THE IMPACT OF A MODIFIED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM ON
RURAL TRANSITION-AGED STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Many skills at the root of youth leadership development are aligned with those for transition, a legally mandated planning process for adolescents with disabilities. This overlap creates a natural pathway for leadership development to be embedded into the high school curriculum for students with disabilities. Limited research exists describing the inclusion of leadership development within the school setting for individuals with disabilities. This study sought to examine the perceived impact of leadership development curriculum on a group of rural transition-aged students with disabilities in a classroom setting. Participants rated and justified levels of understanding, importance, and abilities in relation to leadership, and observers rated perceptions of participants’ attitudes and growth. Suggestions in relation to the use of Universal Design for Learning and experiential learning models to ensure accessibility and integration into the classroom setting are offered.
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Leadership development has been an emerging field for years, but is vast and can be vaguely defined in many different ways and for different purposes. For the purposes of this study, “youth leadership” is considered a part of “youth development”, and involves guiding or directing others, influencing the opinions and behavior of other people, having the ability to analyze one’s own strengths and weaknesses, setting goals, and having the self-esteem to carry them out (Katzel, LaVant, & Richard, 2010). The field of youth leadership development prepares individuals to work with adults and peers by gaining and applying a variety of life skills which may positively impact individuals’ futures. According to Gill (2005), “Participation in leadership development experiences is linked to increased self-efficacy and the development of skills relevant to success in adulthood and the workplace, such as decision-making and working well with others” (p.1). “Self-efficacy” is one’s belief that he or she is able to produce a desired result or outcome (Bandura, 1997). For youth with disabilities, leadership development can be directly tied to the transition and practical life skills already identified as goal areas in each individual’s education plan.

**Statement of Problem**

Leadership involves setting goals and taking action steps towards reaching those goals with the utilization of support networks, to promote active citizenship and positive social change. These practices are very well aligned with efforts made to assist individuals with disabilities in transitioning towards productive adult lives. Unfortunately, there is a lack in the availability of youth leadership development programs in which individuals with disabilities are included or targeted. Gill (2005) also found:

Few programs for youth include all of the youth development, youth leadership, and disability-related components necessary for youth to participate fully in all aspects of
their lives and society. In order to serve all youth effectively, practitioners should connect to national resources as well as other youth-serving organizations in their own communities to incorporate these components. (p. 4)

**Background for Context**

With new organizations and initiatives focused on disability rights and leadership development forming regularly, it is crucial for service providers to join forces and collaborate to avoid redundancy while promoting quality opportunities for youth development and leadership that are widely accessible. Leadership development programs should promote positive identity formation, support services for youth with disabilities, and provide the conditions needed to allow youth to become leaders (Epstein, Eddy, Williams, & Socha, 2006).

As youth with disabilities become included more fully in aspects of education and society, they need to learn proper ways to communicate their needs and determine what supports will guide them towards success in the future. It is common for these individuals to have acquired a “learned helplessness syndrome” due to others attempting to over-accommodate for their needs, rather than focusing on developing self-confidence, problem-solving and communication skills at an early age. However, ‘studies and model programs within the last 15 years have shown that the effect of learned helplessness syndrome can be reversed by providing leadership training for people with disabilities (McKinney & VSA, 1993, p.7).’

The rigorous focus on preparing students for standardized tests is pervasive in the current education system in the United States of America. When leadership development programs are aligned with the standards-based curricula students and teachers must follow, they can be easily incorporated into academic classrooms to increase access and quality instruction of these essential skills for all students.
Although traits of leadership may be picked up naturally or self-initiated by many adolescents, those with disabilities often require more explicit instruction and guidance to learn and retain these skills. Research on the expectations, impact and implications of programs available for individuals with disabilities to develop leadership skills is needed in order to support this demographic towards positive transitions from youth to adulthood.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of incorporating leadership development activities into the academic classroom for rural transition-aged students with disabilities. The study was designed to determine growth in participants’ own abilities to identify areas of personal strength and need, their attitudes toward and comprehension of leadership development concepts and their perceptions on the importance of leadership development. The study also determined the impact of this leadership curriculum on the behavior of high school students with disabilities within a different classroom setting as observed by third party raters. Finally, this study examined the appropriateness of accommodations made to engage youth with disabilities in leadership development activities based upon review of the literature, anecdotal records and participant feedback. The impact of the program was measured using mixed methods for participants, and two third-party raters who observed participants’ behaviors in other environments. The study analyzed anecdotal records and individual exit interviews with each participant and the researcher following the completion of the program. This mixed method study design enabled examination of the diverse learning that occurred for each individual, and provided evaluation of different kinds of information such as changes in skills, attitudes, and knowledge (Russon & Reinelt, 2004).

Rationale/Hypothesis
The first stage of leadership growth involves acquisition of new knowledge and understanding of the related concepts, as well as changes in attitudes and perceptions (Russon & Reinelt, 2004). This may be natural for some individuals, but must be directly addressed for students with vocabulary and language deficits (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). The curriculum implemented in this study focuses on awareness, understanding, facilitation, and practice of leadership skills. Though it would demonstrate a greater impact to be able to identify observable behavior shifts, it is beyond the scope of this study to expect a wide-spread application and generalization of the content into practice for the participants, directly following program implementation.

The high school students selected for participation in this study experience difficulties identifying their own strengths and needs, having the self-confidence to view themselves as leaders, and feeling motivated to engage in their education experiences. By adapting an existing leadership development curriculum focused on experiential learning and Universal Design for Learning, and giving students opportunities to share their perspectives, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive shift in the participants’ understanding of concepts and perceptions of their leadership qualities following engagement in one week of leadership development activities. By activating opportunities for student-centered learning and decision making skills, the participants were empowered to share their thoughts and actions with confidence and a greater understanding of self.
**Literature Review**

Leadership development is a vast domain with potential implications for positive change in any individual. Particularly for youth with disabilities, the opportunity to participate in activities and programs that shape them as leaders can have a dramatic positive impact on their futures. Research demonstrates that opportunities to support youth leadership are important for all individuals, and positively shape the growth of those with, and without, disabilities (Gill, 2005).

There are many ways in which one can define leadership, design programs to promote these qualities, and apply these principles to ways of living. Regardless of differences, the primary focus should be in awareness and growth of opportunities to include youth with disabilities in leadership development programs to better equip them with skills to transition more smoothly into adulthood. High-quality research must be conducted and expanded upon to better identify methods in which youth with disabilities can gain access to and find meaningful growth in leadership development programs. This review of existing literature provides background information on how leadership development is defined and aligns with Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, as well as common outcomes and skills developed in existing programs, and the need for such skills in youth. This review also analyzes literature to provide background information about leadership opportunities for youth with disabilities, leadership development within the school day and how that may work in special education, and finally, the importance of adolescent perspectives on leadership. Before analyzing the focus, outcomes, need, and implications for various leadership development opportunities, it is important to differentiate among common terms which are often used interchangeably.

**Leadership Development and Experiential learning**
According to Katzel, LaVant, and Richards (2010) “Youth Development is a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent” (p.3). This means that the development of youth is ongoing and may be very different for individuals as they grow and change during their formative years. In contrast, “Youth Leadership” is

(1) The ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinion and behavior of other people, and show the way by going in advance; and (2) The ability to analyze one's own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem to carry them out. It includes the ability to identify community resources and use them, not only to live independently, but also to establish support networks to participate in community life and to affect positive social change. (Katzel et al., 2010)

Youth leadership involves both a certain level of ability and a subsequent course of action, which supports the notion that it is both an internal and external capability which may vary based on the individual (Edelman Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004). Youth development is more regimented as a set process towards achieving a specified set of outcomes or competencies- determined by an agency or program. It is easy to see how these two terms are intertwined, but there are important distinctions that set them apart. For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose to focus on programs geared towards youth leadership, though these will often naturally incorporate the process of youth development as well.

Since the 1970s, the concept of leadership has expanded to mean more than an activity one performs, or a role destined only for the gifted and talented. Leadership is not one specific trait or characteristic, but an interactive event between individuals, meaning it is available to
everyone, not just one assigned person in a group (McKinney & VSA, 1993; Edelman et al., 2004). No longer a limited constraint, Eich (2008) reported that “all students who involved themselves in leadership education have the potential to increase their skills and knowledge” (p. 176).

With the growth in acceptance of leadership development as a process involving a multitude of topics and skills, research has tended towards a focus on leadership in action. “Since leadership is a scholarly and applied endeavor, an essential component of an effective leadership studies curriculum is experiential learning…[which] allows students to connect the content of their courses with real-world experiences” (Kretman, Maryland University, & John F. Kennedy High School, 1996, p. 10). Experiential learning has been found to be an effective method for teaching leadership and applying academic skills when an opportunity to put knowledge and skills into action is presented (National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition, 2005). Kolb’s 1984 experiential learning model involves a cycle of four phases which can begin at any point in the cycle. This model can be used as a theoretical framework to assess the leadership development process, and involves flexibility of learning as ideas and experiences change over time (Massey, Sulak, & Sriram, 2013).

As explained by Massey et al., (2013), the four phases of experiential learning involve a) a concrete experience- being involved with what is happening in the present, b) reflective observation- watching and creating meaning of experience through description of perspectives, c) abstract conceptualization- thinking to build theories about experiences and perspectives, and d) active experimentation- applying new theories to make changes in personal experiences.
According to Eich (2008), Kolb’s experiential learning model is “a practical pedagogy for teaching students how to engage in the leadership process through constructing meaning and making connections between their own experiences and reflection.” (p.177). When learners are given the opportunity to determine what occurred and what that means in reference to their own background knowledge and experiences, they are more likely to become active participants and apply their learning to future experiences and thoughts. Leadership development rarely involved clear cut right or wrong answers, but rather allows individuals to continually strive towards improvement and creative thinking methods when completing a task or working with others.

Experiential learning can be paired harmoniously with leadership development programs, but when individuals do not complete the entire cycle, application is less likely to occur after the experience is over (Maellaro, 2013). An example of this was shown in a recent study that examined college orientation leaders who were taught about and engaged in servant leadership. Formal classroom instruction increased understanding of leadership theories and perspectives for
student leaders, which represented the conception stage in experiential learning. However, when students applied their learning to action in the experimentation and experience phases, there was very little reflection occurring (Massey et al., 2013). When a concept is taught or thought about in isolation with lack of application and/or reflection, the entire cycle of experiential learning does not occur and connections fail to be made. “Previous research indicated that students do not make connections between service experiences and academic study unless the links are purposefully described” (Massey et al, 2013, p. 86).

