this course is not acknowledged and prescribed learning outcomes have not been developed. British Columbia’s New Education Plan is another resource that cannot be relied on as this redesign in curriculum concentrates on six core subjects with a focus towards literacy and numeracy (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2012 p.1). In my experience, leadership curriculum cannot follow a stagnant set of learning outcomes and may explain why the ministry is not prescriptive on the content and development of a leadership curriculum. It needs fluidity, reacting to student input and the school’s shifting environment. Over a ten-year span my Senior Leadership classes have never been the same. Yes we follow and host traditional events but their outcomes are ever changing as student input fluctuates year to year. Leadership seven has a predetermined set of outcomes based on the requests from my administration team but the question still remains: How does one develop leadership curriculum, its learning outcomes and deliver it effectively to grade seven students?
Importance of the Study:

The lack of ministry guidance developing leadership curriculum is a dilemma many educators are faced with and indicates a need for an accessible provincial leadership outline. There is a need for leadership to be acknowledged in B.C.’s New Education Plan, as addressing social responsibility, ethics and character, in my opinion, has become as important as learning the six core subjects. Since the ministry is centering their plan on the three core competencies of communications, thinking and personal/social competencies, it seems only natural to create curriculum on how to best teach these sought after skills. Ironically, these are historically desirable competencies assessed daily in most leadership courses and are “sets of intellectual, personal/social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2012 p.1). Studies indicate that practicing these competencies daily may lead to “improved student confidence, achievement and a school climate that is conducive to learning” (Varner, 2007 p.1).
Scope of the Study:

There are some limitations to this study. The study is limited to the grade 7 students in Hatzic Middle Secondary School. My “student first” approach to teaching, where the opinions and input of all students are heard, valued and employed may not work for some of my peers. An example of this is the leadership curriculum I used first term and how it has been exchanged for something entirely new or enhanced in some way because of student input. My assessment practices have also transformed dramatically over the past six months as I continue to work alongside my students and now have blogging as a form of evaluation. As previously stated, the goal for this particular leadership course is derived from my administrators having a desire to have social responsibility, ethics and character developed through curricular lesson plans. This limits the scope of this paper, as these outcomes may not fit the needs of other educators who may have other requirements to fulfill.

Summary:

Moving grade seven students into high school to create classroom space for all day kindergarten has led to some unsuccessful results for grade seven students in the Mission School District. Parents and educators who have expressed their apprehensions of exposing preteens to a high school environment seem to be right, as data has shown a dramatic increase in misbehavior towards teachers,
administration and the school in general over the last two years. In reaction, the administrative team at Hatzic Middle Secondary School felt adding a leadership course into the grade seven fine arts rotation may be the solution in curtailing these behavioral issues, asking me to create the course, its curriculum and delivery. The B.C.’s Ministry of Education shows little interest for leadership evident when visiting the ministries website and not being able to locate the course altogether. Other course outlines available online pertain mainly to senior leadership where the eventual goal is having students become responsible for the planning and carrying out of most school activities. I knew to create a course which not only fulfilled my administrator’s needs but also fit into my philosophy of teaching and learning would be challenging, yet achievable. Research for this paper will be tried, tested and refined to best meet the needs of my school and its grade seven students as well.

Outline of the Remainder of the Paper:

In the next chapter, I will be reviewing literature, which this author believes to be vital when creating a course such as Leadership. There are varying areas to be examined and it is my hope this research will enable me to refine a solid yet fluid course outline. I will begin this chapter using research to define what leadership is in relationship to this paper. As an experienced educator I feel learning can only occur when a safe and caring environment has been established. I want to provide a
reader with research on how important a safe classroom environment is and what role safety plays in the relationships between student and teacher and within the classroom and school. This will be further extended with research on the types of bullying that surround our students today and how this type of behaviour limits student involvement in schools. We will also examine the current goals of education and how creating leadership curriculum should reflect these local governmental targets. Character Education, its return to popularity and the role it plays in developing a schools code of conduct and values system will also be researched.
Chapter II:
Review of Related Literature

Introduction:

There are various means a course such as Leadership Seven could be instructed and, given the amount of flexibility in its development, the curriculum over time I feel will either reflect the instructor’s vision or an administrators needs. Such is the case for this paper as the wants and needs of Hatzic’s administrative team seems to be dictating many of the outcomes for this course, rather than the scope of the one teacher. This chapter will review literature pertaining to these aspirations but will also research other precursors and curriculum outcomes this author/teacher feels are vital in order for this curriculum to be meaningful and effective.

