

How does the active citizenship model contribute to increased opportunities for student voice?

by
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Ethics Statement

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Abstract

This mixed-methods, action research project investigates how using the active citizenship model, a branch of service-learning, may lead to an increase in student voice and students self-identifying as a leader. Student voice describes the ability for students to engage authentically with concepts being discussed and develop a sense of confidence in sharing their ideas. Students' perception of themselves as leaders is connected to student voice, as when students feel that their ideas are valued and heard, their capacity to connect to their school and participate in leadership initiatives increases. Using student reflections, discussions, and student work, this research explores how students within a Grade 6/7 classroom context developed their voice and self-perception as a leaders over the course of 4 weeks. Students worked on an open-ended leadership project, using the active-citizenship model, to demonstrate and exercise their ability to share their ideas and enhance their leadership capacity.

Keywords: active citizenship; service-learning; student voice; connection; leadership; elementary education

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my family and friends who have worked tirelessly and provided me with the skills, support, and courage to complete this research.

I would also like to dedicate this paper to each of the learners that I have had and will have the privilege of teaching. I know that you will make this world a better and brighter place.

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List of Acronyms

AR	Action Research
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour
PBL	Project Based Learning
SAT	Students as Teachers
SDT	Self Determination Theory
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
UNCR	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Introduction

When I reflect upon my own time in elementary school, one recurring theme that has always stuck with me is how trusting my teachers and principal were. They believed that their students were capable enough to take on additional responsibilities and to help with new and important initiatives. In my Grade 7 year, I recall our principal asking me and a select group of other students to join a new group of “Peer Mediators” who would work with other students in the school to help them resolve conflicts during Recess and Lunch times. This task was framed as being a significant leadership opportunity within our school, with even more responsibility than the other jobs options like Lunch monitoring. At the time, I remember feeling uplifted to be chosen because it meant that my principal believed in me and my abilities as a leader. From this experience, I felt empowered to share more of my ideas and opinions in class. I felt that my voice was valued by my teachers and administrator, and this created a confidence within me that grew directly due to the opportunities provided to me throughout my elementary years. Years later when I decided to become an educator, I realized how fortunate I was to have had people in my life who cared enough to continually provide me with leadership development opportunities alongside academic knowledge. I knew that part of my personal educational philosophy needed to include instilling passion for effective leadership within my students. Some of the questions I began to grapple with were “how can I make the leadership opportunities presented more meaningful and student-centered?” and “how can I amplify student voices through leadership initiatives instead of having a top down, authoritative approach?”

When we think about encouraging student leadership, it is important to consider whose ideas are being heard and who is missing from the conversation. Are educators listening passively or are they incorporating students’ ideas into practice? It is too easy to dismiss students’ ideas as naïve or incomplete, which is why it’s critical to work together to develop them and create inclusive solutions. Crucially, student leadership is comprised of many differing aspects of which the definition includes teaching young people how to gain a better understanding of the needs and people which make up their communities as well as developing the skills to communicate, handle conflict, build meaningful relationships, and make important decisions (Bickmore, 2001). From my experience as an elementary school educator, teaching leadership skills both in the

classroom and as an extra-curricular activity, I have observed the positive impact that encouraging students to utilize their voice and exercise choice has had on their class participation and self-confidence. By having students practice these intrapersonal skills regularly, they develop a better sense of connection and belonging to their school, which further encourages them to express themselves, creating a positive feedback loop of participation and growth. Therefore, student voice is an integral part of leadership education for students. Educators facilitating student voice within their classrooms acknowledge that it provides students with the ability to share their ideas freely and develop their identity by gaining a more nuanced understanding of issues that matter most to them (Quinn & Owen, 2016).

Literature Review

Student Voice

The student voice movement began in the 1970s as an initiative to include more student perspectives into the curriculum and provide students with a sense of agency about their learning (Goodman et al. , 2011). Around this same time period, outside of the sphere of education, governmental bodies began to recognize the value of having children develop their capacity to critically analyze issues and advocate for their own rights, as these behaviors breed engaged, adult citizens (Fielding, 2011). “The United Nations has stated that it is a child’s legal right to participate in decisions which affect their lives (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC,1989)). ” The UNCRC also states that all children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child (Article 12), and to free expression; “to seek, receive and impart information of all kinds, regardless of frontiers” (Article 13) (UNCRC,1989 as cited in Quinn & Owen, 2016, p. 61). It is evident, on a global scale, that adults recognize the value of listening to children’s voiced perspectives. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, children need to be taught the collaborative skills associated with advocating and discussing their ideas (Bryen, 2022). Schooling is an imperative part of this learning and the earlier students start to build their confidence and sense of identity, the better it is for their development and potential.

