THE BENEFIT OF CREATING A CULTURE OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP ON

SCHOOL AGED STUDENTS

by

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A Paper

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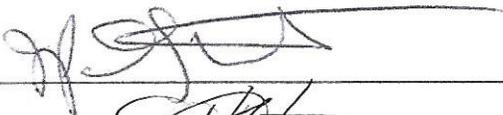In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Abstract

This capstone paper will explore the different theories surrounding the development of leadership in students. Students will learn skills beginning from leadership vocabulary to living and practicing the leadership habits daily. Examining data from several schools that have successfully implemented leadership culture, I assess which models have had the best impact on student success. Drawing on the current research, I argue that the development and implementation of a leadership culture in grade school has a number of positive outcomes including attendance, increased results in literacy and numeracy achievement, behavioural improvements, future success in the workplace and for life. The capstone places particular interest in how leadership affects at risk populations such as First Nations, Metis and Inuit Learners and English Language Learners. Student leadership culture is an opportunity to give all students the chance to be leaders and develop lifelong leadership skills to benefit them throughout their lives.

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The Benefits of Creating a Culture of Student Leadership on School Aged Students

Chapter 1: Introduction

This capstone research project will focus on the development of a culture of student leadership in schools to provide all students the opportunity to lead and to realize the benefits of such opportunities. In this paper I will explore that the more opportunities for students to lead at a young age, the more likely they will become leaders in the future (Pozner, 2012). The problem that exists in our current schools is that students lack strong analytical skills. Students often have little interest or enthusiasm for learning or for being an active and integral part of the community as a whole (Covey, 2008). An intrinsically motivated person needs to have passion and drive, thus if we are able to develop a drive for learning at a young age we can support development of a world with leaders. A sense of leadership will continue into their high school and post-secondary experiences as well as in the eventual work place (Covey, 2008). The practical application for encouraging a passion for learning clearly pertains to student leadership opportunities, through leadership in the school students will develop the ability and skills necessary to lead intrinsically, without being told or being directed to lead. Another practical application is the opening up of leadership opportunities in the wider community and future workplace. Student leadership also benefits business communities who look for leaders in their organizations. This type of practical application can be used in any school or business setting (Pozner, 2012).

Background

Concerns have arisen from parents wanting to ensure that their children will have the key competencies to make them successful in the workplace and in life. Engaging student leadership at a young age can give children the skills necessary to survive in workplaces within today's demanding and competitive climate (Covey, 2008). My goal is to develop a culture of leadership that is impactful on students and results in observable benefits to all members of the school environment. Studies have identified that higher student achievement in literacy and numeracy is one benefit of establishing a culture of student leadership (Covey, 2008). The school climate is the main determining factor for student success, increased attendance, less behavioral referrals and an overall feeling of connection to the school (Hough & Schmitt, 2011).

A main area of emphasis for all elementary and junior high schools is competency in literacy and numeracy. Student leadership can help achieve success in both these areas and have lasting impacts on a student's future. Another focal point with schools is how to reach at risk learners, including First Nation, Metis and Inuit and English Language Learners (hereby referred to as ELL). There is certainly more that can be done by educators to engage such students in school and connect them with their learning to achieve more academic success today and in their futures. As the research presented will show, this can be achieved through the creation of a culture of student leadership.

The research question that this project will intend to address is: How would the development of a culture of student leadership benefit student achievement and engagement for both the school and the wider community?

Purpose

The aim of this research project is to look at the immediate and long term benefits of developing a culture of student leadership for school aged children. The study draws on and applies previous research that reviews different ways of establishing a culture of student leadership and the benefits for the student and school community as a whole. Through the establishment of a culture of student leadership I predict a variety of benefits such as increased attendance, a reduction in behavioural referrals to the office, improvements in both literacy and numeracy and an increased sense of connection to the school. Developing a culture of student leadership will require a long term commitment with years of dedicated focus; determining the timeframe in which a culture of leadership can be developed will be one of the challenges of my project.

