This paper describes the Leadership Opportunity Forums for high school students sponsored by the Explorer's Post of the Birmingham Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The goal of the forum was to increase student leadership behaviors through informational sessions, needs assessment, informal discussions, shared meals, outdoor physical activities, and cooperative social/recreation time. Students greatly enjoyed the opportunities to learn more about themselves and receive peer support and guidance from interested adult facilitators. The combination of instruction about leadership characteristics with individual assessment group exercises was effective in promoting the development of leadership skills in youth. As a result of the forum, each student drafted a personal plan to continue self-exploration and growth as community leaders. Figure 1 is "Sample Agenda for First Day of Leadership Opportunity Forum"; Figure 2 is "Questions for Small Group Discussions"; Figure 3 is "Student Worksheets for Leadership Development." (JDM)
LEADERSHIP SKILLS TRAINING FOR YOUTHS THROUGH THE EXPLORING PROGRAM OF BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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Leadership Skills Training for Youths Through the Exploring Program of Boy Scouts of America

Abstract

Birmingham area high school students participated in the Leadership Opportunity Forums during the summers of 1994 and 1995. The Forums were sponsored by the Explorer’s Post of the Birmingham Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The goal of the Forums was to increase student leadership behaviors through informational sessions, needs assessments, informal discussions, shared meals, outdoor physical activities, and cooperative social/recreation time.
Leadership Skills Training for Youths Through the Exploring Program of Boy Scouts of America

High school students in the Birmingham, AL metropolitan area were selected by teachers and community leaders to participate in week-long residential Leadership Opportunity Forums held at Camp Winnataska in St. Clair County during the summers of 1994 and 1995. The Forums were sponsored by the Explorer's Post of the Birmingham Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America together with public school systems in Birmingham City, and Jefferson, Shelby, and St. Clair Counties. The facilitators of the Forums included Boy Scout administrators and Exploring Program youth staff, and health, psychology, and substance abuse prevention professionals from the Birmingham area.

Leadership Opportunity Forum Program Goals and Explanation

The goal of the Forums was to increase student leadership behaviors through individual identification of strengths and weaknesses, skill training, and goal-setting. Forum activities included informational sessions and personal needs assessment, informal peer discussions, shared meals, guided physical activities, and social/recreation time (see Figure 1 for day one agenda). This brief manuscript will describe the teaching methods and results of one session of the Forum entitled, "Your Leadership Profile."

Under the direction of a doctoral-level trained health
educator and doctoral-level psychologist, students from Birmingham area high schools were asked to imagine a significant accomplishment in their future and write a sample newspaper article to describe their achievement. Students were encouraged to be creative and avoid the temptation to censure their ideas at this point due to concern about practical issues or fear of criticism by others. They were directed to write about the preparation required to reach this accomplishment and obstacles they would have to overcome. Students shared their newspaper feature articles with peers and discussed their future aspirations.

Following this exercise, students individually completed the Leadership Skills Inventory (LSI) (Karnes & Chauvin, 1985). This inventory is self-administered and self-scoring and is used to help students in grades 4-12 assess their current strengths and weaknesses as peer leaders. The LSI includes skills necessary for leadership development grouped into nine categories: Fundamentals of Leadership, Written Communication Skills, Speech Communication Skills, Values Clarification, Decision Making Skills, Group Dynamic Skills, Problem Solving Skills, Personal Skills, and Planning Skills. Students answered each item on the Likert scale by marking a single response. Using their raw scores from the nine categories of leadership skills, students graphed a leadership profile.

Trained facilitators interpreted the results of the LSI and led small group discussions about developing leadership skills for academic, vocational, and social success. Prepared questions were used to direct group discussions (see Figure 2). Students were
encouraged to share their ideas and concerns in a safe group environment. Group rules included no peer criticism or derision.

Understanding of leadership skills builds over time. Students were encouraged to complete two worksheets later that same evening, or on the second day of the Forum. The first was a values clarification exercise provided in the LSI Activities Manual (Karnes & Chauvin, 1985). Students read a list of 13 values, for instance, "to become famous," and ranked each in order of personal priority.