Leadership:

Leadership? What does it truly mean? Its definition has changed dramatically over the years. In one article Senge (1990) describes leaders of past eras as rescuers or heroes in times of crisis, using a top down approach and their charisma to “reinforce a focus on short-term goals, rather than on systemic forces and collective learning” (p. 8). Senge sees the leaders of today as “designers, teachers and stewards. These roles require new skills: the ability to build shared vision, to bring to the surface and challenge prevailing mental models, and to foster more systemic patterns of thinking” (p. 9). Dwight D. Eisenhower’s quoted
leadership as “the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” Appropriate for its time but today’s leaders I feel need to be inclusive, fostering a team first approach. Eisenhower’s quote could relevantly be reworded to meet the needs of today’s leaders becoming, “the art of getting everyone to do what the team needs to get done because they want to do it.” This approach has everyone working as one unit, where inclusion, teamwork and service to others become the motivating factors for group success.

When considering a working definition for student leadership, specifically Leadership Seven, having students understand the value of practicing and acquiring these traits will become the underlying theme for my course syllabus. Although my administrative team desire a course where students behaviours are lead to fulfill school expectations, it is my belief this can be accomplished by implementing curriculum where students take ownership of the overall school community.

Rationale:

Reflecting back on the need for this course, we see it in response to data, where disrespectful misbehavior towards teachers and administration has grown
over a two-year period. It was felt that by developing a leadership course addressing social responsibility, ethics and character development might lead to improving these behavioral concerns. Although important aspects to be researched and implemented, I also believe the method in which schools and educators choose to deliver this curriculum is just as important. As previously mentioned the lack of Ministry direction in leadership curriculum and its delivery leads to the rationale behind this paper. Through research, student input, trial and error, I hope to assemble a course outline for colleagues to use and overtime further enhance.

School Climate: (All Within the Walls)

Adolescent behavior, particularly in high schools, is affected by several factors and addressing all areas fully is required for change to take place. A school’s climate is one such area which Pedro Noguera (a leading expert on high school) reform states that, “many high schools today are plagued by violence, poor attendance, low teacher morale and low achievement” (2004), which in turn increases unwanted student behavior. Outdated stand and deliver curriculum lacking the technological interests of most students today is another area of concern. Speaking at a 2005 National Governors Conference, Bill Gates asserted, “Our high schools were designed fifty years ago to meet the needs of another age. Until we design them to meet the needs of this century, we will keep limiting—even
ruining—the lives of millions of students every year.” (Murray, 2005, p.1). But Dr. Anthony Muhammad, one of the most sought after educational consultants in North America, is cautious of technology stating, “although technical changes are necessary to improve our schools, they produce few positive results and substantial cultural change must precede technical change” (Muhammad, 2009, p. 16).

Endorsing student voice, valuing their input in what and how they learn is also of great importance when attempting to establish a positive school climate. A recent study found “Students will resist any process that disembowels them . . . familiar school routines, teacher talk, passive instruction, and the exclusion of student co-participation in curriculum design and governance” (Johnston & Nicholls, 1995 p. 94). Another study indicates that when high school students are immersed in a “culture wherein student voice is promoted, listened to, cared about and acted on produces real change” (Campbell, 2009 p.4). This study revealed that the solutions to improving high schools so all students experience success lie right within the walls of school (p.16). Cushman (2003) asks educators to listen to students because “they can serve as informants and advocates to educators on what works and what does not work in schools” (Campbell, 2009 p.3). This style of instruction may be uncomfortable to some educators, as it implements “a strategy of not knowing that helps to establish an environment in which students can collaborate on the exploration of problems and develop critical skills that are not
usually taught” (Brown, 2003 p.6). I fully support this method of instruction and have implemented its use in Senior Leadership and I hope to have it inserted into the grade seven leadership courses as well.

It All Begins In The Classroom:

   Before curriculum content conversations such as these take place one key aspect must first be addressed, the classroom environment itself. A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control state that, “over 5% of students surveyed reported missing school due to safety concerns and threats from fellow students” (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007 p.119). A follow up survey of over 1500 students conducted by the World Health Organization found that “approximately 20% of students reported having been bullied in the classroom,” (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007 p.120) Another survey conducted online in 31 schools, found that 25% of the 13,000 adolescent participants reported being hit, threatened and hurt emotionally (Davis & Nixon, 2011 p.19) which this author feels is very significant considering the implementation of countless anti-bullying programs developed over the years aimed toward curbing this behaviour.