This study will be qualitative in nature as I will be studying, analyzing and interpreting the research of others. In part, I will also look at students' overall sense of joy and increased confidence. Through my research I will determine the best practices for establishing a culture of leadership in the future. The focus of this study will be based on students at a school aged level, at risk students, First Nations Metis and Inuit students and ELL. The results of this research will demonstrate various methods, techniques and best practices that can be implemented in order to develop a culture of leadership in a school environment and highlight the resulting benefits for students.

The aim of this plan is to look specifically at the advantages of creating a culture of student leadership. My proposed hypothesis is that there will be marked increase in literacy and numeracy. I also believe that there will be a drop in behavioral concerns and an increase in a sense of connectivity and engagement in school events. To conclude this project, I will highlight

the benefits of establishing a culture of student leadership within school environments for primary and secondary aged students.

Theoretical Framework

Alberta Education and the School Act place focus on student attendance, thus in this I will examine the relationship between student leadership and attendance rates. In following our educational obligations through the School Act Section 18 1 (D) "to Encourage and foster learning in student" (Province of Alberta, 2015), I will also look at the effects of student leadership on student learning. In the words of the school district's Value and Core Commitments, "We nurture the inherent spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, creative, physical, and emotional giftedness of everyone in our schools" (Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 4, page 67). This area of our school board division policies, in relation to student leadership culture, will also be studied and connections between them will be highlighted.

In this study Covey's (2008) theories will be explored and best practices for creating a culture of student leadership will help define the focus. I will highlight the ideas found in, *The Leader in Me,* and the theories that surround the inspiration for these books and look specifically at Covey's "7 Habits." Theories of Kouzes and Posner (2005, 2012, 2014), looking specifically at what practices can be implemented for the benefit of our students in creating student leadership will also be a part of the research and development plan.

The focus of the research will be to locate qualitative data of elementary and middle schools that reveal improvements in literacy and numeracy achievement as a direct result of student leadership culture. I will also look at attendance levels and the number of referrals to the

office before and after the establishment of a culture of student leadership. The qualitative data analysis methods of Renner's (2003) "Analyzing Data" will guide the research shown in this Capstone.

Scope and Delimitations

This study will look specifically at school aged students in both primary and secondary schools, and the benefits of creating a culture of student leadership on these students. This study will not look at post-secondary students and the impact of leadership on those students.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence: The period following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult.

Creating culture: The act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties. The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.

Creating positive school climate: Bringing a good, affirmative, or constructive quality or attribute into existence. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

At risk students: Used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school.

Educational leadership: The process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims.

English language learners: or ELL, are students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds, and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses.

Student leadership: Whether in a formal position or not, students who nurture abilities in themselves and others in order to make an ethical and socially just impact on the school or in the larger community.

Student culture of leadership: The beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions. The term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity. Leaders consider the greater good and strive to improve their communities. They are aware of how their service to others influences their leadership experiences and contributes to their own growth and development.

School aged: The age range of children normally attending school. Primary and secondary students. Ages 5-18 who are attending school.

Significance of Study

The capstone will focus on the benefits of creating a culture of student leadership for school aged students. It will bring awareness to what can be accomplished through the development of these leadership qualities in students. It will focus on what can specifically be done to help increase student leadership within the school setting for students. Chapter two will

focus on the benefits for students, in terms of literacy, numeracy, less referrals to the office for behavioral concerns, an increase in student attendance and an increased sense of connectivity to the school community. This chapter will also focus on the benefits for at risk students, First Nations, Metis and Inuit students and English language learners. Finally, chapter three will focus on possible implementation models to encourage a culture of student leadership for school aged students and address the difficulties in its development.

