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# The Emergence of Leadership in Children: The Role of Play, Athletics, and School

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**CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE**

**THE EMERGENCE OF LEADERSHIP IN CHILDREN:  
THE ROLE OF PLAY, ATHLETICS, AND SCHOOL**

SUBMITTED TO

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AND

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BY

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FOR

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing my senior thesis on children and leadership was an obvious decision for me. Since I was a child, I have known that I wanted to work with children for my career. Growing up, I also enjoyed being in various leadership positions in school, athletics, and work. I truly believe that those experiences were valuable to my personal development. In recent years, the field of leadership studies has become more popular, and I have become more interested in its importance across disciplines. Developing a thesis by combining children and leadership seemed only natural. As I learned more about leadership in children, I have discovered the importance of this relationship and I will utilize this new knowledge as I pursue my career as a teacher.

Around 400 B.C., a Chinese military leader named Sun Tzu, wrote *The Art of War*, a book that detailed the rules of war, military strategies, and overall advice for military leaders in general conflict and resolution. Many copies of the book written on bamboo slats quickly made their way to scholars, military leaders, and politicians throughout China. Not too long after that could it be found in Japan, Korea, and eventually across Asia. When it was translated to French and brought to the Western world toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Napoleon Bonaparte became the first Western leader to use it. In 1905, it was finally translated to English. Much of the advice given in *The Art of War* was not necessarily restricted to times of battle or military situations, but could be used in other challenges. For example, a popular quote from the book reads: “Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons. And they will follow you into the deepest valley.” More than 2,500 years later, the *Art of War* is still used by leaders around the world. Both Ho Chi Minh and Colin Powell used it while they served their

countries. Business executives, lawyers, and athletic coaches have used it to help them be successful at their jobs ([www.history.com/topics/the-art-of-war](http://www.history.com/topics/the-art-of-war)). All those years ago, Sun Tzu had a great understanding of leadership and shared it with the world that, in turn, has studied Sun Tzu's leadership teachings.

The study of leadership can be traced back to other writings such as Plato's *Republic* written around 380 B.C., Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (a.k.a. *Parallel Lives*) written in 1517, or Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* written in 1532. More recently, numerous leadership theories have been developed. Today's most popular theories were developed from the 1840s to as recently as 2008. In the 1840s, Thomas Carlyle popularized the Great Man Theory. In 1939, Kurt Lewin sought to identify different styles of leadership, which included autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. Max Weber proposed charismatic authority. Throughout the 1970s, a surge of leadership theories were proposed and developed – the Contingency Theory of Leadership, the Participative Leadership Theory, the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), Situational Leadership, the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Transformational Leadership. Then in 2008, Bruce Avolio and Fred Luthans proposed Authentic Leadership. While all of these theories are different in some way, they contain aspects on which most leadership scholars would agree.

Many researchers and philosophers have added to the various leadership theories through an abundance of experimental and observational studies. The broad range of theories has allowed the topic of leadership to have focuses in various fields including psychology, government, history, and philosophy. Leadership has recently become an

important subject for businesses and organizations around the world. Organizations have begun to spend a large amount of their resources to try to teach their managers how to lead (Kark, 2011). Some of the top universities and college have developed leadership institutes to study leadership and develop their students to become leaders on campus and in their careers. These include the Leadership Institute at Harvard College, the Brown Leadership Institute, the Raymond A. Rich Institute for Leadership Development of Marist College, and the Kravis Leadership Institute of Claremont McKenna College.



## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Due to the array of theories within leadership, it is impossible to have a universal definition of the term. In a general sense, however, leadership can be defined as “a type of social influence through which one successfully garners the help and support of others to achieve a common goal” (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 461). A leader is able to inspire a passion, drive, and motivation within others in order to move them to make a vision reality. As Warren G. Bennis, a pioneer of leadership studies, stated, “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision to reality” (Bennis, 1988). These definitions can very much be related to transformational leadership, one of the most popular leadership theories today. The Transformational Leadership theory emphasizes the leader’s importance in engaging and developing his or her followers in order to accomplish a goal.

### **The Big Five and Leadership**

The ability to instill this motivation in others to complete a common goal can be very complex. Acts of leadership are dependent on the situation such as the environment, the timing, the culture, the other individuals, and the end goal. Because of this complexity, an individual must have and display certain qualities in order to demonstrate effective leadership. Researchers have identified characteristics that individuals demonstrate that allow them to be effective leaders. Different researchers highlight different characteristics and stress their importance in different ways. However, most of the characteristics that leadership researchers have described can be explained through the 5-factor model of personality or the “Big Five.” In 1961, Ernest Tupes and Raymond Cristal found that five factors reoccurred within their personality analyses of various subjects (McCrae & John, 1992). Over the years, the factors first described by Tupes and

Factors have been refined and then eventually coined as the Big Five. The five factors are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Extraversion embodies an individual's propensity to be assertive, outgoing, and enthusiastic.

Extraverted individuals have initiative. Those with initiative have higher drive and tend to be more innovative and daring (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Popper & Mayseless, 2007).

Agreeableness means that an individual tends to be kind, trusting, and compassionate.