In our school a weight room is above the gymnasium. From there I have observed bullying type behaviour occurring in P.E. classes down below. I feel helpless, as I witness the teacher catching the victim’s reaction and having him/her removed from the gym instead of the perpetrator.
According to John Hattie, having a safe environment coincides with a teacher’s credibility. In his book Hattie stresses, “Students are very perceptive about knowing which teachers can make a difference and if a teacher is not perceived as credible, the students just turn off” (Hattie, 2008 p.23). Building trust, competence, dynamism and immediacy are four key factors Hattie believes lead to a teacher’s overall credibility and good educators establish these with their students in the classroom. A personalized greeting at the door is an example of how educators can build upon these key factors. A study by Allday & Pakurar in 2007 found, “taking a few seconds to greet students by name at the start of class, increased the percentage of students academically engaged from 45% to 72%” (Wright, 2013 p.2). This is a strategy I have used but need to practice more consistently.

Bullying:

Bullying falls under four main categories; emotional, physical, verbal, sexual and homophobic (Hester, Bolen, Thomas, & McCulloch, 2011 p.103) and school safety experts feel “anti-bullying strategies should be an integral component of a school’s safety plan” (Trump, 2011p.9). As it stands, bullying incidents at Hatzic are
taken care of at the administrative level but continue to occur on a daily basis at my school. Cyber bullying which according to my Principal is now the number one issue her administrators have to deal with on a daily basis. This very much a grey area in many of today’s schools and has risen to the extent where we are now seeing local governments taking action. The Province of British Columbia is taking steps towards “modernizing the Criminal Code” (Attorney General, 2013 p.2) creating a law that sees those who cyber bully be held criminally responsible for their actions. In its report the government defines this new phenomena as “the use of information and communication technologies that support deliberate, hostile, and often repeated behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to hurt others” and cites “children and youth as the most common perpetrators and targets of this type of conduct” (Attorney General, 2013 p.3). It is a telling sign when government must implement laws directed towards adolescent bullying.

Teachers Responsibility:

According to Trump, teachers need to continuously educate students on school policies, conduct codes, prevention and intervention strategies on bullying including a communications plan informing students how to report bullying incidents (Trump, 2011 p.10). Several reports conclude how important safety is in the classroom and show a direct link to “improved attendance, academic achievement,
reduced delinquency and overall higher school engagement” (Cregor, 2008). I have had several intimate conversations with my students and have come to a conclusion most classrooms in my school have some sort of bullying taking place without the teacher’s knowledge.

Preventing bullying in schools goes beyond placing rules on the classroom wall and expecting students to comply. Teachers need to be educated on the true nature of bullying, what to look for and how to respond meaningfully. In one study all students who were surveyed “admitted to witnessing an adult figure (teacher) turn his or her head instead of addressing the bullying situation” (Seaman, 2012 p. 26). Is this because the teacher has not been taught the required skills to handle the situation properly and ignore it all together pretending not to notice? Another study finds “high school teachers are twice as likely as elementary teachers to do little or nothing to reduce the amount of classroom bullying at their school” (Limber & Olweus, 2013 p.14). This can be a slippery slope as the message sent to students is one of silent acceptance that the situation will iron itself out. This quickly leads to the ‘bystander syndrome’ where ‘as long as it’s not me’ becomes the classroom/hallway motto. I particularly likes Seaman’s article because it comes from the perspective of teachers helping to minimize bullying in schools. In his article he offers advice on how to incorporate messages of compassion and empathy into lessons that are already being taught. He feels using historical incidences such as
the Holocaust leads to conversations over the full spectrum of bullying (perpetrator, victim and most importantly the bystander). Seaman also demonstrates how this progressive anti-bullying approach can be implemented into all facets of curriculum with students leading the charge.

Goals of Education:
A safe and caring classroom environment is a foundational key indicator of student success but we are in the business of educating so developing a solid curriculum to rely on is vital. There are various opinions about appropriate leadership curriculum but a great place to start may be to examine the goals of education specifically, The Mandate for the School System Province of British Columbia. This document begins by stating, “the purpose of the BC school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (B.C. Ministry of Education Governance and Legislation Branch, 2013 p.90)

This document divides its goals into three main areas: “Intellectual Development” hopes to develop the ability of students to analyze critically, reason and think independently, leading to an appreciation towards lifelong learning, a curiosity about the world around them and a capacity for creative thought and
expression. “Career Development” attempts to prepare students to attain their
career and occupational objectives, assisting in the development of effective work
habits and the flexibility to deal with change in the workplace. “Human/Social
Development” addresses a student’s sense of self-worth and personal initiative,
developing their awareness of social responsibility, tolerance and respect for the
ideas and beliefs of others” (B.C. Ministry of Education Governance and Legislation
Branch, 2013 p.5). These three goals mirror the core competencies in B.C.’s new
Education Plan, where communications, thinking and personal/social competencies
will be used to guide the plan’s initial implementation.