This study is significant in my teaching community as Lethbridge, Alberta, is surrounded by the largest First Nations Reserve in Canada. Due to this, there is a large number of students of First Nations background from the Kainai Nation also known as the Blood Tribe. We also have a large number of students who are English Language Learners. Therefore, this model of leadership is a good way to engage and integrate these students in particular into our school communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is growing literature on the effects of student leadership and this research draws on a number of important and current studies. The desire to develop confidence and leadership skills in school aged students is becoming a growing trend, knowing that the proven benefits include an increase in student academic results in literacy and numeracy. Other significant benefits include an increase in student attendance and less referrals to the office for behavioral concerns (Covey, 2008). Additionally, students overall express a greater sense of connection to the school and school community which has a variety of benefits for all stakeholders, including the students, teachers, school community, and community as a whole. The ability of students being able to lead and to set and achieve goals is of great benefit to all members involved and society as a whole. The more opportunities for students to lead at a young age, the more likely they will become leaders in the future (Pozner, 2012).

Literature Review

Supporting programs or cultivating and encouraging leadership in each and every student will help students be successful in school. In Covey's (2008) guidelines for the process of developing a leader, he suggests that the first step is establishing a clear mission statement for the school and for each individual class. The students generate the classroom mission statement themselves and include in it what they want their class to strive to be daily. Here is an example: In our classroom we are kind and caring group who practice the 7 habits daily, we are strong and proud, we set goals and achieve them, we build each other up, we help each other, and we are a classroom family. Students are then given leadership roles within the classroom and the school as a whole. The leadership roles in the classroom can range anywhere from table leader- the

student who ensures that the tables are all wiped before and after lunch. To spirit leader- the

masters of ceremony for the monthly assemblies and plans all the spirit days for the school.

Through such responsibilities as well as the various opportunities for public speaking, students

develop strong leadership skills. Covey (2008) states that it is necessary to devote time to

developing the uniqueness of every child's mind and to encourage his/her potential.

The students are also taught to understand and implement the "7 Habits." The "7 Habits"

are developed through leadership language and goal setting as to how to make decisions

throughout your day and life. According to Covey (2008), if students can develop an

understanding of the "7 Habits" at a young age, they can achieve great things for their futures.

The "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" include the following: Habit 1: Be Proactive, Habit 2:

Begin with the End in Mind, Habit 3: Put First Things First, Habit 4: Think Win-Win, Habit 5:

Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, Habit 6: Synergize, Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

(Covey, p. 21). These habits address more than how to learn something new, but to encourage

students to become an integral part of the teaching experience. This is an alternative and more

effective model compared to the traditional classroom setting (Covey, 2008) where teachers are

assumed experts who impart knowledge to students. This type of learning is more active and

dynamic. The "7 Habits" are incorporated into all lessons and activities in the schools. They are

posted in all the hallways and visible to all who enter the school, indicating that the school

consists of student leaders and a strong student culture. Developing leadership culture and

building up every student as a leader and as a loved and appreciated person each day is necessary

in this process of learning the 7 habits (Covey, 2008).

Covey (2008) highlights the journey taken by several American schools following the 7

Habits and developing a leadership climate in their schools. A study was conducted to determine

what employers and business leaders are looking for in their current employees. Based on this, Covey developed skills to help students become these types of leaders at a young age. In his study, Covey includes testimony from various schools that became a Leader in Me School and developed a culture of leadership. Hearing about their own journeys and experiences is helpful in establishing a leadership community in my own school. Research has been conducted to show a marked improvement in reading and math scores after the schools incorporated the 7 habits principles. Covey (2008) highlights a variety of schools from around the globe, showing that the benefit of developing a leadership culture can be far reaching. However, most of the data collected is from American schools in low socio-economic communities. This capstone will provide a Canadian perspective and filling this geographical gap in scholarship through my research.

The development of student leadership culture is also supported in literature by Kouzes and Posner (2014). They encourage the following "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership,": Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. The other practices to further develop leaders include: finding your voice and leading by example as well as finding and celebrating achievements big or small (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). These practices help develop student leaders and inspire others to do the same. Providing leadership opportunities encourages students to take the time to develop relationships and to be present and listen during all aspects of their schooling and lives. All aspects of developing student leadership culture requires hard work and time to develop. Once developed, the benefits will be evident through increased individual student achievement, the confidence to speak publically, and the initiative to take on future leadership responsibilities. Kouzes and

Posner (2014) argue that by integrating these practices into our teaching we can develop student leaders.