Student voice continues to be a powerful gauge for student engagement. “Student voice is defined as ‘every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to

voice their views” (Cheminais, 2008). Where once students were viewed as vessels which needed to be filled with knowledge, the concept of student voice demonstrates that students come into schools with a unique worldview and therefore have opinions and views that deserve to be heard and can be used to help create more engaging content and a more dynamic school culture. This type of educational reform can be referred to as a constructivist learning approach.

Through a constructivist lens, “...schooling must be organized around the reality that students are active constructors of knowledge rather than its passive recipients” (Levin, 2000, p. 161). Therefore, for student voice to be successful, there needs to be significant disruption to the status quo. Student voice should not be approached from a tokenistic standpoint, which means that educators need to establish strong student-teacher relations so that students feel empowered and share in the responsibilities of creating change (Fielding, 2004a; Quinn & Owen, 2016). Too frequently, the idea of student voice is minimized and results in an inauthentic engagement with students over trivial matters, which Lodge terms, ‘comfort issues’ (Dobson, 2021; Lodge, 2005, p. 127). For example, educators are more willing to listen to and allow students to have a say about minor issues such as uniforms, food, or bathroom usage instead of cultivating a meaningful dialogue around a topic like school wide goals where the stakes are seemingly higher (Lodge, 2005). Listening to students’ ideas are important and while educators must negotiate teaching a mandated curriculum, it is imperative that we take our approach a step further to embed students’ ideas into teaching practices. Similarly, Quaglia and Corso (2014) describe student voice not only as the listening and sharing of ideas but also as an opportunity for students to offer realistic suggestions that would work to benefit the classroom, which may result in students taking on more impactful roles.

Administrators and teaching staff play a crucial role in changing the culture of the school community to one that is centered around and values student voice. Classroom teachers can employ strategies such as the co-construction of criteria, which use student self-assessments that can hone students’ capacities for self-reflection and ownership (Bryen, 2022) to empower students to develop confidence in using their authentic voice.

The most effective student-centered administrators try to be as transparent as possible and intentionally seek feedback from students, both formally and informally (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). They recognize and legitimize the opinions of their students by inviting

them to have a presence at different staff or departmental meetings, having student advisory councils, and striking up casual conversations during break periods (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). “When students are invited to co-create the way forward not only do school improvement efforts lead to meaningful change, but students learn how to use their voices to engage and succeed both in school and in life” (Bryen, 2022, p. 62).

When children are able to explore their identity by being allowed to discuss their unique experiences and thoughts free of judgment, ... their sense of self-worth is heightened and they are able to begin to view themselves as impactful citizens (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). This is especially true of the experiences of marginalized communities (e. g. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour)) within the Canadian education system who may feel the burden of fear for saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood and dismissed, curbing their expression (Winans-Solis, 2014). By allowing all students to contribute to important school decisions, schools (administrators) may be able to move away from disciplinary actions that are viewed as punitive and illogical to the students demonstrating challenging behaviours (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Disciplinary policies disproportionately impact minority youth and students from working class families. These policies are highly racialized as minority youth are the ones who are predominantly labeled as ‘difficult’ and face the harshest consequences (Bickmore, 2001; Brantlinger, 1994; Larson, 1991; Noguera, 1995). Similarly, challenges particular to female-identifying students such as the control over the narrative of how to handle gendered violence (sexual harassment) and lack of engagement with the school community (pro-longed absences, non-participation in activities) can be viewed as a non-issue or ignored by administration and teachers (Bickmore, 2001; Brantlinger, 1994; Larson, 1991; Noguera, 1995). Bickmore contends that the inclusion of student voice is a way to mitigate these issues through collaborating on decision making processes and treating students with dignity and respect (Bickmore, as cited in Wallin, 2003). When those who hold positions of power within schools listen to all students regardless of their race, gender, ability, class, etc., the school becomes a more effective and accountable organization and is better able to meet its core goals and values (Fielding, 2011). Having a say in their education can give students a sense of agency, which can have important implications for their motivation to do well in school and life.