Many of the greatest and most well known leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. or

Nelson Mandela, had an important quality of leadership – a care for others. Individuals

with this quality tend to desire a personal development in their followers and therefore

are very encouraging toward those followers (Popper & Mayseless, 2007). A component

of caring for others is empathy, for in order to have a care for others, one must

understand what others are feeling. Conscientiousness represents an individual's

tendency to be reliable, productive, and achievement-oriented. It would be impossible for

a leader to encourage his or her followers to achieve a common goal if the leader did not

believe the goal to be possible. A leader must be convinced of a goal's prospective

success so that he or she can bring followers along. In other words, a leader must be

optimistic (Popper & Mayseless, 2007). Neuroticism is described as anxiousness, self-

conscious, and impulsiveness. It is the opposite of neuroticism, such as self-confidence,

that is important to this paper. Self-confidence is the most valuable attribute of

leadership. Individuals who have higher self-confidence are more persuasive and can

better handle stressful situations (Popper & Mayseless, 2007). Openness describes an

individual's openness to experiences. This person is usually curious, imaginative, and

insightful. Creativity is another, yet less discussed, quality of leadership that leaders may

demonstrate. Creative leaders are better able to find alternate solutions or ideas when solving problems or reaching goals (Fu, Canaday, & Fu, 1982).

There are two more leadership qualities that are important to mention but do not fit neatly under the Big Five personality traits. It would be very difficult to influence anyone without high verbal skills. All leaders, regardless of age, should have very good communication skills because it would allow the leader to be more clear, fluid, and therefore more convincing to his or her followers. Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were two of the most influential presidents in the history of the United States and they were both impressive speakers. Lastly, all of the above qualities would be for naught if a person does not have the motivation to lead. An individual cannot lead without the desire to do so.

### **Followership**

An important aspect of leadership that is largely ignored is followership. Good leaders should also be good followers. They know how they should follow and when they should do it. Leaders have the capacity to put aside their egos and be willing to listen to others in order to reach the final goal. In other words, leaders know when to shut up and listen. There are times when a leader may not be proficient in a task or have the knowledge needed to accomplish a goal. At these times, a leader must be willing to ask for advice and listen to those around him or her. In the times that a leader is completely unfamiliar with a task, a great leader is willing to enable a more knowledgeable and capable follower to lead. This will boost confidence and increase productivity (Zust, 2003).

## **Leadership and Children**

Despite the extensive research about leadership, there is not much research addressing leadership in young children (birth – 12 years). Much of the research regarding leadership is focused on or structured around business leaders or executives. One would think that studying leadership in children would prove to be valuable because it could give insight into the development of leadership in adults. Even at a young age, children exhibit leadership skills. Just as children learn other important skills, children can learn and build on these leadership skills through their experiences. Many developmental psychologists support the developmental importance of experiential learning (Popper & Mayseless, 2007). At a young age, children are much more prone to learning skills and retaining them throughout their life. During childhood and adolescence, an individual's behavior, personality, and skills are more malleable than they are in adulthood. Maria Montessori, a pioneer of early childhood education, believed in this idea. She heavily supported and promoted the idea of sensitive periods, the periods of a child's life when skills are best learned. Similarly, in order for an individual to develop good leadership, it is best if various skills are taught at different stages in his or her life, during the sensitive periods when certain skills are best learned (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). As detailed in the table below, Murphy and Johnson (2011) created the periods according to age ranges from 2 years up through 22 years. Although an individual continues to learn vital leadership skills past childhood, the skills learned later build off of the skills learned when young, which only stresses the importance of learning as a child. For example, in the high school – late adolescence stage (ages 15-19), an individual might need to work with others to complete a project at school or a summer

job. In order to do this effectively, he or she should have emotional intelligence in his or her interactions with others, which should be learned in the preschool years stage (ages 2-5) (Murphy, 2011). The last item in the table, “serving as a leader with multiple constituents,” may be done in young adulthood. In order to do this effectively, a leader will need to use all the skills he or she learned earlier in life such as influencing others practiced in the preschool years, coordinating others in teams practiced in elementary school, public speaking to gain support for a cause practiced in early adolescence, and motivating team members practiced in late adolescence.

*Leadership tasks and skills for youth*

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>New Leadership Tasks and Skills</b>
Preschool years (ages 2-5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Influencing others</li> <li>▪ Getting others to like you</li> <li>▪ Communicating wishes</li> <li>▪ Increased need for emotional intelligence with others (reading the emotions of others, and delaying gratification)</li> </ul>
Elementary school (ages 6-11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordinating others in teams</li> <li>▪ Earthy school leadership tasks (e.g., classroom monitor, or teacher’s helper)</li> <li>▪ Fundraising (e.g., selling candy, etc.)</li> <li>▪ Public speaking to express ideas</li> <li>▪ Increased need for social intelligence in interactions with others (understanding social situations and acting appropriately)</li> </ul>
Middle school–early adolescence (ages 12-14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordinating teams for fundraising or student projects</li> <li>▪ Self management (e.g., goal setting, self-observation &amp; evaluation)</li> <li>▪ Serving in elected office and other student government activities</li> </ul>
High school–late adolescence (ages 15-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public speaking as a leader to gain support for a cause</li> <li>▪ Organizing complex projects</li> <li>▪ Motivating team members</li> <li>▪ Organizational skills required by after school or summer jobs</li> <li>▪ Working with others to complete a work product in after school or summer jobs</li> </ul>
College–young adulthood (ages 19-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establishing grassroots organizations</li> <li>▪ Complex supervisory skills required during internships</li> <li>▪ Serving as a leader with multiple constituents</li> </ul>

The tasks important at an earlier age are still appropriate at older ages. The tasks listed for older ages are those more unique to that developmental stage.

*Figure 1:* Reprinted from “The benefits of a long-lens approach to leader development: Understanding the seeds of leadership,” by S. E. Murphy & S. K. Johnson, 2011, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(1), p. 466.

