

# TOMORROW'S LEADERS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

## Reader #1. Literature Search on Youth Leadership

### Introduction

There are literally thousands of articles on adult leadership, but far fewer on youth leadership, and next to none on youth leadership for sustainability. This paper provides a limited literature search of some of the available documents on this topic and includes the following sections;

[Models of Adult and Youth Leadership](#)

[Preparing Young People for the Future Workplace](#)

[A More Formal Approach to Youth Leadership](#)

[Youth Development](#)

### Models of Adult and Youth Leadership

There are many different definitions of leadership. Van Linden and Fertman (1998), for example, define leaders as: "... people who think for themselves, communicate their thoughts and feelings, and help others understand and act on their own beliefs; they influence others in an ethical and socially responsible way. (p. 30)"

However, many authors argue that the models and definitions of adult leadership are not necessarily applicable to young people.

Roach et al (1999) revisited different adult leadership models and carried out a 10 year longitudinal study of youth-based organisations in the US. In their paper, the authors argue that our understanding of youth leadership is quite different to models of adult leadership, suggesting that young people are more interested in developing leadership within their groups, and for the benefit of the group, than in individual leadership.

Their research suggests that for young people, leadership is about:

- Responding to specific situations – It is important to be able to "assess situations quickly and step forward or backward in taking direction for the benefit of the group (p. 19)." This is often known as Situational leadership in which "Leadership arises in response to specific situations (p.19). Youth repeatedly emphasise how today's leader may be tomorrow's follower." Young people define themselves more by the particular activity group to which they belong, rather than their position in the workplace as it is with many adults.
- Teamwork and commitment to relationships – This is about working towards achieving goals for the team. One young leader said: "What it boils down to is that the real power isn't whether you're being a leader or a follower. The power comes from working as a team (p. 18)."
- Equality of chance and a willingness to pitch in – One young person described this as – "... we're all leaders. Basically, everyone just brings something. We're all just one leader (p.18)."

- Respecting the different strengths and viewpoints of others – One young person said “We just look up to each other; it (leadership) matters on different things. It matters what we’re doing because some people do better at some things than others (p. 18).”
- Caring about others in the group – This is about “self-knowledge and helpful relations to others ... (p. 19).” The basic premise is that once young people “understand themselves, (they) will be able to lead others (p. .”
- Changing and fluid nature of leadership – friendship and work groups change, but this brings different combinations of skills and knowledge
- Consultation and collaboration – asking other people’s opinions and working together
- Effective communication – in all forms

Roach et al (1999) believe that teachers and educators can best help young people with leadership by “finding ways for young people to commit to work that will benefit others and be judged by tough criteria (p. 13)”. For school programs, this suggests that leadership can be developed through meaningful group projects.

### Preparing Young People for the Future Workplace

In Australia, schools and tertiary bodies are faced with the challenge of preparing young people for positions in the future workplace and in society.

According to an Australia Report titled “*Employability Skills for the Future*” (ACC, 2002), the key skills needed to increase one’s employability include the following:

- “**communication** skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
- **team work** skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
- **problem-solving** skills that contribute to productive outcomes;
- **initiative and enterprise** skills that contribute to innovative outcomes;
- **planning and organising** skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;
- **self-management** skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
- **learning** skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
- **technology** skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.”

Many of the above skills can be developed thorough school leadership programs.

### A More Formal Approach to Youth Leadership

Ricketts and Rudd (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature around youth leadership development and developed “a conceptual model for teaching, training and developing leadership in youth.”

The five dimensions of this conceptual model are:

1. “Leadership Knowledge and Information
2. Leadership Attitude, Will and Desire
3. Decision making, Reasoning and Critical Thinking

4. Oral and Written Communication Skills
5. Intra and Interpersonal Relations ( p. 2)”

Each dimension can be taught on three different levels or orders of thinking: Awareness, Interaction and Integration.

A National Association of Colleges and Employees (2000) US study, quoted in Ricketts and Rudd (2002) found that the **Top Ten Personal Qualities Employers Seek** are:

1. Communication skills
  2. Motivation/initiative
  3. Teamwork skills
  4. Leadership skills
  5. Academic achievement
  6. Interpersonal skills
  7. Flexibility/adaptability
  8. Technical skills
  9. Honesty/integrity - more ethical leadership
  10. Work ethic\*
  - 10 Analytical/problem-solving skills\*
- \*Equal

“... people do their best when they do the thing they love, when they are in their element. ... We have to recognize that most great learning happens in groups. The collaboration is the stuff of growth.” Sir Ken Robinson – leading UK educationalist

Leadership programs can help young people with many of the above qualities. The same study found that the seven top skills required by employers of new graduates were related to leadership. These skills were:

1. Interpersonal
2. Teamwork
3. Verbal Communication
4. Analytical
5. Computer
6. Written Communication
7. Leadership

From their research, the authors suggested that formal youth leadership training is often provided by youth organisations, but, until recently, has not been the domain of the school curriculum. They believe that a formal school curriculum can complement the leadership development opportunities provided by these extra school organisations.