Student Disengagement

Students can often feel disengaged and disconnected from their school communities. This phenomenon can be attributed to a variety of factors but more importantly, it can result in unwanted behaviour, wherein “[s]tudents deliberately violate school expectations and rules; set up alternative nonacceptable norms; quit school altogether; do not complete assigned work; resist in-class assignments; and, in general, sustain the role of a non-learner” (Goodman et al. , 2011, p. 376). Since one of the goals in the classroom is to get the students to complete their tasks and learning outcomes, motivation is a concept that is critical for educators. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) seeks to explore the concept of human motivation through a lens of addressing one’s psychological needs and how this informs their personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The most autonomous form of motivation is, what Deci and Ryan term, integrated regulation, which is the most autonomous form of motivation. They claim that there are three key needs which need to be met to adopt this behaviour: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Competence in this refers to the fact that one is more inclined to partake in an activity when they’ve felt successful in demonstrating their participation to their peers. Success enables one to gain more value from their experiences. Relatedness identifies the need for belonging and / or wanting to be valued by others with whom they feel hold an important role in their lives. Finally, autonomy enables free thinking, allows for choice, and increases volition which enables a transformation of values gained from any task or activity into their being. Deci and Ryan posit that understanding motivation is of great importance because of the implications for one’s place in society. They conclude that motivation is the source of production, furthering its relevance to the classroom.

As schools frequently embed a top-down model of education they choose to impose their authority onto students rather than creating an equitable and co-constructed version of what a school can be. Regrettably, schools often display power structures that systematically silence and exclude voices of culturally non-dominant students (Winans-Solis, 2014). Therefore, true autonomy, relatedness, and competence cannot be felt by all students and mistrust grows. By fostering greater student voice and incorporating student led initiatives through leadership activities, student motivation can be enhanced.

Working Towards Creating A Democratic Learning Community

“Leadership and responsibility cannot be reserved for a few students but must be provided for all students so they can move beyond their comfort zones and build confidence to take action and make a difference” (Quaglia & Corso, 2014, p. 28). As Quaglia and Corso describe, the skills learned through participating in leadership activities should not be reserved for only a select few students who are deemed capable by their teachers. Instead, the goal should continue to be to create schools where all students feel safe taking risks that may enhance their sense of self and offer a deeper insight to the values that matter to them. An environment which enables this practice is termed a democratic learning community (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). In many cases, however, educators may believe they are providing unique opportunities for students to engage in leadership initiatives when they are instead, reverting towards only allowing students to analyze and debate ‘comfortable issues’.

Another issue which can arise when schools are attempting to facilitate greater student participation occurs when staff try to persuade students to tackle issues or put forth ideas of which only the educator(s) deem important (Fielding, 2011). In looking at the work of McIntyre et al, they too found that teachers were only willing to accept feedback if it was already within the educator’s repertoire (Hopkins 2008, McIntyre 2005). In an attempt to analyze this phenomenon, Fielding suggests that there are six types of partnerships between educators and students. These partnerships range from ‘students as a data source,’ where staff use the information gathered about students to make decisions about how to best serve student needs to ‘intergenerational learning in a participatory democracy,’ where there is a shared understanding and dedication to being an active participant for the common good (Fielding, 2011).

In helping all members of the school community see the value of allowing students to lead by voicing their opinions, there are two methods which could help to facilitate the creation of a more democratic school. These methods could help transition schools from using students as a data source to Fielding’s sixth partnership of students as co-researchers (Fielding, 2001). The first approach would be to use Students as Teachers (SAT). This is where students would work as ‘co-teachers’ to help develop lesson plans and then facilitate the lesson with minimal teacher support (Dobson, 2021;

Emdin, 2016). The second, Project-Based Learning (PBL), describes a method in which students work either independently or collaboratively for an extended time period on a challenging question or problem (Dobson, 2021). Through this work, they will obtain knowledge and skills such as critical and creative thinking and decision-making strategies as they work through this challenging experience (Dobson, 2021). However, there is a significant lack of research around SAT and how this affects student engagement specifically with students in the elementary school range (Dobson, 2021). With either method, students' passions and voices are at the forefront. Since they are the ones creating the questions and choosing which content and delivery methods of instruction will be most engaging for their peers (or themselves), the belief is the remaining students will become more motivated to participate during these in class activities (Dobson, 2021). Conversely, those who may lack the confidence to lead initially or demonstrate passivity toward in-class instruction, they may showcase a curiosity towards the activity because it is student led and relevant to their lived experience (Dobson, 2021).