### **Where Can Children Learn Leadership?**

Children can learn leadership anywhere. They might see the red Power Ranger working with and leading his monster-fighting team. They might read a story about a king who instilled hope in his kingdom after troubling times. They might see or hear of real people as excellent leaders like Drew Brees inspiring his teammates and leading them to the Super Bowl or the president of the United States. There are places in their lives where children can learn and try leadership for themselves. The purpose of this thesis is to discuss three specific areas – play, athletics, and school – where leadership can emerge in children and the opportunities within these areas that allow children to develop and improve the qualities necessary to become a high-quality leader. There has been extensive literature on the positive effects of these three areas for children, but there has not been as much literature connecting these positive effects to leadership studies. The current paper aims to show the connection and advocate for its value.

## CHAPTER 2: PLAY

Recess. We all remember it. We went out to the schoolyard a couple times each day, screaming, yelling, and laughing. We pretended to be mommies or daddies, pirates, policemen, doctors, princesses or animals. We played kickball, tag, hide and seek, or hopscotch. It was the time of day when we did not have to sit in a chair inside a classroom and learn. However, none of us probably realized that we were still learning during recess. To us, playing was not learning. Nonetheless, three of the most important theorists in the field of child psychology – Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Erik Erikson – all contended that play is a vital component of a child’s development. Through his observation of children’s play, Piaget concluded that play gives children a valuable setting to learn about other objects, about other people, and about how the world works through their interactions with their surroundings (Kark, 2011). Piaget believed that play evolved from being very individualized to being social and interactive. This shift occurs as cognitive development progresses, which Piaget argues is partly a result of the experience of play (Nicolopoulou, 1993). Play allows children to practice and learn to interact with their peers in a free and relaxed environment. As children become more socialized through play, it also encourages children to think of perspectives other than their own (Piaget, 1962). For example, in make-believe or imaginative play, a child should consider the feelings of the other children with whom he or she is playing. For Vygotsky, imaginative play is a time of self-empowerment. It allows children to make their own rules and create an expansive world where they are the ruler. Vygotsky argued that play allows a child to practice self-regulation and to develop the child’s ego (Kark, 2011). The child must go against his or her impulses and follow the rules of play that the

child created. Imaginative play also provides a chance for a child to develop abstract thinking. In imaginative play, a child has to separate the physical world from reality. Instead of a building block being just a block, it can be a car or an airplane (Nicolopoulou, 1993). Although not as prominent or extensive as Piaget and Vygotsky, Erikson also contributed to the discussion of the importance of play. Erikson contended that through play, children can work out and cope with any frustrations they may have as well as learn how to postpone situations (d'Heurle, 1979). According to Erikson:

You see a child play and it is so close to seeing an artist paint, for in play a child says things without uttering a word. You can see how he solves problems. You can see what's wrong. Young children, especially, have enormous creativity, and whatever's in them rises to the surface in free play ("Erik Erikson, 91, Psychoanalyst", 1994).

While Piaget, Vygotsky, and Erikson did not all agree with each other's theories completely, they would all agree that play is an essential aspect of a child's development that should not be overlooked.

Since the discoveries of these prominent psychologists, many have added to the importance of play for children. More recently, developmental psychologists have related the lessons learned through play to the development of leadership skills. There are cases where leadership naturally emerges within a play setting and there are also cases where play can help develop leadership skills. Segal, Peck, Vega-Lahr, and Field (1987) found leadership to naturally occur in preschool play. During playtime of preschool-aged children, Segal et al. observed an interesting occurrence; a dominance hierarchy had formed among the children playing. More so, this dominance hierarchy seemed to be



characteristic of preschool groups in general. The children within preschool play groups naturally and willingly conform to leader and follower roles. The children at the top of the hierarchy tended to have some of the qualities described earlier that define a good leader. These children could be described as self-confident, independent, fun-loving, and outgoing (Segal et al., 1987). Segal et al. also found that the children with different social styles preferred different types of play (fantasy, constructive, or rough-and-tumble play) in different configurations (solitary, dyadic, or group play). Despite these variations in social style and play style, the hierarchy still develops. Furthermore, the hierarchy proves to become beneficial to the functioning of the preschool classroom. It can actually help control any aggressive behavior within the classroom as well as organize play. Segal et al.'s (1987) overall findings suggest that teachers, parents or whoever oversees a preschool play setting can help foster leadership skills in children and help the children become leaders even if they do not naturally exhibit these skills. It was not unheard of for children lower in the hierarchy to gain "rank." This occurred as they gained confidence with their surroundings and consequently within themselves.

Though children might learn and practice leadership skills by becoming leaders of their peers during play, followership should not be forgotten. The great leaders in a play setting are "socially effective and desirable playmates partially because they are willing to compromise now and then" (Trawick-Smith, 1988, p. 52). As leaders in play, they give their own ideas and suggestions to their playgroup, but are very willing to receive the contributions of their peers and incorporate them into the play. In relation to the Big Five Personality Factors discussed earlier, this quality would correlate with the agreeableness and openness factors. All of this is done while still maintaining overall control over the

activity and retaining their assertiveness. These good leaders know how to follow, an important feature in great leaders as mentioned earlier. All in all, these leaders were just more fun to play with, so they naturally gained followers. Some children during play are assertive, but are not considered to be effective leaders. These children are the so-called bullies. They always want to get their way and dominate over their peers. They demand for a certain play theme rather than suggesting one and they do not accept the ideas of others. In other words, they lack followership, preventing them from having effective leadership.

### **Strategies for Educators**

Educators should encourage the behavior of the effective play leaders and discourage the behavior of the bullies. For the children who did not have skills in leadership or followership, educators can work to promote effective social skills that can help guide the children toward effective leadership. This can be done through various strategies. These strategies include coaching, modeling, praising, direct teaching, or question asking (Trawick-Smith, 1988). Mize and Ladd (1990) developed specific strategies that can help preschool-aged children improve their social skills and become better leaders. Mize and Ladd (1990) suggested that educators coach the children in leading their peers, asking questions of peers, making comments to peers, and supporting peers. These can be done with the use of puppets or dolls to demonstrate effective interactions between playmates. The children can then use these puppets to practice. Children can also gain the ability to understand ideas from the perspectives of others, a component of empathy, during play.