Schneider & Douglas (2010) looked at the success of a conference that was intended to build leaders from all different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. Activities were developed based on the student diversity as a way to bring all students together within a middle school environment. The intent of the conference was to build strong leaders who would continue to take their newly learned skills and develop them in their respective schools. Students were given the tools to return to their schools and help their peers from different backgrounds and cultures to also become leaders. Leadership is about tolerance and working with everyone. Some of the noted benefits include the breaking down of prejudice towards immigrants and support for new students experiencing culture shock in a foreign educational environment. A school setting that promotes student leadership also encourages community building and integration (Schneider & Douglas, 2010).

Also highlighting the benefits of student leadership, Hough and Schmitt (2011) support developing a positive school climate and the impact this can have on students. They encourage increased professional development for educators to be properly trained in dealing with a diverse student body. The benefits of creating a culture of student leadership range from improved student achievement and attendance to a positive behavioral change for at-risk students. School leaders can be the determining factor of a positive school environment, thereby increasing overall student success. Educational districts as a whole are taking a closer look at Hough and Schmitt's (2011) study to place more emphasis on cultivating a positive school climate that benefits students. As school climates need to improve, school districts are looking at ways to increase professional development and lead the schools in the right direction. School resources

and finances are being put in this direction to create new policies and get schools on board with constructing more positive school environments (Hough & Schmitt, 2011). Although this was one study and one specific way of looking at school climate, Hough & Schmitt (2011) provide data that shows the benefit of a positive school climate and the related impact on student success and achievement, which could be applied to almost all schools.

Posner (2012) looks into the different methods of evaluating leadership using The Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI) as outlined in *The Leadership Challenge*. He compares and reviews data, analyzing the differences between gender, ethnic backgrounds and institutional level in regards to leadership practices. Posner (2012) shows the benefit of starting leadership practices at a young age. He also demonstrates the value of students having leadership opportunities early on and how these opportunities will lead to more leadership role.

Developing confidence, positive habits, and good leadership skills in middle school-aged students, or teenagers, has proven to increase one's academic evaluations as well as leadership in cultural groups that are in need. Such groups would include English language learners, First Nations, Metis and Inuit and at-risk students. Bowman (2013) highlights the benefits of developing student leadership at the Middle School level. For example, he has noted the benefits for students of Aboriginal background who, through leadership opportunities, develop connections to others and feel that they belong to a group. Tapping into positive social interactions and making the student feel part of the school community will lead the student to more positive behaviours in the future. Developing more opportunities in school can help the student develop personally and learn. Leading yourself through the mastery of leadership is about being present and making connections to others in all situations that one encounters (Bowman, 2013). Although Bowman (2013) only focuses on one particular Native American

community, the benefits for that community in relation to the development of leaders can be used as a model for other schools looking to establish a culture of leadership.

In "Student Leadership Development: A Functional Framework," which focuses on a Catholic school in Perth, Hine (2014), does a quantitative study of the role that leadership has in schools. Over the course of three years, different methods of collecting data were used to research the benefits of student leadership in the school. Hine (2014) looked at leadership growth and the different methods used to achieve this growth. A focus is placed on teaching students how to public speak to help build confidence. Specific leadership roles were given to certain students and these students then received individual training to help develop their roles. The data found that student awareness of social issues increased as the students had a growing sense of empowerment. More empowerment and deeper awareness of social issues is another positive effect of implementing student leadership. Thus, leadership is of value to both the student and to the school culture. Hine (2014) has a bias towards Catholic Education and many of the leadership ideas and practices are centered on the idea of Christian Leadership. Hine (2014) had substantial data to support the findings of the research, yet all of the studies were carried out on a population of largely Caucasian students from a low to middle socioeconomic background.