Bridging PBL/SAT with Service-Learning Models

Service-learning is defined as “teach[ing] young people about their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society” (Battistoni, 1997, p.150). There are many benefits associated with service-learning projects as they teach students to be philanthropic by embracing reciprocity. Specifically, it encourages students to feel gratification when performing acts of service for their school community as well as the larger community in which they live (Battistoni, 1997). Service learning is also used as a path towards cultivating an advancement for social justice issues and empowering students, specifically those who are marginalized, as it often takes place in a ‘shared territory’ where there is a change in power dynamics (Winans-Solis 2014). Through their interactions with community members, students are exposed to opportunities and gain a better understanding of diversity of thought and opinion. This exposure to diversity can also lead to conversations and connections between people of different ages, classes, races, etc. who they might not otherwise interact with (Battistoni, 1997). Providing students with community service-learning experiences, such as mentoring younger students or volunteering at an assisted living facility, enables them to understand and practice the soft skills associated with democratic societies. It also

provides students with a chance to practice their creative thinking skills as they may discover conflicts of interest, which can enable them to share their concerns, letting their voices be heard and becoming part of tangible solution making (Battistoni, 1997).

In an effort to blend service-learning with student voice techniques, I came across a body of literature that promotes the active citizenship model. Active citizenship places an emphasis on student agency and entrepreneurial minded projects wherein students are able to either create a service for a community, create a resource, or work as an activist for a problem they notice within their community (Thomson, 2007). This model is designed to allow students to engage with their school and larger communities in a way that fosters student initiative and student voice because it relies on students "... contributing their skills, time and labour to ventures that make a difference to somebody else ... that rely on creativity, teamwork, and persistence" (Thomson, 2007, p. 780-781). The active citizenship model promotes practical life skills such as negotiation techniques, information collection and analysis, and fosters character education by enabling students to identify and develop personal values such as persistence and reliability (Thomson, 2007). Therefore, I began to expand upon my learning to further explore how the active citizenship model could help students to feel more connected to their school and develop their leadership capacities.

The Research Question

From September 2022 to April 2023, I have had ample time to observe and gain a nuanced understanding of the unique strengths and complex needs of the learners in my class. I would often witness their anxiety, self-consciousness, and negative self-perception as many of them struggled to branch outside of their tightly knit friendship circles. I observed that many of them did not feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions with their peers during class and small-group discussions for fear of being judged or getting the answer wrong. Additionally, this hyper-awareness contributed to how group work was facilitated within the classroom. While we had done group work and group projects throughout most of the school year, no constraints were placed on which students could be placed in a group together. This allowed them to continue to stay within their comfort zones and seek out partnerships with those peers they already had established strong connections with. Seeing this, I wondered how they would respond if collaborative activities had randomized their groups instead, and if working with other

members of their class community would improve their confidence and ability to communicate their thoughts to a variety of people.

Furthermore, I noticed that every time other staff or I would mention that my students needed to 'act like a leader' the students would either become very stoic and contemplative or would roll their eyes and disengage from the conversation and instruction. However, those who had been a part of the Leadership Team would often broaden their shoulders and provide their full attention, as though they were mentally preparing themselves to rise to the challenge. These opposing reactions, have been reinforced within students as the perception of their own leadership capabilities. At Lion Elementary School, the site where this study takes place, there are some opportunities provided to students to practice their leadership skills including being a Lunch monitor in a primary class, monitoring the office area, and being a part of the recycling team. However, the most sought-after leadership opportunity is taking part in the school's Leadership Team, for which only select students are allowed to join. This exclusivity is due to an application process where students are asked to write a letter of intent which includes a description of events or initiatives they would like to organize and ways they believe they are a leader or have demonstrated leadership. This application period takes place at the beginning of the school year and only those who are deemed the strongest applicants are admitted. The admission process is conducted by the Leadership Team sponsor teachers as they review the applications and discuss them amongst themselves. While I do understand why the Leadership Team sponsor teachers enforce such a process, it does create a hierarchy amongst students while reinforcing potentially harmful beliefs about what kind of student can and should get to be a leader and have their voices prioritized.