Competencies such as these are solid building blocks when developing
curriculum but I believe ‘service to others’ could have easily have been inserted
within the “Human/Social Development” competency. There are countless
agencies asking students to aid in the fight against homelessness, child poverty and
worldly relief efforts but much of how to provide this help is left to the teacher or
student to develop. Greenleaf (2003) states the value of educating our youth in the
area of ‘servant leadership’. It is his belief leadership stems from the act of serving
and meeting the needs of others. Servant leaders reach success when “those served
grow as persons. When, while being served, students become healthier, wiser,
freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants” (Greenleaf,
2003 p.6). As a leadership teacher I believe in the act of ‘servicing others’ and continuously relay how satisfying this can be in the lives of my students.

Character Education:

Using the goals and competencies described in the Mandate for Schools in British Columbia as a guide in developing leadership curriculum could be viewed as an excellent entry point but the question remains, “where does one begin when attempting to alter a student’s preconceived negative attitude towards school?” Many believe Character Education is a good place to start but is it really necessary? There are ample studies, articles and data showing there may be a lack of values being taught at home and at schools causing a character crisis in today’s youth. One survey published by Psychological Self Help (2003), found, “20% of people surveyed in 1965 believed it was acceptable to cheat on a test, this rose to 67% in 2003” (Graff, 2012 p.6). In 1990 the American Family Policy Council found “children spent 33.4 hours engaged in meaningful conversation with parents, 1,500 hours watching television, and 900 hours in the classroom each year” (Stedje, 2010 p.4). Statistics reported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention show, “38% of public schools reporting to police at least one incident of violence including rape, sexual and aggravated assault, and robbery” (Stedje, 2010 p.5). Statistics in Canada show similar results as there were “1,111 victims of violent crime reported to
the police per 100,000 children, with rates highest among youth aged 15 to 17” (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2012 p. 3). Are statistics such as these connected to the lack of character education taught in schools today?

A brief historical view of education sees it was established on two main principles, “helping people become smarter and helping people become good” (Lickona, 1993 p.6). Character education began in 1642 where “children went to school to become literate so that they could read the Bible and, from it, learn right from wrong” (Vardin, 2003 p.32). In the early 1900’s Montessori based her program upon the guiding principles of character education and felt it was as important as learning to read, write, and do numbers.

It was during the 1960’s when things began to change. One author writes, “the 1960s ushered in the beginning of the “demoralization” of our society, a time where “Do your own thing” and “If it feels good, do it” began to permeate the culture” (Vardin, 2003 p.32). This was defined as the Era of Personalism, “delegitimizing morale authority, turning people inward toward self-fulfillment, away from marriage and parenting” (Lickona, 1993 p6). Over time, “The teaching of good character traits and virtuous behavior became increasingly eliminated from many schools” (Vardin, 2003 p.32).

Is there a correlation between the lack of character education beginning in the sixties and our present diminishing family unit? In 2007, Statistic Canada shows
an alarming 357,604 Canadian children living with at least one parent imprisoned. This has lead to numbers where “children of federally sentenced parents are two to four times more likely to be in conflict with the law than Canadian children in general” (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2012 p.9). As a result Ryan and Bohlin (1999) write, “Today in North America we have far too many twelve-year olds pushing drugs, fourteen-year olds having babies, sixteen-year-olds killing each other, and kids of all ages admitting to lying, cheating, and stealing at epidemic numbers” (Beachum, F. McCray, C. Yawn, C. Obiakor, 2013 p.473). With statistics such as these and the continued deterioration of the family unit, is it fair to assume schools need to step up and educate our youth with the character skills needed to succeed in today’s society?

Recent literature poses both positive and negative opinions on the topic. Authors such as Thomas Lickona are in full support of the program, citing a 1992 report by the National Research Council where it has found “the United States the most violent of all industrialized nations in deep morale trouble” (Lickona, 1993 p.6). Authors such as Alfie Kohn are very skeptical of character education programs and feel, “we need to ask which values a character education program is attempting to foster” (Kohn, 1997 p.8). Kohn feels, “character education may succeed in temporarily buying a particular behavior but is unlikely to leave children with a commitment to that behavior” (Kohn, 1997 p.12). He also cites Dewey’s observation
of how most character educational lessons “are hammered in and plastered on omitting an invitation for the child to integrate them into his or her value structure” (Dewey, 1966 p11). Stedje’s article (2010 p.9) agrees with Kohn stating, there is a need for consensus when selecting certain values and how these values are to be taught. There are many viewpoints on the topic of character education and all are valid but what seems to be consistent is the need for our youth to understand the value of having good character.