Hansel (1991) created a series of activities that can develop an understanding of other perspectives. Differences in visual perspectives should be taught first, for it is very concrete. Educators can provide some structure to make-believe play and ask children to imagine themselves as different animals – lions, elephants, giraffes, birds, ants – and think about how their surroundings may look different when looking through the eyes of the different animals. Then, to begin on emotional perspectives, educators can ask children how they feel during playtime, especially when issues may arise. For example, perhaps a child dropped his or her ice cream cone at the playground and became upset. Hansel (1991) suggests that asking the child to identify the problem, describe and label their feelings, and think of other situations that can also cause that feeling. In the example, the child may say statements like, “I felt sad when my ice cream cone fell” or “I felt mad when Jacob made me drop my ice cream cone.” Children need to understand their own feelings before they can understand the feelings of others and also be encouraged to understand the variety of feelings that can occur about the same issue. Lastly, children can begin to understand the feelings of others when an issue arises. A great example for an issue is when a child decides to take a toy from another child. The child who took the toy can be asked something like, “How do you think Johnny felt when you took his truck?” Then both children can work together to create a solution and are asked, “What can we do so that Johnny and Matthew can play with the truck?” This activity forces the children to think of each other and work with one another; they gain experience in conflict resolution. Hansel (1991) found that the children who went through this process had a better understanding of their own feelings and the feelings of others. The parents could also see these changes at the home.

**Conclusion**

Mize and Ladd (1990) stressed the importance of the leadership interventions when the children are young preschoolers, for children with difficulty in social interactions in preschool continue to have social issues in elementary school. While Mize and Ladd did not individualize the training in their study, early intervention is an important component of social training. Through the training, educators should aim to instill this confidence such that the children can learn to engage with their peers and practice various leadership skills.

### CHAPTER 3: ATHLETICS

There are approximately 60 million youths that participate in organized sports each year in the United States (National Council of Youth Sports, 2008). Children can begin playing organized sports at a very young age. American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) has soccer teams for boys and girls as young as 4 years ([www.ayso.com](http://www.ayso.com)); Pop Warner has football teams for players as young as 5 years ([www.popwarner.com](http://www.popwarner.com)); and Little League has baseball and softball teams for boys and girls as young as 4 years ([www.littleleague.com](http://www.littleleague.com)). For obvious reasons, athletics help children develop physically. It can sometimes be forgotten, however, that children can learn skills that can be used outside of the sport and in life. Through athletics, children can learn leadership skills.

I have been playing sports since I was 6 years old. As a child, I never thought that I could be learning anything outside of shooting or dribbling the ball. When I was 12, I began playing for a basketball team coached by Coach Dan. At this point, I had already played basketball for 6 years and had played on many teams. However, Coach Dan was different than any coach I ever had. Before every practice, he taught us about the *Pyramid of Success* and a man named John Wooden. While I hated this at the time and I just wanted to start playing basketball, I have learned the value of what Coach Dan was trying to teach the team and me. John Wooden was one of the best basketball coaches of all time. He coached the UCLA Men's Basketball Team and led the team to ten NCAA National Championships, seven of which were in consecutive years ([www.coachwooden.com](http://www.coachwooden.com)). Through all of his success in basketball, Wooden became more than just a basketball coach. He became known as a man of wisdom who taught his

players valuable life skills. He developed an illustration known as the *Pyramid of Success*. The pyramid includes various behaviors one should demonstrate in order to be



Figure 2: Adapted from “The Pyramid of Success,” by John Wooden, 1948, [www.coachwooden.com](http://www.coachwooden.com)

successful and to be a leader on the basketball court and in life. Since its creation, coaches everywhere have used the *Pyramid of Success*, not just in basketball, but also in many other sports and even in professional settings. The *Pyramid of Success* has survived unchanged since its creation in 1948 and is now used as part of the John R. Wooden Course – a professional leadership development program. The 25 behaviors John Wooden identified align well with the qualities explained in the introduction that leaders should possess. Enthusiasm, or a passionate love of what you do, is an element of the extraversion factor of the Big Five. It would be hard to follow a leader who was not

interested in the ultimate goal. Another quality in the pyramid is loyalty, or faithfulness to a group or cause. When a leader is loyal, followers can easily trust in him or her. This falls neatly under the agreeableness factor of the Big Five. Within the conscientiousness factor of the Big Five is industriousness, or working hard and productivity. A great leader never stops working hard to accomplish his or her goal in an efficient way. Confidence, or the belief in oneself, can be a good opposite of neuroticism, the fourth Big Five factor. It would be hard for followers to be confident in themselves or in the team if the leader is not confident in him or herself. The fifth factor of the Big Five is openness. A quality within the pyramid that would go well under this factor is alertness. As the pyramid states, alertness involves observing constantly and staying open-minded. When good leaders are alert, they are always listening to their followers and willing to learn and improve from them. There are other qualities within the pyramid that fit with the Big Five factors as well, and they are all important to leadership. John Wooden, as well as Coach Dan, chose to teach the behaviors in the *Pyramid of Success* through basketball.