Realizing this inspired me to find effective ways to amplify all students' voices meaningfully. In thinking about the literature, I researched leadership, student voice and connection to school, and felt that there must be a way to bridge these ideas to create lesson plans that encouraged leadership which also connected to the curriculum. The more I researched, the stronger I felt about the Active Citizenship Model being a good fit for my classroom. Since I knew I would be conducting my Action Research (AR) with my own Grade 6/7 class as well as my teaching partner's Grade 6/7 class, I first wanted to be mindful of how involved the students were already and how comfortable they felt with their involvement of the other leadership opportunities offered at the school (e.g. primary

lunch monitoring, office monitoring, recycling team, etc.) From my discussions with them, I realized that only a third of the students were actively participating in these leadership initiatives. Thus, the inquiry question I developed became:

Research Question

How will amplifying student voices, using an active citizenship model, impact student self-perception as leaders?

This led me to consider and create the following sub-questions related to student voice and leadership:

Sub Questions

What, if any changes, can be observed in how connected students feel to their school community?

Will students report feeling more confident sharing their ideas and opinions after participating in leadership initiatives?

Methodology

Research Site and Participants

I conducted my AR project with two classes of Grade 6/7 (ages eleven to thirteen) students at Lion Elementary School (I have used a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the students and the school). This is an elementary school that runs from Kindergarten to Grade 7, within the lower mainland in the province of British Columbia, Canada. The school itself is a community school, which means that it hosts a number of community activities, programs and services on weekends, evenings, and during the summer months (Burnaby School District, 2019). By integrating the needs of the community with the school dynamic, community schools serve as a hub for residents including those who do not have children attending the school.

This particular school community is located in an area where there is a large class stratification. Here, the socio-economic status gap is glaring. Less than half of the research population lives on government assistance, many of whom are new immigrants to Canada. The majority of families are working class and hold occupations where they are obligated to work long shifts and, as a result, are unable to spend long periods of time with their children during the week.

When looking at class composition, out of a population of forty-five students, there are ten students with designations of G (Autism Spectrum Disorder), H (severe behavior), D (chronic health) or R (moderate behavior), three Indigenous students and twenty English Language Learners. Based on my observations, approximately one third of the students in the classes frequently engage in negative self-talk; this can largely be attributed to anxieties around schooling and complex home situations. These students can exhibit defiant, disruptive, and work-avoidant behaviours. Another third of this student sample have been selected to participate in several different leadership activities and clubs within the school community and have demonstrated great competence and confidence when taking on a leadership role such as lunch monitor or assembly MC.

This group of Grade 6/7 students were selected as the focus of this research project tied in exceptionally well to the standards outlined in the British Columbian Grade 6/7 Career Education curriculum. In the Grade 6/7 Career Education curriculum, students are expected to develop their leadership skills and practice implementing them in a meaningful way. I also felt that the most senior students in the school would have a better, more nuanced, understanding of the community and culture prevalent within their school and therefore, be better at unpacking and pointing out areas for growth.

I created a unit plan centered around student voice and integrating student-led leadership initiatives. I informed students that we would be working on a new unit together as part of their Career Education studies. We then discussed how I would be simultaneously working as their teacher and also a researcher to better understand how to amplify student voices through leadership initiatives and if by doing so, they felt more like leaders. I informed them that I had completed and received the necessary approval by completing a research ethics online course through the TCPS 2: CORE and received a certificate (see Appendix A) as well as procured a letter from SFU Ethics (See Appendix D) to confirm that this research was in fact ethical to conduct. I also informed

them that the Burnaby School District had also provided me with approval to conduct this research at Lion Elementary (see Appendix E). The students and I went through the assent (see Appendix B) and consent (see Appendix C) processes where both their parents/guardians and themselves were asked if they would like to participate in the study. I assured them that their information and identity would be kept confidential and protected by storing their work samples in a locked cupboard in my classroom. Finally, I impressed upon my students that regardless of whether they chose to opt in or out of the study, their grades and my relationship with them would not be affected.

Researcher Positionality and Potential Biases

As someone who has maintained a passion and clear goals in my own leadership education, one of my perceived biases was the expectation that students should be able to easily come up with a topic they were passionate about. As a student, I found it enjoyable to work with a group and found it easy to share my interests with every member. I recognize now, however, that this is due to my teachers and family members who were consistently cultivating these intrapersonal skillsets within me.

Another expectation was that students would be easily excited to take on a project that was unique resulting in increased student voice. However, leadership education relies on significant student contributions, so the lack of strict criteria for them to follow in order to develop student voice led to some amounts of initial anxiety within students who had not been afforded great amounts of choice throughout their education. Additionally, it became a challenge for me as the teacher to guide students without projecting my beliefs and expectations onto their project.