If children spend 900 hours in the classroom each year, how an educator behaves and acts in front his or her students must have an effect. Looking back 2000 years we see how Aristotle noted this in his writings stating, “all adults involved with children either help or thwart children’s growth and development, whether we like it, intend it, or not” One report backs this claim noting, “educators cannot avoid “doing” character education. Either intentionally or unintentionally, teachers shape the formation of character in students—simply by association—through positive or negative examples” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005 p2). What comes in question is, can one leadership seven-course change student behavior/character in two and a half months? How important is it that an entire staff is on board, demonstrating to students desired behaviors, such as politeness and respect? What is the relationship between character education and a school’s climate?
School Climate:

If we design a course in hopes of building good character in our younger students, then how important is it that this curriculum connects to culture/climate of the school? One researcher defines culture/climate as an “unwritten curriculum, where all students must internalize a specific program of social norms for training in order to function effectively as members of a smaller society, the school” (Wren, 1999 p. 594). Is it vital that the culture/climate of Hatzic be included as part of the leadership seven curriculum? One expert finds discussions such as these can “lead students to a greater understanding of how to directly contribute to making a difference in their school” (MacGregor, 2013 p. 24.). One way this connection can be made is with the use of older leadership students. I have used this approach when I first started teaching Leadership 9/10 where I often had Senior Leadership students come sit in during class. Together we would discuss various topics such as, bullying, desired school climate and what it means to be a leadership student. I feel incorporating these important relationships using 9/10 students into the Leadership 7 curriculum will further extend this process.

As I move towards developing curriculum for this course, I must remain mindful of what purpose it is to serve. Yes, there exists behavioural problems but research leads me to remain mindful of Hatzic’s climate/culture. Are newly arriving grade seven students aware of what it means to part of the Hatzic community? Are
they cognizant of all of the programs this school has to offer and how to get involved? I feel responsible to have students become proud contributing members of this school.

I want students to become aware of the kind of school they desire and have them work together in setting goals towards achieving this desirable environment. It is my hope over a three-year timeframe we will develop a climate/culture at this school, which frowns on inappropriate behaviour. This could be considered a form of cooperative learning where students “actively engage in a democratic classroom/society, practicing co-operation, respect and recognizing the equal worth and entitlements of others” (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012 p.3). Dewey (1938) states “the development of character is built through our interpersonal relationships and in turn this affects the way we behave in the world” (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012 p.3). Through these social interactions I hope students not only become concerned for one another but the school community as well.

The Administrator’s Vision:

There are many who feel the climate I desire is derived from an administrator’s vision. The Principal envisions “the school’s future, its possibilities, what might be, what direction to take the school and will no doubt capture some of the elements of a character education program” (DeRoche, 2000 p.2). In his article
‘How Leadership Influences Student Learning,’ Ken Leithwood states that it is “critical that leaders in formal positions of authority retain responsibility for building a shared vision for their organizations” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004 p.7). Hatzic Middle Secondary’s newly developed growth plan reveals an administrative team who has taken positive steps towards developing the future climate of the school. A proud moment for this author was having the opportunity to work alongside the administrative team in creating goal one of the new plan. Rather than having Literacy and Numeracy as our top priorities, goal one of the plan is now aimed at improving student’s personal and social responsibility, with a main objective of increasing the number of students who are actively contributing to a positive school community (Gibson, 2014 p.4). The results of what has transpired due to this change in the growth plan will be further examined in chapter three of this paper.

Some caution me about this step towards including students into this ‘distributed style’ of leadership, where their input is heard but not acted upon. This can quickly lead to apathy and “may backfire if students discover that, having been given responsibility and having taken pains to gather opinions and form plans, realize they have no authority to institute changes” (Higham, Freathy, & Wegerif, 2010 p.420). It is my hope administrators value the opinion of the school community as a whole, implementing more of a ‘responsible leadership’ approach. This allows
for a “shift from educationalists attempting to teach students about citizenship towards allowing students to learn how to be democratic citizens through providing genuine opportunities to act” (Higham et al., 2010 p.422). I feel this approach to instruction exemplifies who I am as an educator and will form the basis of the leadership outline I propose to develop.