Perhaps one way in which the participants of the college orientation study could have improved their reflection practices to complete the experiential learning cycle is with the use of journals to record their leadership growth and perceptions in action directly following experiences. In a study incorporating all four phases of experiential learning, graduate students used a learning journal to create a bridge between leadership learning and practice. Maellaro (2013) found

By requiring students to question their assumptions, surface tacit knowing, and reflect on how to integrate course content with personal experience, learning journals actively involve students in their own learning. This highly participative process can expand a student’s capacity to acquire leadership knowledge. (p. 249)

The inclusion of a reflection journal is a component utilized in the present study, to best incorporate all four stages of experiential learning to promote application and generalization of leadership skills. Specific considerations were given to the questions being asked and the opportunities for reflection embedded into the curriculum, to best support active utilization of this phase with students who rarely engage in reflection and meta-cognition independently. Particularly for this group of students, who had learning and cognitive disabilities, reflection
journals also served as a tool for memory from day to day in the program, and as a catalyst for discovering growth they may not have identified without prompting. Leadership development should involve plenty of opportunities for trial and error and watching positive and negative role models, because “effective leadership training is found in the doing” (Malone III, 1995, p.200).

**Leadership Development Outcomes and Transition Skills**

As the concept of leadership has evolved over time, ideas of the born leader or one person in a position of power have been replaced with the idea that a leader can be anyone and everyone. Sorenson and Machell (1996) indicate, “The new model of leadership enables students to discover they are worthy and competent, and because they are both, they can make a difference” (as cited in Bauer, 2005, p. 8). Leadership development requires participants to engage in both internal self-development and building of external interpersonal skills.

While not every program or activity designed for the purpose of youth leadership development will have identical intentions or outcomes, many share common goals and results. Variations in the goals of these programs may be due to the intended audience; for example, those specifically designed for youth with disabilities, or for older (11th and 12th grade) high school students. According to Katzel et al., (2010) giving all youth opportunities to develop as leaders prepares them for their futures as active citizens prepared to make a difference. Fortunately, according to a report by the White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth (2003), the amount of high quality research on outcomes of youth programs is limited (Edelman et al., 2004). Identifying clear objectives for leadership development program delivery subsequently requires the examination of related results measuring the implications and/or effectiveness of such programs.
A scan of 55 leadership development programs’ outcomes and impacts performed by the Kellogg Foundation in 2004 provided key insights into evaluation methods and important sources of information to consider. The most common measurements of leadership development programs appear to be individual outcomes in acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and/or changes in attitudes and perceptions, and are often documented with program evaluations, surveys, and interviews. In contrast, there are limited evaluations of behavioral changes, probably due to the time it takes for behaviors to be observably different (Russon & Reinelt, 2004). This report also explained the use of three hundred sixty-degree assessments, which are used by the Center for Creative Leadership and Public allies, and involve input from people who know an individual in a certain context and can share their perceptions about each individual’s leadership behavior. For the present study, third-party raters who knew the participants in other classroom environments completed pre- and post-assessment questionnaires based on perceptions of leadership abilities and observable behaviors.

In a study explained by Epstein et al., (2006), twenty-five out of seventy-seven youth development programs were found to be “effective”, meaning they positively affected youth behavior, resulting in significant improvements in interpersonal skills, quality of relationships between peers and adults, self-control, problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, and academic achievement and commitment. Beyond these positive impacts, many of the effective programs also reduced negative behaviors including inappropriate behavior at school, drug and alcohol use, and violence. The level of “effectiveness” appears to be rather subjective, and since it has been established that behaviors are harder to measure than knowledge and attitudes, it appears the evaluation of such programs most likely occurred quite some time after program completion. While it is helpful to identify common outcomes among effective leadership development
programs, knowing more details about the participants and specific measures of growth would provide greater insight into how to incorporate aspects of such quality programs.

The correlations between the goals set for leadership development programs and those of transition planning provide strong justification for inclusion of youth with disabilities in leadership programs. Transition planning is a required aspect of any student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but is rarely a primary focus in education and is not tied to mandated results, meaning this section is not always strictly enforced. This needs to change, and Kohler (1996) argues “transition planning is not an add-on activity for students with disabilities once they reach age 14, but a foundation from which education programs and activities for the child are developed” (p.2). When transition skills are the focal point of students’ education, it is a prime opportunity to incorporate leadership development to support the achievement of such goals. In a study described by Sanders, Jurich, Mittapalli, and Taylor, (2013), high-performing schools were defined and included a focus on transitions at all levels of education, offering programs to assist students in new environments, and to prepare for life beyond high school rather than a focus on high school graduation as often found in average-impact schools.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) places an emphasis on the utilization of so-called “proven” youth development practices, including decision-making, citizenship, and community service. In fact, “adult mentoring and leadership development opportunities are two of the ten WIA-required elements of youth programs” (Epstein et al., 2006, p.2). It is important to be cautious about what one organization may consider ‘proven’ and under what basis these claims are being made, but the expectation is that the practices described as such are supported by quality research providing evidence for their positive impacts. Focusing on multiple outcomes is important for well-rounded leadership development, rather than simply selecting one goal for an
entire program. Thus, positive development implies well-being across a number of outcome domains (Hair, Moore, Hunter, & Kaye, 2001).

Self-determination plays a large role both in leadership development and transition planning for students with disabilities. Research has shown positive effects of leadership programs that incorporate activities leading towards self-determined behavior, including decision making, self-advocacy, self-discovery, goal setting/attainment, problem solving, self-regulation, and participation in the IEP (Amerman, & Carr-Jones, 2006). Building these skills enables youth and their families to be confident when acting as the primary decision-makers in their lives.

According to Lambrecht et al. (1997), the following indications of effective leadership development continue to be identified in research: (a) Placement in a variety of challenging situations with problems to solve and choices to make under conditions of risk. These situations motivate individuals to learn, provide opportunities to gain new ideas and knowledge and practice skills to apply knowledge, and encourage new insights through reflection on prior actions, and (b) Individuals gain their experiences in a supportive environment with supervisors who provide positive role models and constructive support and mentors who provide counsel.

The curriculum for the present study involved many activities placing participants in various challenging situations, and were implemented with consistent positive support. A wide range of outcomes can result from effective leadership development programs, contributing in some way towards positive future attitudes and actions, depending on the goals and audience for which the programs are designed. According to Kretman et al., (1996) “training young people for leadership and empowering them to take control of their lives may be the answer to many of our current social ills” (p. 19).

**Leadership Development Opportunities and Need for Youth with Disabilities**
The medical model of disability is deficit-based, which means a person with a disability is considered as someone who needs to be “cured” before he or she will fit into mainstream society (Bauer, 2003). As disability awareness and activism continues to grow over time, the oppressive medical model which perpetuates false assumptions about people with disabilities will ideally be nullified by leaders self-advocating for their rights and acceptance in society with a sense of pride for their unique disabilities.

When oppression occurs, there is often a rebuttal of activism which results from the negativity. Grenwelge, Zhang, and Landmark (2010) note there have been numerous positive examples of leadership from advocates for the disability culture to counteract the long history of discrimination and prejudice these individuals have faced, such as:

- the passage of special education legislation (e.g., the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, most currently reauthorized as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, IDEA); the deinstitutionalization movement; the wide implementation of community integration programs (e.g., supported employment and supported living); and, most recently, the self-determination movement. (p. 62)

Changes brought about by self-determined individuals to make positive changes and self-advocate for their rights indicates the level of leadership that can be achieved once they are provided with the necessary tools and skills. At this time, leadership is often limited to positions within organizations of the self-advocacy movement, suggesting a need for increased advanced leadership positions beyond this level (Bauer, 2003).

The category of youth considered “at-risk” of not achieving to their potential often have factors which make life harder, including difficulties in reading, behavioral problems, psychological problems, and/or negative attitudes towards work and school (Edwards, Mumford,
& Serra-Roldan, 2007). Labeling young individuals as ‘at risk’ may help identify those who need treatment, but negative predictors can sometimes result in inappropriate interventions and lack of positive expectations. In a study focused on providing an approach which focuses not on the individual’s deficits, but rather his or her strengths and assets through Positive Youth Development (PYD), Edwards et al. (2007) argue that this method may be beneficial because it promotes the development of resilience, which involves finding balance after encountering substantial adversity. Resilient children develop high self-esteem and confidence, are able to solve social problems and believe they have the ability to influence events in their lives for the better (Edwards et al., 2007). A focus on resilience directly supports growth of leadership potential, especially in those who may have more obstacles to overcome than the average child. The authors determined that it may be beneficial for children identified as at-risk to receive training in interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and self-discipline. When these youth learn strategies to say no, identify consequences of behavior, and use time constructively, they tend to engage in less risky behavior and develop positive attitudes and skills (Edwards et al., 2007). The goals and outcomes for the PYD training of at-risk students directly match the skills recommended for many youth leadership development programs, indicating the promising potential impact for similar participants (Carter, Swedeen, Moss, & Pesko, 2011; Edelman et al., 2004; Epstein et al., 2006; Katzel et al., 2010).

Other ways to promote youth leadership development were determined during the Blazing the Trail: A New Direction in Youth Development & Leadership event in Washington DC in August 2007. This event focused on needed improvements in laws, policies, and ways that adults communicate with youth about leadership, with an added focus on youth with disabilities, since they tend to not be included in programs that provide these experiences (Katzel et al.,
The Blazing the Trail Summit was one example of an opportunity for participants to specifically identify actions youth can take to strive towards positive outcomes as they transition from youth to adulthood. Ten action items identified during this summit include: learning rights and responsibilities; connecting to the community; becoming self-advocates; learning disability history; transition planning participation; applying for scholarships, finding internships or work experience; finding or becoming mentors; serving on decision making boards; and training workers with youth (Katzel et al., 2010).