According to Allen, Shankman & Miguel (2012), leadership is not seen as a process that takes time, patience and work but more as a result of environment. Creating this environment can improve results in self-efficacy (Allen et al, 2012). A strong link has been found between leadership and the capacity to improve in the following six areas: emotional self-control, emotional self-perception, flexibility, optimism, and empathy (Allen et al, 2012).

Student leadership also has a direct impact on the group's behaviour and the ability to attain goals as a team. There is a strong relationship between the student leader and the followers. Groups working together have a greater ability to solve more challenging problems together. The engagement levels of the followers help with yielding more successful outcomes in challenging situations (Allen et al, 2012).

In his study of student leadership, Covey (2008) emphasizes the improvement in student achievement and enhanced self-confidence and a drastic drop in discipline problems. Through the opportunity of being a leader, students gain self-confidence and the ability to solve problems and get along with each other. With student leaders there are often fewer disagreements and acts of disrespect between students, which allows teachers to focus more on academics instead of resolving conflicts and enacting disciplinary measures (Covey, 2008). Joseph Welsh Elementary in Red Deer reported a drop in 67% of referrals to the office for disciplinary incidents, once a culture of student leadership had been established (Covey, 2008). Another School in Adams Country, Illinois reported a significant improvement in the Illinois Standard Achievement Test scores for both math and reading results. Reading improved by 32.3% and math by 22.6% (Covey, 2008).

Covey (2008) maintains that through leadership opportunities students also often develop a love for learning and are better prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing work force. Through the development of student leadership, students also develop a creative mind which is necessary in our present business climate. Students are developing the skills to solve their own problems and the skills to become successful in the world. Moreover, students' self-confidence increases, which is evident through their actions and increased use of leadership language. Students also develop respect for one another and the ability to work together (Covey, 2008).

Increase in overall connectivity resulting in increased attendance can also be seen as a benefit of creating a culture of student leadership. In schools with high risk student populations, attendance goals are being met as a result of increased student leadership (Covey, 2008). Furthermore, in schools that use leadership to set group and individual goals the students are rising to meet the challenges.

Leadership goal setting helps to track progress and successes for special needs students. Tracking goals using Data Notebooks has proven to yield high results for students receiving speech therapy (Covey, 2008). According to Covey (2008), the tracking of behavior in the Data Notebooks has also resulted in less behavior interventions necessary for special needs students.

Summary

As presented, much research supports the benefit of establishing a culture of student leadership in schools. Covey (2008) maintains that by providing all students with the opportunity to lead, they will all have the same opportunity for greater success. Covey has a number of school examples in the United States and a few in Canada, while including a Canadian perspective, his study is limited and thus my interest in extending his study to Canadian Schools. This does support and give a Canadian perspective Kouzes and Posner (2014) want students to develop relationships and encourage others to inspire. They encourage the integration leadership practices into daily teaching to achieve the greatest impact on students. Schneider and Douglas (2010) want to build leaders from all different backgrounds. Encouraging students of all backgrounds and building all students up to encourage community.

The positives benefits of creating a culture of student leadership can be easily seen in improvements of the student as an individual, the school as a whole and the community. Individually the student has an opportunity to build on their own strengths and improve on their

weaknesses by having the opportunity to lead at a young age (Pozner, 2012). By creating the opportunity to build analytical skills to increase student drive, motivation and rigour, we are helping to instill the skills necessary for today's business setting and life (Pozner, 2012). Using leadership as a means to bridge students from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds is a positive benefit for the entire school community.

Students generally respond positively to the establishment of a leadership culture. Effective leadership practices and goal setting have shown strong improvements in students both academically and mentally, especially in their levels of self-esteem. Students also learn the importance of self-motivation and leading oneself. Any opportunity to develop connections and feel part of a school community is positive for all students (Bowman, 2013).

Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

Summary

This capstone research project focused on the development of a culture of student leadership in schools and highlights the benefits of the creation of this culture. Research supports several important studies that establish a set of guiding principles on what a culture of student leadership is and what benefits school aged students can gain from such opportunities in school. Benefits include an increase in the academic results for First Nations Metis and Inuit students and ELL learners; increased attendance and overall connection to the school; as well as improved results in literacy and numeracy.