Research by Carter and Spotanski (1989) “found that students who received formal leadership training scored higher than students who had not received leadership training on nine of the top ten personal qualities that employers seek.” (Ricketts and Rudd, 2002, p. 3)

According to Bennis and Nanus (1985) (quoted in Ricketts and Rudd, 2005) all people have the potential for leadership. Taylor (2008) shares this belief. He says:

“... anyone in a sustainability-focused organisation could potentially be a leader at some point in time if they are involved in a process of influence that involves encouraging sustainable practices. It is also possible for groups of people (including organisations) to be leaders. Thus, from this perspective, leadership can be seen as both an individual and group-based phenomenon. (p. 2)”

“... leadership can be taught and learnt ... although some people have greater potential for leadership than others due to their innate personality traits (p. 4).”

DesMaria, Yang and Farzenhkia (2000) propose several essential elements for the development of youth leadership, including:

- “Youth/adult partnerships
- Granting young people decision-making power and responsibility for consequences
- A broad context for learning and service
- Recognition of young people’s experience, knowledge and skills (p. 3)”

### Youth Development

Resnick (2005) believes that research over many years shows that to promote healthy youth development we need to promote “protective factors ... events, opportunities and experiences that promote confidence and competence, and protect young people from harm (p. 398)”. He concludes that “Research revealed the importance of feeling a strong senses of connectedness to parents and family, to other pro-social supportive adults as well as the protective effects of feeling connected to school and experiencing a sense of spirituality ... (p. 398).”

Researchers from the Australian Temperament Project have been studying a group of young people from mid teens to early adulthood, looking at the five main factors of doing well: “social competence, satisfaction with life, civic engagement, ability to trust and others and trust in authorities and public institutions such as courts and government.”

They found that those who were “doing well in early adulthood had much higher levels of school bonding in their late teens than the young adults who are not doing as well.” (Milburn, 2009) When predicting how successful a teenager will become as a young adult, a student’s connection with school was found to be more important than any other factor, including their personality and their relationship with their family and friends.

The researchers believe that this study stresses the importance of helping young people to develop connectedness with their school. This can be fostered by “giving students more opportunities in leadership and school decision making.” (Milburn, 2009)

JoAnn Deak, a US psychologist, reports in several publications in the differences in the brains and, of course hormone levels, of boys and girls. Girls' brains, it seems makes them more fearful when faced with challenges, but their hormones make them more caring, and cooperative. On the other hand, with boys the combination of immature prefrontal cortex, which moderates risk-taking behaviour, and surges of testosterone, makes many boys less fearful in challenging situations. Deak believes that one of the best predictors of whether a child will be happy and successful is self esteem and that this is determined by three factors: confidence, competence and connectedness. She holds that children have to do things and become good at them in order to gain confidence and competence. For girls in particular, this may mean overcoming their fears and "taking calculated risks". (Ryan, 2007) Girls are often overdeveloped in the area of connectedness, but teachers can help girls to develop in the other two areas of confidence and competence in at least a few areas.

### Conclusion

There are a number of general conclusions that can be drawn from this limited literature search:

- That the top seven skills required by employers for new graduates relate to leadership and most of the top ten personal qualities required by employers also relate to leadership.
- That young people who have undergone formal leadership training perform better on the employability skills required by employers.
- The essential elements for the development of youth leadership include:
  - Youth/adult partnerships
  - Granting young people decision-making power and responsibility for consequences
  - A broad context for learning and service
  - Recognition of young people's experience, knowledge and skills
- Formal school curriculum in leadership can complement the leadership development opportunities provided by extra school organisations.
- Everyone has the potential to be a leader, depending on the situation.
- Everyone can improve their skills to help them be more effective leaders.
- Teachers and educators can best help young people develop leadership by helping them to commit to projects that will benefit others and are judged by tough standards.
- The protective factors to promote healthy youth development include a strong sense of connectedness to parents and family, to other pro-social supportive adults as well as the protective effects of feeling connected to school and experiencing a sense of spirituality. However, connectedness to school is the single most important factor in predicting how successful a teenager will be as a young adult. Giving young people opportunities for leadership and school decision-making can help develop this connectedness.

**Youth Leadership** can be defined as – *the ability to work with a group to influence them to work, in a particular situation, on an agreed course of action that will best serve the interest of the group.*

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