As youth with disabilities become more fully included in aspects of education and society, they need to learn proper ways to communicate their needs and determine what supports will guide them towards success in the future. Leadership skills are often built upon during activities that take place outside of the school day, such as service groups, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately, youth with disabilities are less likely to participate in these types of activities and groups (Uditsky, 2005), so there is a strong need for service providers such as educators to support these individuals towards engaging in activities that will develop leadership involving peers with or without disabilities (Zygmunt, Larson, & Tilson, 1994). Leadership education has been recommended to be included in everyone’s education, although most programs continue to target youth who have already shown some level of leadership ability (McKinney & VSA, 1993). By maintaining such a narrow focus, individuals with disabilities are often left out of programs even though they may have the strongest need for development of leadership skills, and may have more potential than expected. Although traits of leadership may be picked up on naturally or self-initiated by many adolescents, those with disabilities often need more explicit instruction and guidance to learn and retain these skills, and lack the opportunities to foster these skills in comparison to their peers without disabilities.
All youth have the potential to be leaders, and demonstrate their abilities daily in various situations. Youth are less likely to be motivated to become leaders if they believe leadership abilities are out of their control. Being passive about leadership can have negative effects on school work, communication, decision-making skills, and even finding a job in the future (McKinney & VSA, 1993). Youth with disabilities must have enough self-confidence to believe in their potential capabilities to be leaders, and have supportive role models to guide the process.

Another consideration when researching the details of varied youth leadership development programs must be to examine the target audience and the impact that may have on a program’s accessibility and inclusion or segregation of youth with disabilities. Some programs, such as the Dare to Dream conference or the Youth Leadership Forums are specifically designed for high school students with disabilities, which creates opportunities to focus on topics such as IEP development and disability history with needed accommodations, promotes a sense of community surrounding common challenges and experiences, as well as develop pride in the disability community (Epstein et al., 2006; Amerman et al., 2006). In contrast, others argue for the need for full integration into leadership programs with programs elements applicable to all youth, which support alliances between individuals with different disabilities, with and without disabilities, and among staff and participants (Bauer, 2003; Edelman et al., 2004). Maintaining a student-centered focus of leadership development programming, the present study focuses on implementing a curriculum developed with Universal Design for Learning principles in mind, to ensure access for a wide range of participants. When designing leadership programs, practitioners should acknowledge and accommodate for learners across the spectrum of ability to impact as many as possible on their personal journeys.
Regardless of the specific goals, outcomes, or intended audience for a certain leadership development program, collaboration among agencies and resources will support the awareness and growth of opportunities for youth with disabilities to participate in such programs and advocate for more effective transition planning and leadership opportunities for their futures.

**Leadership Development Programs within Schools**

Leadership is about a process, not a person. Kretman and colleagues purport:

> We believe that all children, not just student government leaders, have the “music” of leadership within…Since every person is both a leader and a follower in life, the opportunity to learn about, develop, and reflect upon leadership and followership in the context of small, naturally occurring groups should be at the core of our educational system (1996, p. 10)

Leadership development can and should have a place in every school in the nation, and would promote acquisition of the characteristics and behaviors emphasized by quality school environments, such as lifelong learning commitment, development of strong values, social competencies, and positive self-identity (Edwards, 2007). Students with learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disabilities are at higher risk of not completing school, but programs involved work-based learning or personal development have been found to prevent dropouts (National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition, 2005).

There are limited examples of quality leadership development programs implemented within the school setting. Kretman et al., (1996) provided a case study about the Leadership Training Institute (LTI) at JFK High School to develop leadership in a large, diverse public school setting, and promote identification of youth members as involved and responsible citizens. This program incorporates academic content as well as experiential interactive education by applying the content in meaningful ways. The LTI advises beginning with a foundational course to provide a common base of knowledge prior to application (Kretman et al., 1996). That advice aligns with the focus of the curriculum in the present study, which is
introductory and focused on providing knowledge to support future applications of leadership. The LTI program uses cooperative and experiential learning, addresses multiple intelligences, and requests support at home to build upon leadership skills. Finally, they maintain that “when students believe in themselves and their ability to make a difference, they become master learners” (Kretman et al., 1996, p. 70).

In another study detailing the implementation of leadership development in the classroom, Hess (2010) suggested teaching strategies for leadership skills such as role playing, group projects, cooperative learning, and service-learning projects. Unfortunately, some of the information cited in this study was not from peer-reviewed sources, which compromised the quality of the research.

Leadership development can take place in a school setting in a variety of ways. Students can participate in leadership workshops or classes, or leadership education can be integrated directly within core content areas (Bisland, Karnes & Cobb, 2004). This flexibility in program implementation further supports the notion that there is a place for leadership education in every school. It is important to consider the needs of all learners when planning delivery of leadership development curriculum.

By designing leadership programs with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a focus, the most students possible can gain access to the curricula. The three major principles of UDL are: multiple means of representation, multiple means of student action and expression, and multiple means of student engagement (Karger & Currie-Rubin, 2013). This educational framework allows teachers and facilitators to stay flexible while providing engaging lessons with proper levels of challenge and support for the group. In the past, students with disabilities have often been left out of clubs or classes focusing on leadership. With the inclusion of UDL
practices, students don’t need to be labeled with a disability, because there are multiple paths for success, and blame doesn’t need to be placed for any problems they experience. According to Karger and Currie-Rubin, (2013), “UDL is based on the premise that meaningful, systemic change often begins “in the margins,” where the system is working least well and change is essential” (p.106). Ideally, leadership development will follow suit and continue to emerge from the margins into the spotlight of education as students, educators, and administrators recognize the importance and ease with which it can be incorporated into the school day. Providing multiple means of engagement is found to be particularly important for students who have disengaged or “checked out” of the learning process, and the focus on supporting students to develop self-regulation and self-efficacy skills can help address behavioral challenges (Karger & Currie-Rubin, 2013). “Promoting self-determination has become a best practice in special education” (Wehmeyer et al., 2012, p. 135). When aligned with experiential-focused leadership development programs, UDL may be the key component for increasing access and inclusion for youth with disabilities within the school setting.

“Studying leadership is a journey into self-discovery. It requires the learner to examine beliefs and values, to suspend judgment in order to become a critical thinker, and to move into new and unchartered territory” (Kretman et al., 1996, p. 35).

**Adolescents with Disabilities’ Perspectives on Leadership Development**

Solicitation of the perspectives of individuals with disabilities on services, supports, and opportunities has not been addressed by a large number of research studies. “Moreover, there is ample evidence that the perspectives of young people may diverge somewhat from those held by educators, service providers, policy makers, parents, or other stakeholders” (Carter et al., 2011). Young adult participants in a study conducted by Carter et al., (2011) reflected upon factors
impacting leadership internally, as well as how it can be demonstrated in typical activities and interactions, rather than the traditional focus on participation in an IEP meeting. This research makes the important statement that youth with disabilities, particularly those who have engaged in leadership activities, have important perspectives which need to be shared and may offer unique insights into program development and implementation.

Of three possible models, the current research employed a “with youth” program, meaning the participants were able to share their input to influence program design although the model was still adult driven (Edelman et al., 2004). The program maintained the importance of student input and actively sought to apply leadership concepts such as decision-making to promote the cycle of experiential learning. An interpretive methodology was adopted, and recognized the fact that “we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations” (Yanow, 2000, p. 5).

By prevailing over learned helplessness with the intentional program delivery of leadership development curriculum focused on student input, experiential learning, and UDL practices, the participants in this study self-identified an increase of new knowledge and positive attitudes towards the concepts covered. In addition, third party raters observed and recorded any behavioral improvements demonstrated immediately following the implementation of the curriculum.

Methods

Context and Participants

This study involved high school students at a public high school in rural Appalachia. According to the Ohio Department of Education’s 2012-13 school report card, the average daily enrollment of students in the school was 246. Of these students, 26.2% were identified as students with disabilities. In the school district, 66% were considered academically
disadvantaged. This indicates a strong likelihood that the participants in this study were considered at-risk for at least one reason, as defined previously in the literature.

The study took place over a period of two weeks during late spring, near the end of the school year. This allowed attitudes to form, relationships to strengthen, and students to feel comfortable engaging in activities with one another throughout the year prior to the study. This was important because the study called for students to participate with various partners and groups and attempt challenging activities which required trust and familiarity with one another. This study was offered to the full class roster in a self-contained English classroom. Students had been placed in this class due to disability diagnoses deemed to adversely impact their educational performances and all had current Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). One student opted out of the study, for a total of 10 participants.

Seven participants (70%) were male and three (30%) were female. The average age was 16 years (range 15-17 years). Three students were in the ninth grade, and seven were in the tenth grade. Participants fell under the following disability categories: learning disability (n = 5), cognitive disability (n = 4), and emotional/behavioral disability (n = 1). Nine participants were Caucasian (90%) and one identified as multi-racial (10%). All ten students qualified for free or reduced lunch, as determined by household income levels. The actual leadership program curriculum took place during five consecutive 80-minute block periods, from Monday-Friday in May 2014.

The researcher was participating in a year-long teaching fellowship which included teaching in her own self-contained high school resource classroom for English and Math instruction. The researcher implemented the leadership programming within the assigned class periods for one week within the final month of the school year. It is important to note that the
researcher ensured the daily lessons were aligned with Common Core State Standards in order to be incorporated into the English curriculum. The researcher has been trained for four consecutive years (2011-2014) as a leadership development specialist on the curriculum upon which this study was based, during a volunteer staff position at a week-long national leadership conference.

There were two third-party raters who participated in this study by completing identical pre-and post-assessment surveys based upon their personal observations and perceptions of the participants. The first rater was a paraprofessional who worked every day with the entire class of students both in the researcher’s classroom, as well as other content area (Science and History) classrooms, meaning she spent two 80-minute block periods back-to-back with the same students. She joined the school district in January 2014, and has a background in teaching special education. This observer is also local to the area, and knew some of the participants prior to working with them in the school setting. The second rater was the other content area special educator for the school, and taught one block period of either Science or History daily with the group of study participants directly following the researcher’s block period of English or Math. This teacher taught at the school for ten years at the time of the study, had some students in his classroom the prior year, and is also the school’s golf, track & field, and cross country coach.