### **Benefits of Athletic Participation**

Other than the use of the *Pyramid of Success* to teach leadership, researchers have studied the ways in which youth can learn the leadership skills through athletics. Sports provide a perfect environment where children can learn these skills because youth are highly motivated to participate, allowing skills development to come naturally (Gould & Carson, 2008). In fact, sports may be the best setting for children to learn leadership skill compared to other organized activities. A study by Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) showed that children in youth sports programs showed significantly higher rates of initiative, emotional regulation, and teamwork experiences compared with other

organized activities such as performance and fine arts or academic clubs. This is not to say that these other organized activities do not allow children to develop these skills, but athletics seem to be much more effective.

Participation in sport has also been shown to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence (Chelladurai, 2011). Athletes like to create goals that they can continue to attain through hard work and perseverance. They may also compare themselves to their competitors and may tell themselves, “I can do that!” when watching what the competitors are able to do. Furthermore, it is important that coaches are encouraging and positive to build on their athletes’ self-esteem and self-confidence. The pursuit of excellence is a component that all athletes must have. When athletes are sore or fatigued, they view this as the cost of progress in the pursuit of excellence. This pursuit is closely tied to a leader’s necessity to be achievement-oriented, a component of the conscientiousness factor of the Big Five. Achievement-oriented athletes are willing to put in the extra practice or training time to create a competitive advantage over their opponents. This mindset is very desirable in an effective leader.

As the athletes learn and develop leadership skills, they may eventually step up and become natural leaders. Rees and Segal (1984) identified two functions team leaders may satisfy – task and social functions. These leaders are not necessarily the best players on the team like many people assume is necessary. The task leaders tend to be the starters, but the social leaders tend to be those with more seniority, or the players who have been there the longest. This may be because they have more experience with the team and are more respected by the other team members. In any case, the social leaders



need not be the most valuable players, but may even be the least valuable players on the playing field. That does not mean that they cannot be valuable in other ways.

### **The Importance of Coaches**

It is important to note that simply participating in athletics does not automatically cultivate leadership skills. The positive behaviors learned are largely due to the behavior of the coaches. It is important that coaches are supportive and positive to create the organization's philosophy where the life skills can be properly addressed. If the coach does not create this environment, athletes may instead be learning dominant and deviant behaviors (Chelladurai, 2011). The athletes must also be in an environment that is enjoyable for learning to be easy. Athletes like their team more when their coaches reward the team often for effort as well as success and have realistic expectations (Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003)

As mentioned earlier, followership is a very important aspect of leadership. In sports, participants must follow their coach in order to be successful. They must conform to the coach's rules, regulations, and standards. Children can learn that following can be the best way for a task to be completed properly.

While the coaches are the official leaders of the team, they can also give their players a chance to practice leadership. Coaches may designate players as the captain. Captains can provide valuable motivation and direction to their teammates. For this reason, Glenn and Horn (1993) suggested that coaches need at least one athlete as another leader on the team. The coach may appoint the leader or hold team elections. The coach may also rotate the role of captain every week so that every player has the chance to demonstrate leadership. When assigned as a captain, athletes tend to take on more

responsibilities than they normally would, allowing them to practice their leadership (Wright & Côté, 2003). However, just because an athlete is appointed as a captain does not mean that he or she will be effective. Coaches should try to provide guidance to the captains and encourage positive leadership behaviors.

In order for the children to continue learning the valuable leadership skills through sports, they must continue playing the sport. Coaches are important factors in ensuring children's desire to keep participating. Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck, and Bradley (1996) suggest that three factors are important in the child's desire to continue participation in a sport: the child picks the sport on his or her own or self-selection; the structure of competitiveness; and social support. The first factor is mostly reliant on the parents, but the other two are largely connected to the coach. The coach should try to create a competitive atmosphere that is fitting of his or her athletes. This may range from a "winning is everything" atmosphere to a "let's just try our best" atmosphere. With any atmosphere the coach creates, he or she must be supportive of all of the athletes regardless of their talent. As the atmosphere becomes more competitive and athletic talent is judged more strictly, children are less likely to join a sport and 35% of children quit their sport if the coach does not demonstrate an emphasis on fun and improvement. The coach should also set goals for the team that are achievable for all players on the team.

### **Sports Programs Created to Develop Life Skills**

Many programs in various sports have been created to develop life skills such as The First Tee and Play it Smart (Gould & Carson, 2008). The First Tee, was created by the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), the Professional Golf Association

(PGA) of America, the Masters Tournament, the PGA Tour, and the United States Golf Association (USGA) in 1997. Their mission is “to impact the lives of young people by providing educational programs that build character, instill life-enhancing values and promote health choices through the game of golf” ([www.thefirsttee.org](http://www.thefirsttee.org)). Since its creation, The First Tee has served more than 9 million youth. The First Tee teaches its youth important skills that are meant for youth leadership development. It focuses on how to manage emotions, how to set goals, how to resolve conflicts, how to introduce themselves, and how to communicate with others. Play it Smart is a similar program that teaches life and leadership skills through football.

### **What About Making the Youth the Coaches?**

After learning leadership skills via athletics as young children, they may have a chance to apply these new skills in a greater capacity than as their team’s captain; they can become a coach of their own team as an adolescent. Based out of Springfield, Massachusetts is a program called Project Coach. Founded in 2002, Project Coach trains and mentors adolescents in high school to lead young athletes. Since its founding, Project Coach has begun spreading its reach outside of Springfield and has worked with partners in New York, France, and Denmark. Although the program has not expanded very much, it appears to be a valuable program that could be implemented in other cities across the United States. Through the Project Coach training, participating adolescents acquire knowledge, skills, and values in communications, planning, emotional and attentional control and more. These new skills, which correlate nicely with the leadership skills discussed earlier, help make them more effective coaches or leaders of their teams. The adolescent coaches are told explicitly that these skills should also be useful outside of

coaching, in school, in the community, and eventually in the professional world ([www.projectcoach.smith.edu](http://www.projectcoach.smith.edu)). As adolescents become leaders of their own team, they can also teach leadership skills to their athletes, allowing everything to come full circle, from the adolescents learning leadership as children to teaching leadership to other children as adolescents.