Data from Ecole St. Mary, in Lethbridge, Alberta, has shown that with the establishment of a culture of student leadership, academic results on Provincial Achievement exams improved for all students and particularly for First Nations Metis and Inuit students. In literacy, for example, the English Acceptable standard increased from 43.8 % in 2013 to 84% in 2016. Standard of Excellence increased from 10.4 % in 2013 to 23% in 2016. According to the Accountability Pillar Results of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR, 2016), numeracy results also showed a marked increase for all students as the Math Acceptable Standard raised from 41.7 % in 2013 to 80.4% in 2016. Additionally, the Standard of Excellence results reveal an increase from 6.3% in 2013 to 17.6% in 2016 (Alberta Education, 2016). These results indicate radical improvements in literacy and numeracy as a direct result of the establishment of a culture of student leadership at Ecole St. Mary.

The Accountability Pillar Results of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR) highlight the specific results of our First Nations Metis and Inuit students. First Nations Metis and Inuit students' results on writing Achievement Exams at Ecole St. Mary appear to have

improved or maintained measure of evaluation overall. An "Acceptable" level of achievement

for First Nations, Metis and Inuit students is 47.5% up from 28.6% the previous year. Creating a

culture of student leadership has succeeded in narrowing this gap and increasing the learning

results for our First Nations Metis and Inuit students at the elementary age. Once students have

reached junior high and high school the learning gap has usually widened tremendously and thus

needs to be addressed at an early age.

Finding success through student leadership for First Nations student and ELL learners

will lead our students to greater academic successes. This will also lead to increased student

attendance for our First Nations Metis and Inuit students. Developing more leadership

opportunities in school can also help students develop themselves and feel connected to the

school environment (Bowman, 2013). Placing a focus on the attendance and academic

achievement of the First Nations Metis and Inuit students of Ecole St. Mary School will have a

positive impact on our entire school population. In order to close the achievement gap for our

First Nations Metis and Inuit students and increase High School achievement, initiatives need to

be implemented in Elementary school to build student leadership. Continuing to build a culture

of student leadership will help to meet the needs of our students in terms of academic

achievement and attendance, as students will feel a greater sense of connectivity to the school

and community. Community building through leadership can be used to strengthen learning for

the community as a whole (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

Student leadership also extends into the community in preparing students for the

demanding and ever changing work environment. To reiterate the main research question for

this project: How would the development of a culture of student leadership benefit student

achievement and engagement for both the school and the wider community? The Accountability

Pillar Results of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR) highlights the effects on students'

"Preparation for Lifelong Learning, World of Work and Citizenship" (Alberta Education, 2016).

After a culture of student leadership was created at Ecole St. Mary, there was a discernible

increase in the number of people who agreed with the following statement: "percentage of

teachers and parents who agree that students are taught attitudes and behaviours that will make

them successful at work when they finish school" (Alberta Education, 2016). In 2012, 61%

agreed with this statement whereas in 2016 91% agreed, according to the 2016 AERR results.

Recommendations

Developing a culture of student leadership in an elementary school environment in which

students are intrinsically motivated and self-driven to lead can take a number of dedicated years

to implement. If this drive for learning and leadership can be established at a young age it can

carry on throughout high school, post-secondary and eventually the work place. The current

overall lack of strong analytical skills interest and enthusiasm for learning can be overcome

through student leadership and creating a leadership culture (Covey, 2008).

To develop an atmosphere of leadership, the first step is to slowly introduce classroom

lessons that follow Covey's "Seven Habits" (2008). Once the habits have been introduced the

language of leadership can begin to permeate throughout the school, playground and community.

As a classroom, the students can develop a class mission statement that is then posted for all to

see and be reminded of. When students practice leadership and follow the "Seven habits," they

can be publically or privately acknowledged through a "Random Acts of Leadership" bulletin

board that is written by other students (Covey p.113). Positive examples of leadership can also

be broadcast on the daily announcements to encourage others to follow these habits and be

leaders themselves. One of the main objectives is to give the students a common language through bulletin boards, songs and quotes visible throughout the school (Covey, 2008).