**Instrumentation**

As noted by Russon and Reinelt (2004), different methods of data collection result in different types of information; shifts in self-awareness and values are best captured with interviews or text analysis, while growth in skills and strategies can be measured with pre/post interviews and 360 feedback surveys. This study focused on a mixed-method design with both quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as both evidential and evocative inquiries (Grove, Kibel & Hass, 2005). Participants in this study completed two nearly identical pre- and post-
assessment questionnaires online within the school setting, comprised of questions to gather quantitative and qualitative data. They also met with the researcher on the final day of the program to each individually participate in a brief one-on-one exit interview with audio recording for later analysis. This interview was comprised of eight open-ended questions regarding the experience. Additionally, two second-party raters each completed pre-and post-assessment questionnaires similar to the participant version. Finally, anecdotal records included participation and attendance notes and scores, as well as submissions recorded in participant guides.

**Student pre-assessment questionnaire.** Every participant completed this electronic measure of perceived understanding of five specific leadership concepts, perception of his or her current role as a leader, identification of strengths or weaknesses for a prescribed set of eight abilities (working with others, sharing thoughts with others, expressing wants and needs, knowing and sticking to personal values, showing what I do well, showing I need help, understanding people’s differences, and reflecting on what went well or not), and perceived importance of leadership development prior to the program delivery. Participants rated responses on a likert scale from 1-5, with 1 representing the minimum level and 5 the maximum. Every quantitative response was substantiated with a qualitative open-ended response providing an example or justification for the participant’s rating. The specific concepts and abilities in the survey were selected following a thorough analysis of literature detailing common and recommended outcomes for leadership development programs, with a focus on the prescribed goals from the American Youth Foundation (AYF)’s first year leadership development curriculum for the National Leadership Conference, which was the basis for the curriculum utilized in this study (American Youth Foundation, 2007; AYF, 2013; Black, 2006; Lorimer,
2006; McCauley & Hughes-James, 1994; Russon & Reinelt, 2004; Sabatelli, Anderson, Trachtenberg & Liefeld, 2005; Villaruel, Perkins, Borden & Keith, 2003) See Appendix A for a copy of the instrument.

**Third-party pre-assessment questionnaire.** The pre-assessment quantitative and qualitative evidential measure distributed to two third party raters included a confidential master page with student’s codes, and a hard copy of the survey for each participant. Raters recorded their perception of each participant’s current leadership status, identification of strengths or weaknesses, and perceived abilities of leadership development prior to curriculum delivery, both with Likert scale scores of 1-5 and justification for each rating. The materials for this assessment were handed out one week prior to implementation of the program, directly following study approval from the International Review Board (IRB). See appendix A for a copy of the instrument.

**Subject daily participation checklist/ anecdotal record form.** This instrument was a simple checklist used to monitor subject participation employing a numeric code and recording specific observations for each day of leadership development. Students began with a score of 20 points for each day, and were deducted five points each time he or she earned an X on the checklist from the researcher or assistant. Subjects were made aware of the scoring system and confirmed understanding of ways to receive an X, which included refusal to participate, disrespect of others/environment, sleeping or talking inappropriately. This checklist provided an opportunity for notes about participation, such as certain roles or contributions made by subjects. Over the course of five sessions, scores were tabulated, with a maximum participation score of 100 available. See Appendix B for a copy of the instrument.
**Student post-assessment questionnaire.** The quantitative and qualitative post-assessment measured participants’ understanding of specific leadership terms, perception of their roles as leaders, identification of strengths or weaknesses, growth and perceived importance of leadership development following the implementation of one week of leadership curriculum. The survey was nearly identical to the pre-assessment, but also included questions about growth in understanding and ability of leadership, as well as an opportunity for any final comments. See appendix A for a copy of the instrument.

**Third-party post-assessment questionnaire.** The quantitative and qualitative post-assessment measured the same third party raters’ perception of each participant currently as leaders, identification of strengths or weaknesses, and perceived abilities of leadership development directly following the implementation of one week of curriculum delivery. The observers rated the growth of participants’ abilities and any changes in behavior after the completion of the program. The second party raters opted to use a rate growth and behavior on the same papers from the pre-assessment survey in a different color. They were given one week to complete and submit this data. See Appendix A for a copy of the instrument.

**Exit interviews.** The exit interview was comprised of a set of eight open-ended questions to be asked during a one-on-one discussion with each participant directly following the completion of one week of leadership curriculum, and prior to the completion of the post-assessment questionnaire. Each participant was reminded of the main activities from the program, and given the opportunity to share his or her thoughts in response to each question while being audio recorded for subsequent analysis purposes. See Appendix C for a copy of the instrument.
Upon approval from the University’s IRB, all parents/guardians of students in the special education self-contained resource classroom were provided a written (and verbal if desired) explanation of the study and asked to sign and return the form if they did not wish for their child to participate. This method of passive consent was approved by the school principal, based on a history of low return rates, in order to ensure students were able to participate. Some of these forms were distributed by hand following IEP meetings, and others were mailed to students’ residences. At the same time, pre-assessment questionnaires were distributed via email and hard copy to both third-party raters to complete prior to program implementation. Questions were answered by the researcher to clarify directions, and a confidential master code list was provided.

Participants also received assent forms which were distributed following full parental approval as well as a verbal and written description of the study including the purpose, objectives, general procedures, and opportunities for questions. All students electronically provided their assent during their participation in the pre-assessment questionnaires completed using Qualtrics, an online survey software program. One student elected not to participate due to anticipation of low attendance later in the week, and completed an alternate assignment.

Upon no objections from parents/guardians and subject assent, participants completed their individual online pre-assessments. A code was assigned to each individual to replace identifiers, and they were informed that their responses would remain private and confidential. Each question and options were read aloud and participants were asked not to work ahead, so that directions were not misinterpreted. One student dictated responses and the paraprofessional typed for him, which is an acceptable accommodation listed in his IEP, and a common practice.

Program Implementation
The leadership development curriculum used for this study was modified and adapted from the curriculum designed for first year participants at the National Leadership Conference led by the American Youth Foundation. The focus was on “learning awareness, understanding, and facilitated practice of leadership skills” (AYF, 2013, p.1).

**Session One.** The first leadership session began with a verbal and written introduction to leadership development to activate prior knowledge and provide background information. This included an explanation and discussion of important relevant vocabulary terms (i.e., leadership, reflection, diversity, collaboration, and self-confidence). Participants received a pencil and personal leadership guide with both guided outline pages and blank pages to be used throughout the program. Next, they completed a guided outline while participating in a discussion about the BrainROVER© tool (AYF, 2007) for generating ideas, and collaboratively applied this strategy when creating a “recipe for success” with the group. They ended by writing three qualities needed for the group’s success on clothespins for use in future activities.

**Session two.** The second session began by recalling the recipe for success designed the prior day, and acquiring needed materials. The list of group roles found in the participants’ handbooks was read aloud and modeled with participant feedback. A problem-solving collaboration activity was presented to the group with minimal direction, and the group traveled to an outside area on school property to complete the activity. The researcher distributed a number of random objects to the participants, and asked them to place them in order within a rope circle with no further guidance. Upon completion, the group returned to the classroom where the roles were re-read aloud, and they were given 10 minutes to reflect independently in their journal section of the handbook, and in discussion with the class. They took a short break, and returned to class for an introduction about managing conflict. Participants were welcomed to
share connections, the rating style was explained and statements were read aloud as participants followed along in their handbooks and recorded their personal ratings. The scores were tallied with assistance as needed, and participants examined their personal style of managing conflict, connecting to examples in their lives. The session concluded with an opportunity to reflect, and affirm participants by sharing clothespins with one another for qualities observed during the session.

**Session three.** The third session began by recalling the tools and ideas learned up to that point including brainROVER©, recipe for success, group roles, and handling conflict. An introduction was given on communication through using an interactive demonstration and discussion of poor and high quality models of communicating. The VEERPS (volume, eye contact, enunciation, rate, posture, subject) acronym was explained and visually represented as participants completed a guided outline in their handbooks. Participants then tied VEERPS to an activity in groups of 3-4 individuals involving one-minute speeches with time for feedback from group members on strengths and weaknesses in their VEERPS. The session concluded with a group reflective discussion on the activity, personal reflection time in their journals, and affirmations with clothespin qualities.

**Session four.** The fourth leadership session began as usual by recalling past activities, most specifically the communication focus from day three. The focus turned from speaking to listening, beginning with an outline for participants to complete examining why listening is important and how to improve those skills, followed by a discussion on their thoughts. The participants were divided into two groups, with one group receiving a speaking prompt and the other receiving a listening criteria card to either demonstrate positive or negative listening characteristics while their partner spoke. The partners then switched roles with varied prompts
and discussed their feelings and reactions about the experience. Participants were given a brief description of the next activity called ‘three lines of communication’ which occurred outside to practice listening skills in another way. They were taken in three separate groups with unique directions for ‘doers’ who were blindfolded to navigate an obstacle course, ‘seers’ who could observe the situation and communicate with hand signals and body language but not talk, and ‘communicators’ who couldn’t see the obstacle course but had to speak to direct their blindfolded group member in the task. Once all groups finished the task, everyone returned to the classroom to debrief on success, struggles, and connections to life experiences. The session concluded with affirmations.

Session five. The fifth and final leadership session began with a recap of the major topics covered, explaining that each person is unique and has his/her own strengths and needs which make him/her a leader. Participants were led through the ‘my whole self’ activity, responding to each prompt in their handbook with either words or drawings to depict who they are as a leader. They were asked to volunteer to share the sections that were hardest and easiest to complete, and discussed the importance of understanding personal values for group dynamics. They then participated in a final affirmation activity connecting all members in a spider web. Participants were introduced to the final activity of creating a vision board while waiting for their personal exit interview.

Post-Implementation

Participants were called individually to participate in an approximately five-minute exit interview in a private location with an audio recording to ensure proper memory recall for data analysis purposes. Once dismissed from the interview and thanked for participation, they were
provided a certificate of completion, and logged on to computers to complete a post-assessment questionnaire with the same confidential code to replace identifiers.

The same two third-party raters were given one week from the end program date to complete post-assessment questionnaires and submit them in a confidential envelope which was kept in a locked cabinet along with participant handbooks.

**Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed in many ways in order to respond to the following sub-questions identified in this study:

- Does leadership development in the classroom increase high school students with disabilities’ knowledge and understanding of key vocabulary and personal strengths/weaknesses?
- Does leadership development in the classroom increase high school students with disabilities’ positive attitudes towards leadership and identification as a leader?
- Will there be observable shifts in demonstrations of leadership behavior and abilities, as observed in other school settings?
- Was the program design and implementation deemed sufficient for student engagement and access to leadership concepts?
- Did the level of individual participation as determined by the daily checklist correlate with levels of impact of the leadership program on participants?

Data was analyzed by measuring quantitative differences in individual participants’ pre- and post-assessment responses based on their Likert scale scores, as well as the Likert scale scores of the third-party raters. Means were established to represent average levels of growth for the entire group of participants. The total participation score out of a possible 100 points was tabulated for each individual based upon number of X’s earned daily. Some of the trends based on the group’s
perceived areas of growth or lack thereof were also determined to make broader conclusions. Some of the data gathered through the pre/post assessments help to determine what was happening and the effects of the program (Black, 2006).

Data was also analyzed qualitatively by examining comments made in explanations on participant and third-party raters’ assessments, notes recorded on the daily checklist, in participant guides, and feedback given during exit interviews. This data helps to measure consistency or inconsistencies between both types of data, and provide deeper insights and examples than numerical data alone. The evocative nature of the open-ended survey responses, anecdotal observations, and participant journals offered the unique inclusion of participant insights into the data analysis, helping to shed light to the less tangible elements of personal learning (Black, 2006).

**Results**

The results of the statistical analysis are presented in the following sections. The tables demonstrate participants’ ratings of understanding of leadership vocabulary, ratings of personal strengths and weaknesses in key areas, perceptions about leadership and self-identification, and observations of behavior and abilities. A sampling of transcribed insights and explanations from the participants are offered to support the statistical findings.

**Quantitative Results**

Participants were asked to rate their understanding of key terms related to leadership from 1-5. The numerical ratings represented the following beliefs: 1- Never heard it; 2- have heard it but don’t fully understand; 3- understand it but don’t feel comfortable using it often; 4- understand it and am comfortable using it; and 5- understand it and use it often.
Tables 1 and 2 represent the numerical ratings of each of the 10 participants’ pre- and post-assessment responses to the question about understanding of the concepts listed: collaboration, self-confidence/self-advocacy, communication, diversity, and reflection.

**Table 1**

*Participants’ Perceived Comprehension of Leadership Concepts on Pre-Assessment*

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As detailed above, the mean scores all represent increased understanding in the post-assessments, except for in the area of reflection. Out of a possible 5.0, ratings of collaboration increased from a mean of 1.9 to 2.8; ratings of self-confidence/self-advocacy increased from 1.5 to 3.8 (the largest growth); ratings of communication from 3.1 to 3.7, diversity from 1.7 to 2.5, and reflection from 3.0 to 2.6.

For every question requiring a quantitative measure on a Likert scale, respondents were expected to support their answers with short narrative justifications including examples,
reasoning, or comments. The following selected excerpts demonstrate participants’ understanding of concepts and terms.

In general, participants indicated the lowest understanding of diversity on the pre-assessment, with a mean score of 1.7 indicating they had never heard it and didn’t understand it. All subjects stated “no idea” or a similar response. The highest mean score was 3.1 on communication, which was explained as “talk to someone”, “talking out loud”, and other variations on talking.

On the post-assessment, the greatest increase was in the area of self-confidence/self-advocacy, which increased from a mean of 2.5 to 3.8, and became the highest scored item, indicating that after the intervention, some students understood and felt comfortable using the terms. Six participants indicated some variation of “I don’t know” on the pre-assessment for this concept. On the post-assessment, five were able to specifically articulate explanations such as “not afraid to tell someone who you are”, “believing (sic) in your abilities (sic) and set goals”, and “its (sic) how people about there (sic) self.” Rating of the concept of reflection decreased slightly from a mean of 3.0 to 2.6. On the pre-assessment, two participants rated their understanding a 5, with one explanation of “its (sic) like your (sic) reflecting on what you want to do in life and that you want to go for [a] goal or the way you are and how you use it”. On the post-assessment, a higher number of subjects offered ideas such as “thinking back” and “summarize (sic) what u (sic) learned”, possibly indicating a discrepancy between numerical perceived ratings and actual understanding.

Participants were asked to rate how they viewed their ability on a scale from 1-5, then support their answer, for a set of eight skills. A rating of 1 indicated a personal area of weakness, and a rating of 5 meant the participant believed it was a strength he or she had.
Upon analysis of the pre-and post-assessment data, the following mean scores were reported. “Working with other people” increased very slightly from 3.4 to 3.5; “sharing my thoughts with others” increased from a mean of 2.2 to 2.7; “expressing wants and needs” remained at a mean of 2.8; “knowing and sticking to personal values” decreased from a mean of 3.5 to 2.9; “showing what I do well” increased from 3.6 to 4.1; “showing I need help” increased from 3.2 to 3.5; “understanding people’s differences” increased from 2.9 to 3.5; and “reflecting on what went well or not so well” increased from 2.5 to 3.3. The ratings and mean scores for the participant pre-and post-assessments are found in tables 3 and 4.

For the concept of “working with others”, participants’ ratings remained near neutral. Explanations increased following the intervention: “they are all right (sic) as long as they don’t get on my nerves” to “I work pretty good with people. They help me and I help people”; “I can work [with] people but not for to (sic) long” to “its (sic) got[ten] beater (sic) now that I have worked with the class”. In relation to “sticking to my values,” few participants indicated strengths on the pre-assessment, “I go to work all day every day and never miss a day” and many were more vague in indicating “some what” or “not really”. On the post-assessment, more participants clearly stated “[I] don’t know my values”; “I don’t use that” or “I stick up for my sister, brothers, and dad”. On “understanding people’s differences,” statements began as “not my problem” or “I have truble (sic) uder standing (sic) people” and changed to “not around difference very much” and “its more barter [better] then (sic) last time”. Another participant stated, “I know people are having troble (sic) and I know that some people have thier (sic) hard times. I wish that I can do my part to help”
Table 3

Participants’ Perceived Comprehension of Leadership Concepts on Pre-Assessment

<table>
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<th>Participant #</th>
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<th>values</th>
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Table 4

Participants’ Perceived Comprehension of Leadership Concepts on Post-Assessment

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<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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Participants were asked to rate how important they found leadership, both for all high school students, and for themselves personally. They rated their responses on a scale from 1-5 as follows: 1- not at all important; 2-not very important; 3-unsure; 4-somewhat important; 5-very important.

The results demonstrate a shift from slightly unsure (3) to somewhat important (4). Participants rated leadership for high school students as increasing from 3.9 to 4.6 in importance. Participants explained, “[be]cause all the ninth grader[s] still act like two year olds”, and “because it helps out a lot and it is good when u (sic) can show that u (sic) can be a leader.” They also rated leadership for them personally to increase from 3.5 to 4.3 in importance, explaining “it [will] help me now and later in the future.” The results are conveyed in table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>for high school Ss (pre)</th>
<th>for high school Ss (post)</th>
<th>for self(pre)</th>
<th>for self (post)</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
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The final area on the surveys asked about self-identification and growth as leaders, as, and is represented in table 6. When defining one’s self as a leader, the ratings were: 1- no, not at all; 2- I might be in the future, but not now”; 3- I’m not sure, but I might be sometimes; 4- I am a leader in some settings; and 5- Yes, I am a leader. Ratings of self-identification as leaders increased from 2.6 to 3.6, explained as “there is times were (sic) I don’t show that I can be a leader but there is times [where] I do and [I know] that I can get more better in the future”. Understanding of leadership increased 3.7 points, with 1 indicating ‘no growth’ and 5 as ‘a lot’. Participants wrote, “I listen and talk about ideas and talk about what we need to do.” Growth in ability to act as leaders increased 3.5 points, “I have some troble (sic) but I am still working to understand what I have to do” and “I’m more comfendant (sic) and try harder.”
In contrast with self-perceptions of leadership and growth, third party raters were also asked to identify students’ levels as leaders based upon observations, with the following scale from 1-5: a rating of 1- no, not at all; 2- he/she might be in the future, but not now; 3- I’m not sure, but he/she might be sometimes; 4- he/she is a leader in some settings; and 5- yes, he/she is a leader.

Third-party raters were also asked to assess if each participant values leadership using the ratings of 1- not at all; 2-very little; 3-neutral; 4-somewhat; and 5-yes.

Table 7 represents third party observer ratings that increased from 2.2 to 2.5 for leader identification, and mean ratings of approximately 2.6 increasing to 3.2 for valuation.
In response to a question about observable shifts in demonstrations of leadership behavior and abilities, as observed in other school settings, third party raters reported almost consistent scores in the 2.0 range, indicating no change. Observers used a rating scale from 1-5 with a rating of 1-you have seen regression in the past week; 2- you have seen no growth; 3- you have seen little growth; 4- you have seen moderate growth; and 5- you have seen a large amount of growth.

Table 8 represents the data as averaged between both third party raters with the following scores. “Working with other people” increased very slightly with an increase of 2.3; “sharing thoughts with others” increased 2.2 points; “expressing wants and needs” remained stable; “knowing and sticking to personal values” increased slightly as a 2.2; “showing what I do well” increased 2.4;
“showing I need help” also increased with 2.4; “understanding people’s differences” showed the highest increase of all the abilities listed, at 3.0; and “reflecting on what went well or not so well” remained constant at 2.0.
Table 8

Third Party Raters’ Observations of Growth in Participant Leadership Skills (Post-Assessment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>work w/ others</th>
<th>share thoughts</th>
<th>wants/needs</th>
<th>values</th>
<th>show strengths</th>
<th>show need help</th>
<th>und.differences</th>
<th>reflect</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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Qualitative Results

Ten exit interviews were audio recorded, and later transcribed and summarized. One participant refused to respond and walked away, so subject #3’s data was discarded for this part of the study. Nine participants responded to questions (found in Appendix C) about their experience, the design of the program, and future implications.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 rated the three lines of communication activity as his favorite because he got to give directions and go outside. His least favorite activity was “the book”, which meant the participant journal, because “it was boring”. He felt like he understood all the directions and steps to the activities. He recommended “having all [activities] outside” could be a positive change for the program in the future. He felt he learned “a lot” about leadership during the program, and felt he learned to “listen and...How to become one (a leader) in the class.” This participant believed leadership is an important skill to learn and practice in school, because “it follows you through your life.” Finally, he stated that this program will impact his future in terms of “jobs…like following directions, and make sure they look at you when you talk and stuff like that.” This interview provided insights in the student’s increased understanding of the importance of leadership and more specifically, communication skills such as listening and making eye contact.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 also rated three lines of communication as her favorite activity, because it was fun. She couldn’t choose a least favorite activity. She felt like she understood all the directions and steps to the activities usually, but “sometimes it was a little unclear. I just tried to figure it out when I didn’t know.” She also was absent for part of two sessions and ill during the week, which could have affected her perceptions of clarity. She didn’t wish for any activities to be changed, and felt she learned “a little bit more than [I] already
knew” about leadership during the program. This participant believed leadership is an important skill to learn and practice both in and out of school, because “there are a bunch of things we can do, like help kids that have mental problems. I think we should learn it [leadership] starting when we’re little and all throughout school.” Finally, she stated that this program will impact her future because “when I have my own kids, just showing them how to act. I can also help my brothers and be a leader with them.”