### **Conclusion**

With the large capacity of children participating every year, athletics provides an excellent opportunity to teach and foster leadership skills. Children can learn valuable lessons regardless of the type of sport in which they participate. Coaches Dan Mori and John Wooden are examples of great coaches. They are models for coaches who want to do more for their athletes than just teach them how to shoot and dribble, but who also want to be role models.

## CHAPTER 4: SCHOOL

Elementary school is full of new experiences. Children learn how to write cursive, how to multiply and divide, about photosynthesis, and they memorize all 50 states. School and the time in the classroom also provide great opportunities for leadership skill development. Furthermore, “teachers are the earliest role models for children outside of the family,” whether they wish it or not (Kretman, 1996, p. 7). Teachers can easily and directly influence and nurture their student’s optimism (Murphy, 2011). It is important that teachers encourage students and are told what they are good at, like the various skills involved in leadership, so they can internalize their success. When students do fail, they must be encouraged and taught how to overcome these failures and find new and creative ways to solve the problem. This can allow the students to be more optimistic as they move forward.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education helped fund a project focusing on teaching leadership in the classroom. Their report, *Learning Leadership: A Curriculum Guide for a New Generation Grades, K-12*, strongly advocates for the implementation of leadership studies into the classroom. The authors stated:

We believe that all teachers, whether they teach kindergarten or twelfth grade, language arts or biology, have the capacity in their everyday classroom activities to enable our children to realize their potential as citizen leaders. We are not talking about a special program for the ten self-identified and teacher-identified ‘leaders’. We are talking about a new model of leadership that argues that any individual, located any place in the system, can play a leadership role. (p. 1)

Despite their pleas and the many opportunities school presents for leadership development, it has not become a standard addition to elementary curricula.

### **Class Discussions**

There is ample research on the benefits of classroom discussion for leadership development. The goal behind these discussions is for every student to contribute. There is no need for the students to raise their hands; they should just interject when they feel it is right. The discussion should be fluid and natural where it feels like a conversation. Sportsman, Certo, Bolt, and Miller (2011) examined the effect of classroom discussion for elementary school students. Before and after students participated in small-group literature discussions, social and leadership data were collected using the Behavior Assessment System for Children. Large improvement of social and leadership skills was observed for academically at-risk students. Improvement was observed in average- and high-achieving students as well. Student discussion leaders also serve as models for the other students (Certo, 2011). The most common behavior reported by interviewed students in Certo's (2011) study was the helping of others. Close to half (48%) of the students across various grade levels reported either helping other students or receiving help from other students in their literature circles. This includes help with reading or writing in their journals. The helping behavior is an important practice for children to develop skills in agreeableness, one of the Big Five factors connected to leadership. Certo (2011) posits that the discussions also force the children to take turns and get along with the other students. Again this goes along with the agreeableness factor. Some students will inevitably be more comfortable with the discussion than others. These students tend to naturally step up as leaders of the discussion. They ask insightful questions and help

keep the conversation going. These students become models for the other students, allowing them to learn how to ask better questions and better add to discussions that then allow them to gain confidence, initiative, and verbal skills – all valuable leadership skills. In one of Certo's interviews, a young student recounted what his class experience was before the classroom discussions were implemented. He mentioned that he did not know how to talk with a group of people and never had the confidence to do so. However, after he began taking part in the discussion, he became more confident and eager to engage in group conversations. Clearly, through classroom discussion, children have the opportunity to demonstrate and develop leadership skills such as self-confidence, initiative, and verbal skills.

For younger students, groups that may have trouble collaborating in their discussions, or groups that may have a student or students who dominate the discussion, teachers may choose to assign roles to discussion group members which would prompt the students to contribute a response. However, it is important that teachers eventually remove these assignments once the students become comfortable with the discussion process. Without removing the assigned roles, the students may become too comfortable with the assignments and the discussion is at risk of becoming scripted rather than fluid and natural (Certo, 2011).

While teachers have no control over their student composition, it is important to note that students should have the opportunity to interact with a diverse mix of peers. This helps prepare them to be leaders in multifaceted society that includes diversity of cultural heritage, nationality and race, political backgrounds, and intelligence level (Kretman, 1996, p.19). Diversity in the classroom gives children many chances for an

exchange of ideas and collaborative learning. Students can become more open to new concepts based on their exposure to diverse perspectives and realities.

### **Group Tasks**

There are other ways in which students may be working in a group outside of group discussions. There may be times when a group of students may be asked to complete a task as a team. For example, the students may need to solve a complicated math problem in small groups. Researcher Ryoko Yamaguchi (2001) created a study in which he put elementary and middle school students into groups of three and asked them to do a cooperative math activity. Half of the groups were either primed to be in a mastery goal orientation or a performance goal orientation. The groups in the mastery goal orientation were told that the purpose of the math activity was learning and improving. The groups in the performance goal orientation were told that the purpose of the math activity was to test their ability and see who had the best ability. In other words, the students were either put in a competitive or non-competitive atmosphere. In the performance goal groups, or competitive groups, one student usually bullied his or her way to the top and led the group. The bullying involved yelling and pushing to get his or her way. In the mastery goal groups, or non-competitive groups, all the students in the groups demonstrated leadership. Everyone shared responsibility and listened to each other's ideas. It is no surprise that the mastery goal groups had more success in completing the math activity.

Outside of group discussions, leadership has the potential to emerge. However, it is important that teachers create the right environment that allows all students to build leadership skills. While competition can sometimes create a good learning environment,



it is important that the overall theme of all group activities is to learn and grow and not to be the best at everything.