While there are several ways my research sought to create equitable opportunities for all students within the various gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation spectra, there were a few barriers to entry, ranging from having the time to complete their active citizenship projects after school hours and access to technology outside of school. As a person of colour, I have experienced the frustration and anxiety around sharing my own perspectives with my peers for fear of being othered. Over half of the students I teach identify as BIPOC so approaching the topic and activities relating to student voice needs to be done so in a culturally-responsive way.

I have been working as an educator for the past six years and while I pride myself on consulting with students and trying to incorporate their ideas into my curriculum, I may not have been actively modifying my approach in the way I intended. Therefore, a challenge I had to overcome was learning to engage with student voice in a more democratic manner. Creating a classroom culture that truly highlights the concept of student voice is something that I will continue to actively work towards encouraging.

Unit and Evaluation Design

Action Research (AR) is “carried out by teachers who are not only interested in *understanding*, but also *changing* their teaching to make it more in line with their values” (Arhar & Buck, 2000, p.336). Using this methodology was important to me as the intention of this research was to better my own teaching practice around utilizing student voice meaningfully and leadership education within the classroom context. AR, therefore, would allow me to investigate how to help and improve my students’ learning in these areas.

Using my AR question to guide me, I created a unit plan to facilitate and bridge the use of leadership skills while providing greater opportunities for students to share their ideas and opinions about how they believed the school could improve. My hope was that as the unit progressed, the way that students perceived themselves in relation to the idea of being a leader would become a more positive one that inspired enthusiasm towards making a difference in one’s school community. This unit was designed so that it could take place over the course of three to four weeks, however it could be expanded upon and potentially used throughout the course of the school year. Finally, in designing this unit, I tried to make it as accessible as possible for my most vulnerable students. This included collaborating with the Educational Assistants in the classrooms and the school’s Learning Support Team to ensure that there were multiple entry points. For example, a number of the students being taught do not identify as having English as their first language. Therefore, I needed to use many visuals and differentiated response sheets to make it possible for students to engage with the material presented.

My unit plan was broken up into three different sub sections. The first section looked at what it meant to be a leader. During this portion of the unit, students engaged in collaborative tasks. They were asked to participate in small group and class

discussions and then asked to fill in a brief pre-unit questionnaire about their experiences around the sharing of their ideas and opinions and feeling around being seen as a leader. In the second phase of my unit plan, students were able to practice participating as leaders in two school-wide activities: leading the school's Sports Day and hosting a Poetry Café. Throughout the planning process of these activities, they continued to reflect on their contributions by answering questionnaires. In the third and final portion of my unit, students discussed, debated, and created an initiative that they felt would help to facilitate a healthier and more vibrant school community. Student work samples and reflections were integral here as this was the part of the unit that relied heavily on the active-citizenship model.

For my AR, I used a mixed-methods approach. I used the technique of triangulation to further help analyze the data collected. Triangulation is a strategy used to counter validity threats by "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell, 2012, p.245). When utilising the triangulation method for this action research project, I gathered data through qualitative and quantitative means as my data collection included written responses, class and small group discussions, observations, anecdotes from my field journal, and student work samples (artifacts). The data gathering techniques I employed were my own observations written down in a field note journal. This was important because it allowed me to have greater insight as to what students were saying in those down time periods amongst themselves. The field journal also allowed me to reflect on their behaviour and discussions, as well as identify trends and gaps as the research was taking place. Additionally, I utilized questionnaires for part of my data collection. I felt that this was a more comprehensive way to learn about how students had grown or did not grow in their ability to self-identify as a leader. I developed pre and post unit reflections (see Appendices G and H) which used a star method for students to rank their own overall leadership abilities. They were also asked a yes or no question to see if they viewed themselves as a leader. By using this method, I was able to gather a baseline for students' self-perception around identifying as a leader. I also asked them open-ended questions such as how they felt about sharing their ideas and opinions during class and small group discussions. I captured the data this way because I wanted to gain a more in-depth look at how they were feeling about sharing their perspectives. The last data collection method I used was gathering student work samples. The student work

samples enabled me to see how well my research was going in terms of how connected to the topic students were as well as if there were any trends that emerged amongst my entire group of students. The student work samples provided me with the ability to track how their thinking had changed over time.