Participant 3. Participant 3 refused to participate in the exit interview, stating “I don’t care, I don’t like it, am I done?”

Participant 4. Participant 4 rated the ropes activity as his favorite activity during the week, because that was the only outside activity he was present for, and he took charge and helped problem solve to find the answer. His least favorite activity was “just sitting in there [the classroom] and writing and being bored.” He felt like the directions and steps to the activities were all “pretty clear.” He recommended having a race to motivate people or “whoever didn’t do it had to run around the track” to increase participation. He felt he learned “a pretty good amount” about leadership during the program, and felt he grew as a leader by “trying to get people to pay attention and keep going.” This participant believed leadership is an important skill to learn and practice in school, because “without the President we wouldn’t have nothin’ [and he is a leader]” and it helps “show everyone else how to be good and get your grades up”. Finally, he stated that this program will impact his future in terms of his summer job and knowing how to take charge.

Participant 5. Participant 5 rated the three lines of communication as his favorite activity, because his partner “was telling me where to go and I could actually trust him.” His least favorite activity was the ropes activity, because “it got confusing.” He felt like he understood all the
directions and steps to the activities, besides the rope game, which was on purpose. He didn’t recommend any changes, and felt he grew as a leader by paying attention and “getting stuff done.” This participant believed leadership is an important skill to learn and practice in school, because “people learn confidence. I didn’t really have much confidence, but this kind of changed that and I have a couple friends now.” Finally, he stated that this program will impact his future because “it will give me more confidence to play football.”

Participant 6. Participant 6 rated three lines of communication as his favorite activity during the week, because “it was fun more than anything else we did and we got to outside.” He did not care for playing games in general. He felt like he understood all the directions and steps to the activities, and didn’t have any changes he would want to make. This participant felt he learned “quite a bit” about leadership during the program, and advised others to “make better changes in the work you could do to be a leader, and show more people respect and the right thing to do.” This participant believed leadership is an important skill to learn and practice in school, because “it helps keep people on task.” Finally, he stated that this program will impact his future because “it might help treat other people better and get a little farther in life and follow the rules someone has, like if you work for someone.” This participant was very disengaged during the week, so it was interesting to hear his insights and belief that leadership is very important, even if he hadn’t shown his interest throughout the program.

Participant 7. Participant 7 rated three lines of communication as his favorite activity because “one person gave directions and we tried to communicate with them.” He stated, “my least favorite was the first thing...the Brain ROVER, because it was hard.” He felt like he understood all the directions and steps, and recommended that he could “listen a little better” or that the program should be “a little easier.” Participant 7 felt he learned that leadership “is very
important” and grew as a leader “because I can actually help someone, like a kid.” He believed leadership is an important skill to learn and practice in school, because “in life a lot of people need it, and you might as well teach them now until they get old and don’t really know it.” Finally, he stated that this program will impact his future when he goes “to start a business, I can just tell whoever is working what they need to do and we can get things done.”

Participant 8. Participant 8 said learning the vocabulary was her favorite activity, because “when we first were doing it, some kids weren’t paying attention but it was fun because everybody started to get creative with their minds and started talking more.” She stated, “my least favorite was the three lines thing…it was kind of difficult when you’re going right or left and blindfolded.” She felt like he understood all the directions and steps except during the above mentioned activity when her partner “had me going in circles and that made me mad when I was listening to everything he was saying.” She thought food would have helped people “wake up” and knew “some people didn’t really want to go outside.” This student felt she learned “for one, leadership takes a lot of hard work, and you’ve got to take your steps just to be a leader.” She explained, “My strengths, and my communication...I’m still working on things, but I’m driven again. I grew because I helped some ways, even though I was a little bit avoiding something this week, but I’m working on it.” She believed leadership “should be in every classroom like an assembly thing, that would be pretty big and it would help out. With some of the kids that are trying in this classroom, it could help some people here in the school. With everything that we learned this week, with strengths, leadership, communication, diversity…it could help some of the students here and give them a little step up to know what they’re supposed to do too and maybe help people stay away from conflict.” Finally, in the future she felt this program would impact her because, “with everything we have done this week, it’s actually kind of helping me,
building me up to avoid people, and learning how to communicate without messing up eye contact, and the volume in the speaking.” This student was particularly expressive and grateful for this program.

Participant 9. Participant 9 thought the three lines of communication activity was funny, but the rope activity was hard because “I only participated a little bit.” He felt he understood everything, would not make any changes, and learned “a bunch” about leadership. He felt he grew “a little bit with the speaking and listening for communication,” and agreed leadership is important in school. He felt like this program might “make you a boss.”

Participant 10. The final participant, number 10 agreed that the 3 lines of communication was her favorite because her team had good communication, and disliked the rope activity because “it was kind of confusing and I didn’t like all the people not doing anything.” She would not make any changes and felt she gained “more self-confidence than I had. I’m more shy and mellow of a person, but now I’m not always mellow.” She believes leadership is important in school, because “if people are being picked on, you need to learn to stand up for yourself and tell them to stop and that it’s not cool. Leadership helps shy people to build up their self-esteem and make them more comfortable.” She believes that this program will “just make me a better person and a stronger person in all places in my life” in the future.

Although brief, the exit interviews provide important insights into students’ thoughts and attitudes after the completion of the intervention. Table 9 displays general demographic data as well as each participant’s final participation score out of a possible 100, with notes on attendance/participation. This table makes the information more visually comprehensible for some, and allows for easier comparison to other data to make conclusions in relation to participation level and growth, as well as other factors.
Discussion

It is not an easy task to evaluate leadership development programs, because they can lead to intangible results (Black, 2006). The relationships between a program and its various results may not be direct, because there are a multitude of factors outside the design and implementation of the leadership program which may affect outcomes. Many evaluations of leadership programs focus primarily on numbers, or may offer a few qualitative excerpts, but there is a way to capture the “spirit” of the programs as well as concrete data, by using complementary inquiry forms known as evidential and evocative (Grove et al., 2005).

Evidential inquiry attempts to understand what is happening through use of factual evidence, which can be qualitative or quantitative, and will hopefully lead to reasoning about a program and its effects (Grove et al., 2005). This study utilized evidential inquiry through the review of literature to inform practices such as program design and delivery (UDL and experiential
learning), and with the use of ratings and explanations about understanding of leadership concepts in pre- and post-assessments.

Evocative inquiry entails seeking thoughts and viewpoints of anyone influenced in order to “wake a reaction to the change process as a whole” (Grove et al., 2005, p.9). This form of data analysis is far less tangible than hard facts, but is extremely important, and perhaps more aligned with the detailed intertwined factors involved with leadership development. This study utilized evocative inquiry by employing open-ended surveys about strengths and weaknesses, attitudes about leadership and the specific program, and self-identification as leaders. Anecdotal observations, participant journals, and feedback during exit interviews all provided valuable insights without concrete conclusive information.

Although determining the perceived impact of this leadership program for rural high school students with disabilities was at times a vague and indeterminate process, there are still important conclusions to be drawn, which may inform future practices. The findings demonstrate that participants gained knowledge in concepts and application of leadership topics, had more positive attitudes toward leadership, and perceived their own growth in understanding and abilities to act as leaders. There were limited results in the observations of growth in participants’ leadership behavior and abilities in other settings, as determined by two third party raters.

**Research question one.** The first research question sought to determine if leadership development in the classroom increases high school students with disabilities’ knowledge and understanding of key vocabulary and personal strengths/weaknesses. Knowledge gain was the primary focus of this leadership program, since it was an introduction for most students, which is advised by the successful LTI model in New Jersey (Kretman et al., 1996). Rather than being assessed on the vocabulary related to leadership in a traditional test manner, participants were
asked to explain their perceived understanding of concepts about terms and their own abilities on pre- and post-assessments. Using a 5-point Likert type scale, participants rated their understanding of the six terms which formed the central concepts for this program: collaboration, self-confidence/self-advocacy, communication, diversity, and reflection. The terms were defined explicitly during the first day, and reinforced throughout the rest of the program, which led to a majority of participants reporting increases in their understanding of all the terms, except for reflection. However, more than half of the participants were able to explain the term correctly in their justification, indicating the group mean score of 2.6 may be lower than accurate. Also when re-phrased in the question about participants’ ability to ‘think about what went well or not so well’, respondents showed perceived increases in ability, meaning perhaps the wording prevented their perceptions of growth.