### **General Classroom Activities**

There are simple ways in which teachers can teach their students leadership skills without the need for a structured activity. These simple activities can be done in addition to other formal, structured activities such as classroom discussions. If a teacher is for some reason unable to implement classroom discussions or other formal activities, these serve as great substitutes. Bradley (1948) discusses these activities in her study. One component of leadership is to understand the task at hand and the demands of a specific job in order to make informed and productive decisions. To demonstrate this, students can be asked what is needed to most to complete a task well. In a second grade classroom, for example, students were asked what was most important in order to wash the blackboards well. The class decided that tall students would be best suited to complete the job, so they elected the tallest students to become the board washers. This short and simple activity forced the students to think about the specific requirements one may need in order to tackle a task. Furthermore, the students should understand that if they do not possess the specific requirements to complete a task, it is fine to ask for help.

Teachers can also do activities in the classroom that are specifically geared toward lessons on leadership. Figure 3 below includes activities within *Learning Leadership: A Curriculum Guide for a New Generation Grades K-12* (Kretman, 1996). The activities cover many aspects of leadership as well as multiple school subjects from art to social studies. In *Weave a Web of Love*, children sit on the floor and roll a ball of yarn around to their classmates as they state how the classmate they rolled it to has made

a positive contribution to class. As the activity progresses, the web will show how every student adds to the class and that every child has the capacity to be a leader in some way. In the *Charlotte's Web* activity, the students discuss the leadership of Charlotte from the book. They compare the qualities Charlotte demonstrated as a leader, especially her communication, with the way they communicate with each other. The comparison forces the students to evaluate their own communication skills and hopefully implement the effective communication tools they noticed in the book to their own lives. *Global Collaboration On the Internet: Creating a New Democracy* is a much more advanced activity. Students are asked to advise a fictional formerly communist country about establishing a democracy and a functioning society. In groups, the students need to research leadership in government, political structures, human rights, and anything else they believe to be relevant. Then, they need to present their findings as a group. This activity is very extensive and requires teamwork, delegation of tasks, and communication. Students learn about group dynamics quickly with this activity. Students can really learn about the importance of proper communication in conflicts through *Using "I" Messages to Express Feelings*. This activity is done through worksheets and role-play. *Litchko City: A Setting for Learning Social Responsibility* uses the story *Curious George Gets a Job* to help students become familiar with the jobs a city needs to run properly. Then, the students identify the jobs their classroom needs to run. After each student takes one of these jobs, the students should develop clear rules and consequences for the classroom. This activity teaches the students many lessons such as the understanding that the classroom cannot be run by one person, but needs all students to contribute. It also empowers the children to run the classroom.

### WHY DO WE NEED EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

<u>LESSON</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>CONTENT</u>	<u>COMPETENCIES</u>
1. <i>If They Hate Me; Weave a Web of Love</i>	Elementary, K-5	Language Arts Music Art	Critical Thinking (CT) Cooperative Learning (CL) Conflict Resolution (CR) Moral Reasoning (MR) Multicultural Understanding (MU)
2. <i>The Courage It Takes To Lead</i>	Elementary, 3-4	Language Arts	CT, CL, MR
3. <i>The Mock Trial of General Custer</i>	Middle School	Social Studies English	Communications (C) CT, MR, MU
4. <i>What a Difference Leaders Make! Revolutionary Leadership: George Washington and Thomas Jefferson versus Robespierre and Napoleon</i>	Middle and High School	English Government History	CT, C, MR

### HOW DO PEOPLE LEAD EFFECTIVELY? WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES AND STYLES OF LEADERSHIP AND WHAT NEEDS DO THEY MEET? HOW DO THE DECISIONS THAT LEADERS MAKE CONFIRM THEIR PERSONAL AND ETHICAL VALUES?

1. <i>A Line Needs a Leader, And it Needs a Caboose</i>	Elementary, K-2	Language Arts Music	Visioning (V) C, CL, CR
2. <i>Charlotte's Web</i>	Elementary, 3-4	Language Arts English	CT, C, CL
3. <i>Who Killed Montezuma?</i>	Middle School	English History	CT, C, MR, MU

### IN WHAT WAYS CAN A GROUP BE MORE PRODUCTIVE THAN AN INDIVIDUAL? WHAT TYPES OF LEADERS DO GROUPS NEED? HOW CAN I BE AN EFFECTIVE GROUP LEADER AND FOLLOWER?

1. <i>Discovering the Leader in You</i>	Elementary, 3-4	Language Arts Social Studies	CT, C, CL, MU
2. <i>Tech Challenges: Making Sciences and Technology Skills Work</i>	Middle and High School	Science (Lab/Biology)	V, CT, CL
3. <i>Global Collaboration On the Internet: Creating a New Democracy</i>	Middle and High School	English Government History	V, CT, C, MR, MU

### WHAT ARE THE CONNECTIONS AMONG CONFLICT RESOLUTION, LEADERSHIP, AND CURRICULUM?

ATFRC (Action, Thoughts, Feelings, Reaction, Consequences)

1. <i>Friends?</i>	Elementary	Language Arts	CT, C, CR, CL, MU
2. <i>What Apartheid Did to South Africa</i>	Middle School	English Social Studies	CT, C, CR, CL, MU

ACTIVE LISTENING

1. <i>Using "I" Messages To Express Feelings</i>	Elementary	Language Arts Social Studies	CT, C, CR, CL, MU
2. <i>Taking It Out</i>	Middle School	English Communications	CT, C, CR, CL, MU