Data Collection and Findings

Within this section, I describe how I delivered my unit plan to students, their subsequent reactions and the important information I was able to gain throughout this process. My AR project was conducted with students from my own and my teaching partner's Grade 6/7 class. Although my research began in mid-May, I had been working with them throughout the year, beginning in September. Therefore, I had a substantial understanding of each of the unique individuals within these classes and their needs. Prior to conducting my research with this group of students, I had not taught or delved into the topic of leadership with them in any capacity except for when we discussed how one should act when participating in a group. Part of this conversation entailed the importance of listening to others and sharing ideas. However, from my observations, students who found it challenging to share ideas or listen to others continued to stay silent or disengage. During the group work projects assigned in class, these students still clung to their preconceived beliefs about their capabilities. One third of these students had been chosen to participate on the school's Leadership Team in September. Therefore, they had a substantially longer period of time to engage in the leadership skills Bickmore describes such as developing the skills to communicate, handle conflict, build meaningful relationships, and make important decisions (Bickmore, 2001).

In beginning my AR, I initially began by accessing prior student knowledge through having students independently complete a question prompt in class. The question "What does the word 'leader' mean to you?" took students by surprise and I was met with many groans but also some cautious enthusiasm. I explained to the students that they could write down, draw, or brainstorm their thoughts in any way that worked best for them. This approach was intentional as I wanted to engage students who exhibited challenges with written output or anxieties around writing.

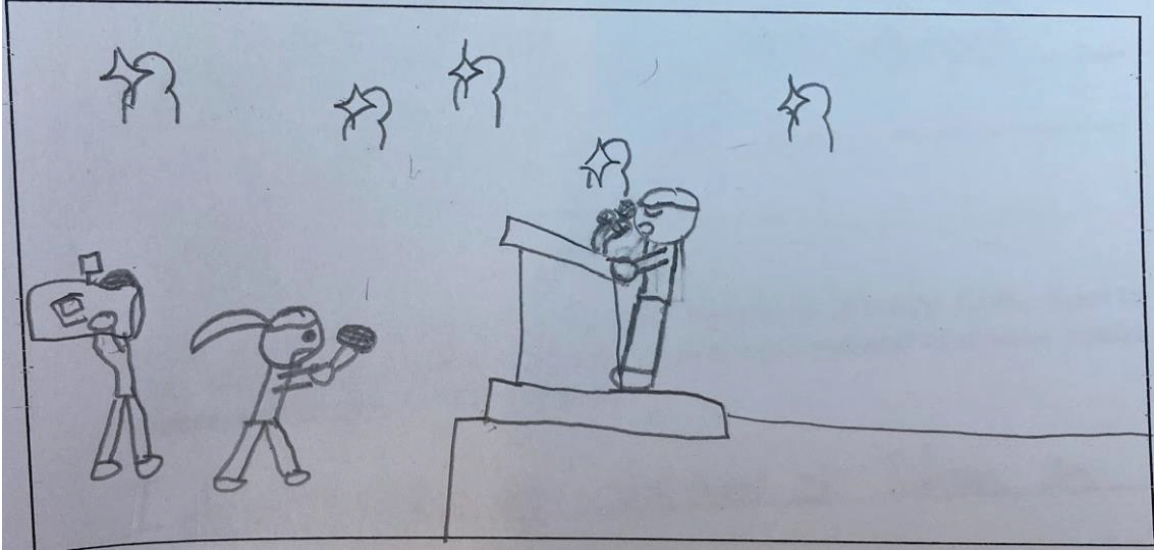


Figure 1. Student A's drawing of "Being a Leader" (May 2023)