In this chapter I believe the literature presented represents a solid foundation for which to begin developing a leadership seven course. There are several other areas one could have further explored but the capacities I have chosen to focus on in this chapter symbolizes what I believe vital to improving student behaviour. Establishing a safe environment where student input is heard, valued and implemented is of great importance to this author. If we want behaviour in schools to improve then a vision must be put in place where virtues such as tolerance, patience and respect for others are willingly practiced. This I believe will lead to a favourable climate where good behaviour becomes the norm.
Chapter III
Methodology and/or Recommendations

Introduction:

After nearly a decade of aspiring to be an effective Leadership teacher I have come to a conclusion that it is an occupation of trial and error. In reality I have found reliable go to curriculum and a dependable delivery model to be an elusive dream. Leadership is a course that evolves with its users and may explain why the Ministry is hesitant in supplying its curriculum. Over a ten-year span I have attended several Leadership seminars, read countless books and have spoken with other educators about Leadership and its curriculum. All offer advice on what works best and why but again there seems to be very little consistency when it came to providing a model to execute.

This Leadership 7 course was put in place at Hatzic to address rising behavioral concerns among this grade level. My problem was finding curriculum/assessments to use, how to deliver it effectively and see if it would positively impact student behaviour over a ten-week period? As I write this paper I am nearing the end of my first year teaching leadership 7, so I have chosen to write chapter three by applying a ‘what worked and what didn’t work’ approach. I will give an overview of my first year; explain why particular curriculum/ assessments were chosen, why some were removed and the resulting outcomes.
Connections:

Over the past ten years I have had the freedom to develop curriculum for Hockey Academy, Junior 9/10 Leadership and Senior 11/12 Leadership. Each of these courses is very much different from one another but in each case I always begin the development stage with the student in mind.

During this stage I think back to the great teachers I had as a student. They were effective teachers because they had connected with me, understanding my needs and how I learned best. Great teachers connect with students by establishing a safe, inviting classroom environment, where mutual respect for one another is created. I have found standing at the door and welcoming students into the classroom is an excellent technique to launch this first time connection. Once inside the classroom I have come to realize how important it is to continue connecting with students.

In the beginning of the year (first term) I started the first class handing out a course outline and reading it out loud. I went over the required assignments where students remained silent, afraid to ask questions. Over the course of this term students were hesitant to participate in teambuilding activities and reluctantly completed their work. There were several instances where behavior became an issue but I couldn’t help but feel as if it were my fault. As the term ended I realized I had been more concerned over students receiving curriculum rather than how they
received it. I wondered how much of the curriculum taught was actually retained. Each term thereafter I began to rearrange my priorities focusing on connections first rather than curriculum. What a difference one change can make! I now dedicate the first week of each term towards building relationships between the students and myself. Low risk name games and familiarity activities have led to this amazing turnaround where new friendships have evolved amongst the students. These exciting activities lead into opportunities where we can sit as a class and formalize a set of student led expectations where everyone has a chance to voice their opinion. By term four I have learned to allow for additional wanted behaviors to be added as students are exposed to activities where these traits become the norm.

Necessary Changes:

In the first term I would normally move onto a character reading activity with the intention of relaying the administration’s message of students acquiring good character skills. No matter how well I dressed these lessons up, students had no interest in learning them and I found they had made little if any impact to reducing unwanted student behavior. I quickly realized it wasn’t the message that was the problem; it was how the message was being delivered to the students. I began to break the lessons down, having students participate in activities where they were
able to see and feel what good and bad character was like firsthand. Again, what a difference changes towards ones outlook on teaching and learning can make.

Now, after a week of making connections, I employ several activities where both good and unwanted behaviors come to the surface. One such activity coined ‘Turning over a New Leaf’ is a simple yet challenging activity, which promotes team building, develops trust/communications, highlights goal setting and in the end is used metaphorically. It begins by moving the class to a new location (cafeteria/outside) where it is no longer the classroom. The entire class then stands on a tarp (leaf) where they are challenged to turn the leaf over without touching the ground (poison water) in the process. This activity allows for a person’s true colors to emerge, especially after the lovey-dovey games we just experienced the week before. I have witnessed behaviors such as name-calling and put downs to dominant personalities who accomplish very little when trying to implement a top down leadership approach. After ten minutes I stop the challenge and have students sit down. I have students recall the agreed upon classroom expectations and ask why they were quickly tossed aside. There are several explanations but I wait for the response ‘this isn’t the classroom’. This leads into some very interesting conversations where students become vocal about how they are treated in other classrooms and in the halls. In some cases tears were shed and it allowed everyone to see how unwanted behavior has its effects on others. We identified the behaviors
that were unhealthy for our group but more importantly we began to focus on behaviors we would like the group to continue using. In doing so the class moved through the remainder of the challenge practicing skills such as, listening, compromising, teamwork and overcoming failure. Once they are successful we head back to the classroom to debrief this activity. At this time we focus only on skills, which helped us overcome adversity and led us to success. I then tie the name of this activity to these newly practiced proficiencies metaphorically by pointing out that we are not turning over a new leaf literally but figuratively because we are growing and developing in areas not normally practiced. I recently found a website ‘Playmeo’ where several value-based activities such as these can be found and inserted into everyday lessons.