Participants also rated their perceptions of ability related to leadership behaviors to determine how well they could identify strengths and weaknesses. This was another very important aspect to examine, because analysis of one’s own strengths and weaknesses is included in the definition of youth leadership used for this study (Katzel et al., 2010). Again, all but one area reported growth in participants’ self-perceptions of abilities. Participants believed their ability to ‘know and stick to my values’ decreased, which could indicate response-shift bias (Grove et al., 2005) from pre-to post-assessment as they gained more understanding about themselves and related terms. Participants’ justifications for their responses revealed more detailed and relevant responses on the post-assessments, which may represent an increased awareness of self and improved metacognition. This could potentially be related to the use of reflection and journals throughout the program, requiring increased self-analysis and helping to identify personal growth.
**Research question two.** The second research question for this study asked, “Does leadership development in the classroom increase high school students with disabilities’ positive attitudes towards leadership and identification as a leader?” Data to analyze this question was collected using pre-and post-assessments, as well as the exit interviews and anecdotal records. On average the participants in this study were “unsure” or viewed leadership development as “somewhat important” for high school students and shared similar, but even lower ratings of importance for leadership development for themselves. Following the program, participants increased their mean ratings of the importance of leadership development by 0.7, and 0.8 points respectively for high school students in general and for themselves. These results indicated a universally positive shift towards the belief that leadership development is certainly important. Justifications related the importance to the benefits leadership development can have on young kids, immaturity, setting good examples, confidence, working with others and future situations such as school and jobs. An analysis of student participation scores compared to their perceptions of the importance of leadership was conducted with interesting results. Five of six individuals with participation at or above 85% rated leadership development as ‘very important’ or ‘somewhat important’ on both their pre- and post-assessments. However, three of the four participants who participated at a level between 50-70% indicated leadership development was ‘very important’ for both high school students and themselves on pre-assessments, representing growth from ‘not at all’ or ‘not very important’ in some cases.

Exit interviews were completed with nine of the ten participants, due to the refusal and non-compliance of subject #3, which is also represented in his negative answers on the pre- and post-assessments. His data was not entirely removed, because he did choose to participate in some of the activities during the week and indicated mild growth in some areas. The exit
interviews supported participants’ views of the importance of leadership, with all nine indicating importance. Emergent themes of helping, being a good example, paying attention, increased self-confidence, and communication were all included in participants’ justification for why leadership development is important to learn and practice in school. All participants also agreed that the program would impact them in the future in various ways including: jobs, academic improvement, confidence, following and setting good examples, communication skills, in sports, confidence, and overall life improvement. Many of these outcomes are consistent with programs established as effective, which also reduced negative many negative behaviors (Epstein et al., 2006).

**Research question three.** The third research question asked if there would be observable shifts in demonstrations of leadership behavior and abilities, as observed in other school settings. Two third-party raters evaluated their perceptions of each participant’s level of leadership ability and behavior prior to the program delivery, and perceptions of growth within one week of the program’s conclusion. Growth was identified in all areas, but at low levels. The average rating of participants as leaders increased from 2.2 to 2.5, indicating the belief that most participants had leadership potential but were not currently acting as leaders. The raters also believed participants valued leadership ‘very little’ (mean score of 2.6) prior to the program, and ‘neutral’ (3.2) upon completion. This was interesting in contrast to the participants’ high value mean ratings as described above, perhaps indicating they did not apply that belief outside the research classroom, or they were not conveying their attitudes in positive ways. The third-party observers also rated their perceptions of participants’ growth on the same eight leadership skills participants identified as strengths and weaknesses. A rating of 2 indicated ‘no growth’, which was representative of all areas, except “understanding people’s differences” which they identified as
perceiving ‘little’ growth. While one would prefer to see growth identified by others, it is not necessarily a testament to the program that this was not strongly identified immediately following the study. In fact, there are limited evaluations of behavioral changes in existing leadership literature due to the length of time it takes for behaviors to be observed as different (Russon & Reinelt, 2004).

**Question four.** The fourth question addressed by this study asked if the program design and implementation was deemed sufficient for student engagement and access to leadership concepts. This is important when examining the accessibility and appropriateness of leadership development for students with disabilities and in a classroom setting. Data from anecdotal records and exit interviews assisted in answering this question. All nine participants confirmed they understood the directions and steps in all activities, with the exception of one (the rope activity) which was intentionally left unclear for the purpose of the task. This supports the inclusion of Universal Design for Learning methods such as multiple means of representation (visually, spoken, written, demonstrated), student action and expression, and student engagement (Karger & Currie-Rubin, 2013). Use of UDL for this program enabled common core standards, leadership development goals, and student accommodations all to be met in an accessible manner. Experiential learning also provided students with opportunities to develop as leaders through experiences, reflective observation, thoughts about concepts, and active experimenting of the concepts which allowed students to form connections and construct meaning (Eich, 2008). Participants overwhelmingly preferred the interactive and outdoors activities (3 lines of communication), which aligns well with all the above theories. Aspects participants disliked varied for reasons of boredom, difficulty, confusion, and negative partner interactions. The
researcher noted that participants were more engaged when applying concepts in related activities in comparison to note-taking about concepts.

**Research question five.** The final question for this study asked, ‘Did the level of student participation as determined by the daily checklist correlate with levels of impact of the leadership program on those individuals?’ This question was examined in relation to participants’ attitudes towards leadership. Subject #3 had a low level of participation, but increased on the final day so he “would not fail”, but remained resistant to the program, with reflective low ratings of growth. This is a difficult question to clearly answer, because as mentioned earlier, impact is not a neatly defined measure. In general, the participants with higher participation levels were more open to learning and growth, and completed the cycle of experiential learning more fully than those who chose not to participate in class discussions, activities, or reflection opportunities. The exit interviews revealed somewhat surprisingly positive responses from some participants who acted resistant and disengaged throughout the week. For example, participant #1 only received a 60% on participation due to refusal to complete some activities and all written reflections. He believed leadership development was ‘not very important’ for high school students ‘because I’m in high school so it’s not tht (sic) important’ on his pre-assessment, and included answers in his participant guide such as ‘IDK (sic) [and] I don’t care’ about the definition of leadership, and ‘I need nothin (sic) and hope for nothing (sic)’ about expectations for the week. His comments on the post-assessment summed up his thoughts: ‘I like it it was boring [and] it could be beter (sic) I learnt (sic) a lot’. Finally, on the exit interview, this individual identified the importance of leadership because it ‘follows you in life’ and he believed it could help him with ‘jobs, following directions, and communication’ in the future. The participation score was a general indicator, but did not directly correlate with overall impact of the program on the participant. It is important to
triangulate all the various forms of data provided to get a broader understanding of the impact
this program had on each participant, as well as the group as a whole.

**Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

The implications for this study include benefits for the subjects, their communities, and
future of leadership development for students with disabilities, and for programs within
classrooms.

Study participants engaged in opportunities to improve their collaboration skills, self-
awareness and confidence, communication skills, awareness of diversity, and reflective practices
in varied methods throughout the program. Increased collaboration skills align with
employability and need for social skills. Understanding strengths and weaknesses and improved
communication skills contributes to students becoming self-advocates and expressing their needs
in the future, which are important transition-related skills for individuals with disabilities (Bauer,
2003). Diversity was less explicitly covered, yet increases in ratings of perceived growth were
reported, indicating participants had a greater understanding of how to celebrate their own and
others’ differences, which is important particularly if individuals expect to travel outside their
small rural town. Finally, increased reflective practices indicate the ability of students with
disabilities to engage in metacognition, which is not commonly emphasized in special education,
but can be an extremely useful tool and necessary for experiential learning. The data indicates
new knowledge and skills in leadership were acquired, meaning participants have the tools to
transfer that knowledge into positive changes in behavior and beliefs to support positive futures
in independent lives.

Participants self-identified commitments toward improving their attitudes, interpersonal
skills, and academic efforts among others, which can all have positive effects on future teachers
and classmates. Both third party raters will be with the ninth grade participants again in
classrooms for the following year, and could potentially provide insights into longer-term retention of knowledge and/or behavior shifts, as well as serve as reminders for students to continue aligning their efforts with leadership skills.

The short duration of the study intervention was one limitation which may have prevented genuine growth and best practices from occurring. In the future, incorporating leadership development earlier in the school year may allow for increased growth.

Many different factors were explored and large amounts of data examined to form the conclusions for this study, which prevents easy replication. Perhaps in the future, participants would only perform a final evaluation to avoid extensive time with assessments, and avoid response shift bias which may have occurred in this study due to the use of pre- and post-assessments and changes in understanding (Grove et al., 2005). Third party raters would also only be asked to measure observed growth over a longer period of time, such as a semester, following the program implementation.

Leadership development programs are closely aligned with many transition skills that should be targeted for students with disabilities in order to prepare for adulthood, and can supplement the need for inclusion of such skills in classrooms in all schools. Students who participate in a leadership program with UDL and an experiential learning focus will be better equipped to own their experiences and become productive members of society. Educators can be trained in facilitation of leadership development and can choose to teach a specific leadership unit, or embed the concepts within core content, depending on their preferences. Student needs and interests should always be considered, and the program may be best implemented earlier in a school year to allow time to guided transformation and application beyond the surface of knowledge and skill acquisition as found in this study.
Conclusions

The findings in this study support the notion that leaders can be anyone, and leadership development is both possible and important for students with disabilities, and within a classroom setting. By giving participants a voice to share their perspectives, both evidential and evocative inquiry took place to determine the impact of leadership curriculum on a group of rural high school students with mild-moderate disabilities in their English class. Behaviors are more difficult to evaluate, especially in a short period of time (Russon & Reinelt, 2004). An acquisition of key knowledge and skills was established, and supported with thoughtful justifications from participants about their shifts in perceptions, attitudes, and potential for the future as leaders.
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Appendix A
Ohio University Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Title of Research: Leadership Development for High School Students with Disabilities

Researcher: Sara Luehring
Advisor: Dianne Gut

You are being asked permission for your child to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want your child to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your child’s personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you should only sign it if you do NOT give permission. The study will begin one week after you have received this form. This form of passive consent will allow your child’s participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study
This study is being done to explore the impact of including leadership development activities in the High School curriculum specifically adjusted for students with disabilities. The study will measure students’ attitudes about leadership development and understanding of specific skills, as well as the impact on their lives in the future.

If you agree to allow your child to participate, he/she will be asked to complete a computer survey to measure thoughts before and after one week of activities. He or she will participate at his or her chosen level of engagement in 5 leadership activities focusing on communication, collaboration, diversity awareness, self-confidence, and reflection skills. At the end of the week, your child will be asked to have a one-on-one discussion with the teacher to reflect on the experience. This will be audio recorded only for personal use to recall student answers, and will be destroyed after the study is finished.

Your child’s participation in the study will take place for 5 class block periods in Resource English and will last no longer than the end of the 2014-15 school year on May 30, 2014.