**TRIGGERS**

1. <i>Recognizing Triggers Before They Go Off</i>	Elementary and Middle School	Language Arts	CT, C, CR, CL, MU
2. <i>Dealing with Triggers in the Middle East</i>	Middle and High School	History Government	CT, C, CR, CL, MU

**BRAINSTORMING**

1. <i>What If the Other Side Had Won?</i>	Elementary	Social Studies	CT, C, CR, CL, MU
2. <i>What Ever Happened To the Maya?</i>	Middle School	History	CT, C, CR, CL, MU

**HOW CAN WE BE CITIZEN LEADERS IN OUR OWN COMMUNITIES?**

1. <i>Litchko City: A Setting for Learning Social Responsibility</i>	Elementary, K-2	Social Studies	V, CT, C, CL, MR Community Service (CS)
2. <i>The Hope Project</i>	Elementary	Social Studies	CT, C, CS
3. <i>Saving Our Streams: From Environmental Investigator to Citizen Leader</i>	Elementary and Middle (5-8)	Science Social Science Language Arts Media	CT, C, CL, CS
4. <i>A Call to Action! Looking At Your Own Community</i>	Middle and High School	English Government Math Science	CT, C, CL, CS

Figure 3: Adapted from “Learning leadership: A curriculum guide for a new generation, grades K-12,” by K.P. Kretman (Ed.), 1996, College Park, MD: Center for Political Leadership and Participation, p. 72-74

**Other Extracurricular Activities**

School also provides many opportunities outside the classroom that can help children develop their leadership skills, such as performance and fine arts, academic clubs, and community service. Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) examined the developmental experiences within various organized activities. Students who participated in performance or fine arts (dance, music, art club) reported having many opportunities to practice initiative. While not as often as other activities, arts also give the students an opportunity to learn about helping others. In community service activities, students reported many instances of teamwork and positive relationships.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, schools are meant to prepare their students for the road ahead, for higher education, for the students' careers. This means that students develop qualities and learn skills that are important to their future success. Leadership is one very critical quality that students need to learn. However, leadership has been overlooked in curriculum design for most elementary schools. It is odd that, while a report funded by the U.S. Department of Education urged for leadership studies in the classroom, not much has come of it. It is unlikely that the entire United States will implement leadership into the curriculum at once. This needs to start with individual school districts and states. Hopefully, it will eventually make its way through the United States. Our country is in dire need of education reform and leadership studies should be part of that discussion.

## CONCLUSION

Leadership development has become very popular among businesses in recent years. In 2000, organizations spent close to \$50 billion on leadership development and education (Ready & Conger, 2003). A quick search for “leadership development” at Amazon.com yields more than 42,000 results. Universities and colleges, undergraduate and graduate, have created leadership research and development institutes. As leadership development among professionals becomes a bigger focus, it is easy to assume that businesses would have an increasing number of effective leaders in their ranks. However, CEO turnover at major corporations increased 53% throughout Europe and North America from 1995 to 2001. The number of CEOs who left because of poor financial performances increased by 130% (Lucier, Spiegel, Schuyt, 2001). The leadership development programs employed by corporations are failing. Although 76% of senior executives polled in a recent United Kingdom study believe that it is important for their organization to develop leadership skills, only 7% believe that their organization develops the skills effectively (Gitsham, 2009).

This overwhelming failure among the top corporations can partly be linked to bad structuring of these programs. However, the current review reasons that effective leadership development can actually be done much earlier. Although adults have the capability to develop leadership skills, children are much more sensitive to skill development and change. There are many opportunities to develop leadership skills throughout childhood. Fostering leadership skills in children can combat the current trend of failed leadership in corporations today.

Some of the most well-known and influential psychologists – Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson – have recognized the value of skill development at a young age. Previous research and this current review have indicated areas where leadership skill development can occur. Through play, children gain experience interacting with their peers and can practice leadership in a natural environment in which they eagerly engage. Play gives children the opportunity to develop skills in influencing others, getting others to like them, communicating wishes, and emotional intelligence (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). As children grow older, they have the opportunity to participate in athletics. Athletics give children the opportunity to interact with peers while working hard and striving toward a common goal as a team. With proper coaching, children can learn many skills from athletic participation as John Wooden illustrates in his Pyramid of Success. This pyramid has since had success outside of athletics and in a professional leadership development program. Furthermore, school is a place where children are required to attend and also give them a chance to interact with their peers in structured classroom activities. They can work together in groups toward a common goal and can be exposed to multiple different viewpoints and types of people. Leadership skills can be learned through any subject and taught to any age group. School also provides a variety of activities outside the classroom where leadership development can occur.

While play, athletics, and school are important factors in leadership development, there are other factors that play a role in the development of an effective leader. Arvey et al. (2006) used databases of twins raised together and apart to discover that genetics is a factor in the presentation of leadership skills. This demonstrates that some leadership is innate and not only developed. However, genetics only partially explains leadership

outcomes. The home is a major component of leadership development. Parents and siblings provide the first exposure to any form of leadership. Research has shown the impact of different parenting styles in childhood development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Related to parenting style, children's attachment style can be predictive of leadership in the future.

Regardless of the manner in which leadership skills are acquired, there is a need for leaders in every facet of society – from Fortune 500 companies to small business, from universities to elementary schools, from the U.S. government to a city council, and so much more. Leadership is far too important for its teaching to be delayed until adulthood or even the teenage years. Leadership skill development in young children must be seriously considered in childhood education. However, more research is needed in the early development of leadership. As professional leadership development programs fail, it is time to turn the attention to leadership development in children. Recent history has demonstrated the need for strong, effective leaders. Major corporations have fallen and governments have failed. The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow. The better the leaders are created now, the better the world will be in the future.



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