Students can also be acknowledged in monthly leadership assemblies, which are entirely run by the students. These sessions allow students an opportunity to speak publically and increase their self-confidence and self-worth (Hine, 2004). Students have the opportunity to plan the assembly and come up with roles for all students participating. The assembly is upbeat with the goal of encouraging the heart of all students present, showing the value of student leadership and recognizing the contributions of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The next step for the development of student leadership culture is to assign all students in the school leadership roles (Hine, 2004). Giving students a chance to lead at a young age will increase their opportunities to lead in the future (Posner, 2012). One role could be student greeters to welcome all students and parents to the school at the front doors (Covey, 2008). Students have leadership roles within the classroom and throughout the school, so that the opportunity to lead is felt by all students. Recognition of students who are doing a wonderful job leading can also be recognized as "Leaders of the week" (Covey, 2008, p.94).

Through the development of leadership roles routine roles can be developed within the school. Through these roles also giving the students autonomy to establish creative and innovative projects within their role will give meaning and help to establish a purpose for leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Allowing students to take risks and implement projects within the school that are meaningful to them helps to create leaders and develop the school culture. Such projects could include creating and caring for a school garden, raising awareness regarding social justice issues. This involves giving leadership groups the time to plan and implement their own projects. Leadership culture develops by students looking for ways to

improve our school community through project development and innovation (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

Another step is to move forward with the collection of student data and goal setting through a "Data Notebook" (Covey, 2008, p.61). Binders which are kept up to date with the students own school data ranging from attendance to goals which the student has set for him or herself. The data only represents the individual student's data, so they are only compared to themselves and only compete against themselves and their own goals (Covey, 2008). Kouzes and Posner (2012) view goal setting as a means of keeping oneself focused and staying on track with one's intentions. Teacher's also need to routinely provide critical feedback on the goals that the student has set. Goals and feedback need to come together to keep moving in the right direction to fulfill the goals that are set (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).

Pulling all of these elements together to create a culture of student leadership will ultimately bring all members of the school together to feel part of the community. When the community is together with common language, goal setting and leadership roles, then all members feel like they are part of the community (Bowman, 2013). Once the feeling of community is established then the students, including at risk leaners, feel connected.

Conclusion

The potential benefits of creating a culture of student leadership have no bounds. Closing the gap surrounding student motivation and instilling a sense of enthusiasm for learning at a young age can be established through the development of a culture of student leadership. The building of strong analytical skills and creating a community working together towards common goals with a common language and mission is essential to this development. Creating

opportunities for students to lead creates future leaders. Establishing leaders at a young age only sets students up for success in their future schooling or business/work environment.

When developing a culture of student leadership to benefit student achievement and engagement in the school and wider community, all students need to be given equal opportunity to lead. At risk learners, in particular, need to be at the center of the planning to ensure that all learners receive the benefits of increased literacy and numeracy levels. Additional benefits include less referrals to the office for behavioral concerns and building a greater sense of connection to the school environment. Once they have completed school, learning behaviours established at a young age will only make students more successful in their future careers. As evidenced by these numerous benefits, a culture of student leadership needs to be shared with students at a young age.

At Ecole St. Mary, in Lethbridge, the establishment of a culture of student leadership has had numerous benefits. Notably, it has aided in closing the achievement gap for the all students and particularly for First Nations Metis and Inuit students who have demonstrated dramatic increases in literacy and numeracy rates.   In fact, results have shown great improvements for all learners in literacy, numeracy and a higher standard of excellence on the Provincial Achievement Test results for all students. Through giving all students the opportunity to lead and to be successful has shown to a benefit through the data results. Students have furthermore shown an overall sense of joy and increased confidence through the establishment of leadership culture. The culture of the school has positively shifted resulting in greater academic achievement and an overall sense of connectivity to the school community.

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