Risks and Discomforts
Risks or discomforts that your child might experience include possible discomfort in problem solving or participating in new types of hands-on activities. They will be encouraged to participate only at the level they feel comfortable with, and will have an alternative assignment if they choose not to participate. Accommodations aligned with IEPs are included in the adapted curriculum for this study and will be honored as needed.

Benefits
This study is important to society because students with disabilities are not always viewed as having leadership abilities, so they may benefit from specific activities to grow in these skills. Viewing themselves as leaders and understanding the importance of such skills may motivate these students to pursue their goals and be a positive influence on others.
At the end of this research, your child may understand his/her strengths and weaknesses better, and improve behavior in other settings such as other classes, home, and/or work to embrace the qualities practiced in this study. This could result in better grades, more motivation to seek help and help others, and understand his or her unique qualities.

Confidentiality and Records
Your child’s study information will be kept confidential by assigning a code to replace their name when taking the online surveys before and after the week of activities. The list of codes will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be taken during exit interviews and will only be accessed by the investigator to recall answers during the data analysis. Recordings will be stored on a password protected personal computer and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Luehring at tl_sluehring@seovec.org or (740) 767-3434 ext. 201. You may also contact her academic advisor Dr. [name] at [email address].

If you have any questions regarding your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact [name] Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664.

By receiving this form you are agreeing that:
- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks to your child and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries your child might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your child’s participation in this research is completely voluntary
- your child may leave the study at any time. If your child decides to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to your child and he/she will not lose any benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

Please sign below only if you do NOT consent to your child’s participation in this study.
Parent Signature________________________________________ Date________________

Printed Name________________________________________

Child’s Name________________________________________

Version Date: [05/03/2014]
Ohio University Subject Assent Form
Title of Research: Leadership Development for High School Students with Disabilities
Researcher: Sara Luehring
Advisor: Dianne Gut

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study
This study is being done to explore the impact of including leadership development activities in the High School curriculum specifically adjusted for students with disabilities. The study will measure your thoughts about leadership development activities, your role as a leader, your understanding of specific skills, and how you think it will affect your lives in the future.

If you agree to participate, you will complete a computer survey to measure your thoughts before and after one week of leadership development activities. You will earn up to 20 points daily based on participation at your chosen level of engagement. You will engage in daily leadership activities focusing on building communication, collaboration, diversity awareness, self-confidence, and reflection skills. You will be reading and writing about the activities, as well as working individually and together to practice these skills. At the end of the week, you will be asked to have a one-on-one discussion with Ms. Luehring to reflect on your experience. This will be audio recorded only for personal use to recall specific answers, and will be destroyed immediately after the study is finished.

Your participation in the study will take place for 5 class block periods in Resource English and will last no longer than the end of the 2014-15 school year on May 30, 2014.

Risks and Discomforts
You might experience possible discomfort in problem solving or participating in new types of hands-on activities, sometimes outside of the classroom and school building. You will be encouraged to participate only at the level you feel comfortable with, and will have an alternative reading and writing assignment if you choose not to participate.

Benefits
This study is important to society because viewing yourselves as leaders and understanding the importance of these skills may motivate you to follow your goals and be a positive influence on others. You may have an impact on the community by continuing to act as leaders in other areas of your lives.
At the end of this research, you might understand your strengths and weaknesses better, and improve your behavior in other settings such as other classes, home, and/or work to embrace the qualities practiced in this study. This could result in better grades, more motivation to seek help and help others, and understanding what makes you unique.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your personal information will be kept confidential by assigning a code to replace your name when taking the online surveys before and after the week of activities. The list of codes will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be taken during exit interviews and will only be accessed by Ms. Luehring to recall specific answers during the data analysis. Recordings will be stored on a password protected personal computer and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU

**Compensation**

As compensation for your time/effort, you will receive a certificate of achievement at the end of the week as a thank you and congratulations for participating.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Luehring at tl_sluehring@seovec.org or (740) 767-3434 ext. 201. You may also contact her academic advisor Dr. Dianne Gut at gut@ohio.edu or (740) 593-0874.

If you have any questions regarding your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature ________________________________ Date ___________________
Appendix B

Study Participant Pre-Assessment Questions

For the following five questions rate your answers on a scale from 1-5 as follows:

1- Never heard it
2- Have heard it but don’t fully understand
3- Understand it but don’t feel comfortable using it often
4- Understand it and am comfortable using it
5- Understand it and use it often

- How would you rate your understanding of the concept of collaboration?
  + Please give an example:

- How would you rate your understanding of the concepts of self-confidence and self-advocacy?
  + Please give an example:

- How would you rate your understanding of the concept of communication?
  + Please give an example:

- How would you rate your understanding of the concept of diversity?
  + Please give an example:

- How would you rate your understanding of the concept of reflection?
  + Please give an example:

- Do you see yourself as a leader?

  1- No, not at all
  2- I might be in the future, but not now
  3- I’m not sure, but I might be sometimes
  4- I am a leader in some settings
  5- Yes, I am a leader
  + Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

- For the following skills, rate how you view your ability on a scale from 1-5, then support your answer.
  1 means you see this as a personal area of weakness, and 5 means you believe this is a strength you have.

  **working with other people**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **sharing my thoughts with others**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **expressing wants and needs**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **knowing and sticking to personal values**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **showing what I do well**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **showing I need help**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **understanding people’s differences**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **reflecting on what went well or not so well**
-Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

-How important do you think leadership development is for high school students?
1- not at all important 2-not very important 3-unsure 4-somewhat important 5-very important

-Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

-How important do you think leadership development is for you personally?
1- not at all important 2-not very important 3-unsure 4-somewhat important 5-very important

-Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?
Study Participant Post-Assessment Questions
For the following five questions rate your answers on a scale from 1-5 as follows:

1- Never heard it  2- have heard it but don't fully understand
3- understand it but don’t feel comfortable using it often
4- understand it and am comfortable using it 5- understand it and use it often

-How would you rate your understanding of the concept of **collaboration**?
+ Please give an example:

-How would you rate your understanding of the concepts of **self-confidence and self-advocacy**?
+ Please give an example:

-How would you rate your understanding of the concept of **communication**?
+ Please give an example:

-How would you rate your understanding of the concept of **diversity**?
+ Please give an example:

-How would you rate your understanding of the concept of **reflection**?
+ Please give an example:

-Do you see yourself as a leader now after this week’s activities?
  1- no, not at all  2- I might be in the future, but not now  3- I’m not sure, but I might be sometimes 4- I am a leader in some settings  5- Yes, I am a leader
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

-For the following skills, rate your ability right now on a scale of 1-5. 1 means you see this as a weakness, and 5 means this is a strength you have.
  **working with other people**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **sharing my thoughts with others**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **expressing wants and needs**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **knowing and sticking to personal values**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **showing what I do well**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **showing I need help**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **understanding people's differences**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

  **reflecting on what went well or not so well**
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

-How important do you think leadership development is for high school students?
  1- not at all important  2- not very important  3- unsure  4- somewhat important  5- very important
  - Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?
How important do you think leadership development is for you personally?
1- not at all important  2- not very important  3- unsure  4- somewhat important  5- very important

-Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

How much do you feel you have grown in your understanding of leadership, on a scale of 1-5? 1 means no growth and 5 means a lot of growth

-Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

How much do you feel you have grown in your ability to act as a leader, on a scale of 1-5? 1 means no growth and 5 means a lot of growth

-Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

3rd party rater pre-assessment checklist
Student’s code: __________

1. Do you see this student as a leader? (circle your response)
   1- no, not at all  2- he/she might be in the future, but not now  3- I’m not sure, but he/she might be sometimes  4- he/she is a leader in some settings  5- yes, he/she is a leader

+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

2. For the following skills, rate this student’s ability on a scale of 1-5.
   1- you see this as a weakness  2- you see little ability  3- neutral  4- ability is shown at times  5- this is a strength this individual has

   a. working with other people
      1  2  3  4  5

      +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

   b. sharing thoughts with others
      1  2  3  4  5

      +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

   c. expressing wants and needs
      1  2  3  4  5

      +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

   d. knowing and sticking to personal values
      1  2  3  4  5

      +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

   e. showing what he/she does well
      1  2  3  4  5

      +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

   f. showing he/she needs help
      1  2  3  4  5

      +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?
g. understanding people’s differences 1 2 3 4 5
   +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

h. reflecting on what went well/not so well 1 2 3 4 5
   +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

3. Do you feel this student values leadership development? (circle)
1- not at all 2-very little 3-neutral 4-somewhat 5-yes
   +Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

Any comments on this student’s behavior or abilities that enhance or impede his or her leadership abilities, specifically in terms of the following qualities:
Collaboration; self-confidence & self-advocacy; communication; diversity awareness; reflection
3rd party rater post-assessment checklist

Student’s code: ___________

Do you see this student as a leader?
1- no, not at all    2- he/she might be in the future, but not now    3- I’m not sure, but he/she might be sometimes    4- he/she is a leader in some settings    5- yes, he/she is a leader

+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

For the following skills, rate any growth you have observed in this student’s ability on a scale of 1-5.
1- you have seen regression in the past week 2- you have seen no growth 3- you have seen little growth 4- you have seen moderate growth 5- you have seen a large amount of growth

working with other people
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

sharing thoughts with others
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

expressing wants and needs
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

knowing and sticking to personal values
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

showing what he/she does well
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

showing he/she needs help
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

understanding people’s differences
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

reflecting on what went well or not so well
+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

Now do you feel this student values leadership development? (circle)
1- not at all    2- very little    3- neutral    4- somewhat    5- yes

+Please explain your rating. Why did you choose that rating?

(Short answer)
-Have you observed any perceived changes in this student’s behavior or understanding related to each of the following qualities? Please explain any differences.
collaboration skills
self-confidence
communication
diversity awareness
reflection
# Appendix C  Daily Participation Checklist

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Appendix D

Exit Interview Questions

1. What was your favorite activity this week and why?
2. What was your least favorite activity and why?
3. Do you feel like you understood the directions and steps in all activities?
4. Are there any changes you would make to an activity?
5. How much do you feel like you learned about leadership?
6. How do you think you grew as a leader or not?
7. Do you think leadership is important to learn and practice in school? Why or why not?
8. How do you think this will impact you in the future?