Easing into Ethics and Values:

I have found it amazing the transformation this course has gone through in just under nine months. During first term I would tell students about major assignments and how they would be assessed. Now I ease into projects where students not only feel they have created them but have also shaped how they are to be assessed. In first term I had students make a “leader in my life” poster where I spoke to students about values and the role they play in everyday life. In the end I received nice posters but I knew this lesson approach did little to change their
outlook towards ethics and values. I researched for other avenues to implement and eventually stumbled upon a well-rounded lesson on the importance of ethics and values. This PowerPoint style lesson uses age appropriate language, a thought provoking video and naturally leads into several prompting questions where students want their voice heard.

This video begins with realistic outside look of a high-rise fire. It has people yelling from the windows up above for help with firemen holding a life-net below. This catches the student’s attention very quickly and I will stop the video to discuss what the firemen should and can do. I receive the usual answers of what should occur next and I also have students speak about societies view on firemen. I start the video where we left off and we then hear the people above yelling bids to the firemen below. The firemen move back and forth to the highest bidder where eventually someone wins. The winner jumps out of their window only to have the firemen move at the last second because someone placed a higher bid. The expressions, which are on the student’s faces, are priceless and frank discussions over values and ethics come naturally. This lesson also has two sets of value/ethic packages with the first on having just the values/ethics and the second one having descriptive age appropriate definitions. I have students look at the first package and have them highlight the values/ethics they don’t understand and then handout the second package so they are able to copy down those definitions. This leads
nicely into the Leader In My Life Poster, as I ask the students if firemen could be considered leaders. I have them narrow down five values/ethics we honor most (i.e. trust, loyalty) when thinking about this profession. I then have students think about a leader in their lives and find they are more than willing to create a poster, which incorporates these personally handpicked values/ethics. I used to supply a premade rubric for assignments such as these but I came up with the idea of projecting an online rubric maker to the class. Together we create a rubric, using consensus (four horsemen) where everyone has the opportunity to voice his or her opinion.

Technology Use:

Another example where I have changed my perception on assessment is in the use of technology. “Edmodo is an educational website that takes the ideas of a social network, refines them and makes it appropriate for a classroom. Using Edmodo, students and teachers can reach out to one another and connect by sharing ideas, problems, and helpful tips. A teacher can assign and grade work on Edmodo; students can get help from the entire class on Edmodo” (Cauley, 2013 p.2). I particularly like to use Edmodo during/after discussions where students post opinions or hand in written assignments. Posts can be for class viewing or privately sent to me. Written work is usually in opinionated form and I assess it as a
participation mark. I want my students feeling comfortable when voicing their opinions where it positively impacts their learning.

Engaging Hallways:

Once trust and student expectations have been established I have the students participate in our newly found “theme hallways”. This engaging endeavor has become larger than life, where students, staff and parents have all participated in their success. These hallways are the brainchild of my Leadership nine/ten students and grade seven students are proud to have an opportunity to contribute. Our Remembrance Day tribute hallway is an example where the school’s community came together to create what I feel was a hallway not soon to be forgotten. When WWII veterans came for our assembly and saw this tribute they became very emotional and it was later aired on CBC. Not once have these hallways been vandalized or damaged, which has reassured my belief in community/culture building projects such as these.

I have also inserted various assessment practices into these projects, trying not to make it a repetitive process. First, I had students self-assess their overall effort and contribution to projects using a rubric. Then, students analyzed their overall group effort, coming to an agreement of how successful they were. Students were also asked to electronically journal their experiences during the hallway projects
using Edmodo. They were asked to make three entries, representing the beginning, middle and end stages of each project. These quick writes are assessed formatively, as I really wanted students to relay true feelings rather than worrying about writing for a mark.

Community Efforts:

I also had/have the grade seven students participating in projects where they have become ambassadors of good will. Our annual food drive is an example where homerooms challenge each other to bring in the most goods during the month of December. Leadership students then load the food onto a school bus and hand deliver it to a local food bank. Students help stock shelves and hear from volunteers how important such a large donation is to the less fortunate. Students are more than willing to post experiences such as these to Edmodo, where the word ‘powerful’ comes to mind while reading them. Other examples of where students have engaged in helping the less fortunate are Free the Children and Cops for Cancer. Term four leadership seven students are proud to have aided in raising over $2000 for the Cops for Cancer Foundation.
Student Voice and Recommendations:

I feel as if I have made great progress in teaching this grade seven leadership course but I am unsure if it has achieved its goal as of reducing the rise in unwanted behavior. Truthfully, I do not believe one course has the ability to accomplish such a challenging goal. I have come to believe there are other factors in play, which need to be addressed if we are to succeed in having this particular grade level behave appropriately.