The second worksheet directed students to write two lists. The first was a listing of personal strengths, the second was a listing of preferences. Students rank ordered these items and then considered the "fit" between personal strengths, values, interests, and career goals (see Figure 3) (Bolles, 1985).

Results

Students greatly enjoyed the opportunities to learn more about themselves and receive peer support and guidance from interested adult facilitators. The combination of instruction about leadership characteristics with individual assessment group exercises was effective to promote development of leadership skills in youths. As a result of the Leadership Opportunity Forum, each student drafted a personal plan to continue self-exploration and growth as community leaders. Groups of Explorers will plan and conduct community service projects. The Birmingham Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America will continue Exploring activities with Forum participants throughout the academic year to provide students
with regular guidance and to encourage achievement of personal goals.

References


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<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.M.</td>
<td>8:30 Registration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9:45 Opening Ceremony</td>
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<td>10:15 Icebreaker - &quot;Getting to Know You&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:15 Break</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11:25 What are Feelings of Self-Worth?</td>
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<td>P.M.</td>
<td>12:15 Break</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12:30 Lunch</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* 1:15 Your Leadership Profile</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:00 Break - Prep for afternoon's activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:20 Report to assigned activity area</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3:30 Horseback riding, swimming, or boating</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:30 Rotate to next activity (horses, swimming, or boating)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:30 Free Time - Recreation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6:00 Supper</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 Setting Personal Goals, Short-Term and Long-Term</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying Your Own Strengths and Weaknesses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7:30 Developing a Plan for Self-Improvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8:30 Announcements and Recreation Time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10:00 Prepare for Bed</td>
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<td>11:00 Lights Out</td>
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Figure 1: Sample Agenda for the First Day of the Leadership Opportunity Forum
GOOD AND BAD ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP

1. Why would someone want to be a leader?

2. Why do people leave well-paying jobs to become government leaders?

3. What benefits do leaders receive from their work?

4. What are some negative aspects of being a leader?

5. How can you balance the positive and negative aspects of leadership?

Figure 2: Questions for Small Group Discussion
First, write down your PERSONAL STRENGTHS, the things you do well. Only you will see this list. Answer honestly.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Secondly, RANK ORDER your Personal Strengths from most to least.

1. ______________________________________

2. ______________________________________

3. ______________________________________

4. ______________________________________

5. ______________________________________

6. ______________________________________

7. ______________________________________

Figure 3: Student Worksheet for Leadership Development, Part I
Thirdly, write down your PERSONAL PREFERENCES, the things you most enjoy doing.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Fourthly, RANK ORDER your Personal Preferences from most to least.

1. _________________________________________________________________

2. _________________________________________________________________

3. _________________________________________________________________

4. _________________________________________________________________

5. _________________________________________________________________

6. _________________________________________________________________

7. _________________________________________________________________

Figure 3: Student Worksheet for Leadership Development, Part II
DON'T WAIT!!!

-----------------------------------------------

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Look at the worksheet, "VALUES IN MY LIFE" and compare the rank order of personal values to your rankings of PERSONAL STRENGTHS (the things you are good at doing), and PERSONAL PREFERENCES (the things you most enjoy doing).

Think about what you can do now to learn more about careers and occupations that match your VALUES, STRENGTHS, and PREFERENCES.

Talk to people about how they chose their careers.

Speak to your parents or guardian, school guidance counselor, Explorer Director, librarian, or other adult you trust about your career plans and concerns.

Read more about leadership roles in careers that are similar to your goals.

Consider volunteering in a business, agency, or workplace that employs persons in the career you are interested in learning more about.

Figure 3: Student Worksheet for Leadership Development, Part III
**Title:** Leadership Skills Training for Youths Through the Exploring Program

**Author(s):** Brian F. Geiger, EdD & A. Sandra Willis, PhD

**Publication Date:** 8-27-00

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