In speaking frankly with students on this topic, two general themes always seem to surface. First, they are bored not with school but how curriculum is being taught. They feel the old stand and deliver textbook style curriculum needs revamping. Classes are seventy minutes long and they are finding it difficult to sit that long, class after class. They would like to see curriculum delivered employing a mix of bookwork, hands-on activities and technology together. Through social media students are seeing examples of where teachers are allowing students a choice on how to demonstrate their learning, rather than just the usual pen and paper. I am not sure anything can be done to address such a sensitive issue as long as teacher autonomy remains as strong as it is today. I do believe however, it is the teacher’s responsibility to constantly self reflect and question why the students are misbehaving in class rather than avoiding the problem altogether by sending students down to the office. I had to self reflect after term one and now deliver
curriculum, which is engaging and enjoyable, where student misbehavior is now of little concern.

The second area of concern the students felt in need of attention was the lack of overall activities offered by the school. There are a number of students who arrive at school early and other than the volleyball leadership program, students have nowhere else other than the hallways to wait for classes to begin. Lunchtime is another occasion where little is offered by the school to keep students occupied. This lack of activity is partially due to several teachers withdrawing their volunteer services for various reasons but mainly because of the resentful feelings leftover from past labor disputes. This lack of teacher involvement has also affected after school programs as well where the outside community now runs whatever programs are still offered.

The lack of lunchtime activities is the main concern and during one class we feel we have come up with a solution. The approach is a threefold implementation process, which uses leadership students, noon hour supervisors and student identification. We offer four activity areas (games room/large gym) where one supervisor (adult) and two leadership students stand at the entrance. Students can only enter by handing over their student identification, the key to this whole process. If a student misbehaves he or she is asked to leave, without their I.D., so they cannot gain access to another area. The I.D. is handed over to administration where further
action can be properly taken. I then asked what if a student is removed repeatedly? They felt some sort of school community service (recycling) should be completed to earn their identification back. I brought this student led proposal to my administration team and they thought it was a brilliant idea needing further investigation.

Conclusion:

In an attempt to address rising behavioral concerns at Hatzic Secondary, administrators felt inserting a leadership course specifically for grade sevens would have the ability to remedy the situation over time. In doing so, what they had done was to simply delegate this responsibility onto me, the teacher. Up for the challenge, I began to develop a course, which I quickly realized focused more on the wants of my administration team rather than the needs of my students. As term one came to a close, I recognized the curriculum I had created/taught needed revisiting and transforming. As I made the necessary modifications to my curriculum, I didn’t realize was how much this change would alter my approach towards teaching and student learning (pedagogy).

What began as a quest to create a leadership seven course and implement its behavioral focused curriculum into the everyday lives of adolescents, ended up affecting the entire school culture. I now believe when one attempts to introduce
any course to students we need to make meaningful connections with its curriculum. As the school year comes to a close I feel there is much room to continue improving this course. I have learned through the process of writing this paper that great educators are constantly evaluating their practice while looking for innovative ways in which to improve. The theme hallways are an example where I want to challenge next year’s students to think of ways in which to expand into other areas of the school.

Next year will be a year of change for many, as Hatzic transitions into implementing a middle school model. Both staff and students will be uneasy, which undoubtedly will challenge everyone’s confidence. I believe the next step for me is to offer an afterschool program, which I have, coined ‘Confidence Camp’. I feel there is a need for an extension of the values/ethics/character curriculum I am already teaching to all students. The camp will have a multi-faceted approach where both the mind and body is addressed. I have instructed students for nearly a quarter of a century and I feel a sense of total fulfillment when I build the confidence of others. Writing this paper and completing the Masters Program has truly built my confidence over the last two years and I feel it is my duty to pass this self-assurance knowledge onto those in need of a helping hand. Providing a bit of my time to help improve others and also the culture of my school is not too much to ask and falls into the category of a servant leader, traits I truly admire.
I do believe the true purpose of attaining a Masters Degree is to create change not only in oneself but in others as well. There has been a dramatic shift in the culture of my school due to this assignment and hopefully over time it will address many of the behavioral concerns that still exist. I feel my colleagues have been reenergized with my progress over the last two years and seem to have a renewed outlook. They have witnessed firsthand how one person can inspire others to work cohesively towards achieving a common goal. If we desire students to be caring and respectful I feel we need to tackle this issue using this same teamwork approach and not expect one course and one teacher to come to the rescue. We need the entire school community working together when addressing this issue and then and only then do I believe success can be achieved.
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