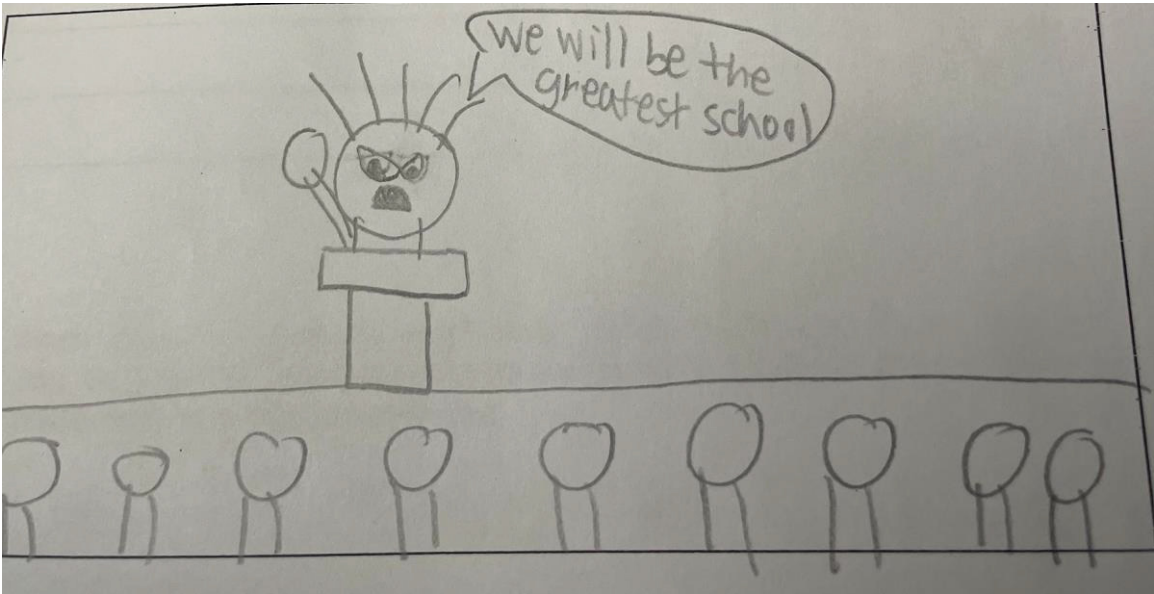


Figure 2. Student G's drawing of "Being a Leader" (May 2023)

Field Journal #1

Prompt: What does the word 'leader' mean to you?

"I think leaders tell other people what to do." – Student D2

"Leaders make sure the rest of us are okay." – Student V

"They are powerful people who make sure things are running how they should be." – Student A2

"I think a leader is someone who is confident and doesn't need other people to tell them what's right or wrong." – Student D

"I think they (leaders) can be both good and bad. They are usually in charge of something big and will use different tactics to get their job done...like Kim Jong Un" – Student B

"The word leader means a person who is in charge. When I think of a leader I think of someone who is persuasive." – Student R

"A person who gets the job done!" – Student H

The majority of the students elected to draw pictures of politician-like figures speaking to large crowds. Interestingly, they also used words during our class discussion to describe a "leader" as someone who is "confident", "powerful", "responsible", and "good at public-speaking". When I prompted them to further consider why we only view leaders as politicians, several students suggested that it was because "this is the only representation we have" and "they are the most important kind of leaders we (society) have." I found this striking as even the students who were a part of the school's Leadership Team did not even recognize themselves as important leaders within their community. They chose to instead focus on the grandiosity associated with the concept of leader instead of realizing that leaders are necessary on both a macro and micro level.

After we finished our class discussion, I had students complete a pre-unit reflection (questionnaire) which prompted them to reflect upon if they considered themselves to be a leader and how confident they felt communicating their ideas during group work and class discussions. I used this reflection to create a baseline of their willingness to demonstrate voice and choice in the classroom around both their teachers and peers.

Field Journal #2

Prompt: Do you consider yourself to be a leader? Please explain why or why not.

“No, don’t want to be. I can’t because I’m too stupid.” -Student S

“Yes. I set an example for younger students.” -Student I

“No, I just don’t have the guts.” -Student S2

“No, I’m not responsible enough.” -Student T1

“Yes, I help people and have good sportsmanship.” -Student J5

“Yes, I don’t like to be a follower. I am true to myself, no matter who is around me.” - Student A2

“No, I’m too afraid of public speaking. I am a quiet and shy person. But maybe in the future?” -Student D2

“Yes, but not all the time. Sometimes I am not confident in making decisions.” - Student P

“No, I am not confident or brave.” -Student M4

Field Journal #3

Prompt: How comfortable do you feel sharing your ideas, thoughts, and opinions during group and/or class discussions?

"I am always comfortable sharing my ideas and thoughts. When I have ideas in my head, I share them. " -Student M

"I love to share my ideas in a group, because my idea might be one that we use for a project!" -Student M2

"I am a little shy sharing with the class, but if I am with my friends I feel more confident. " -Student L

"I almost never share anything. I'm scared of being judged by others, or saying something wrong. " -Student L2

"I think you should always share what you are thinking, because maybe your idea is really good and helpful! If you stay quiet, no one will hear you and you will never get any feedback. " -Student T2

"I am getting better at talking, but I still don't share ideas. " -Student N

"I don't really share that much. . . even if I do, it's usually just dumb things that aren't part of the conversation. " -Student M2

"I rarely share. Usually just with my friends. Talking to my classmates is kind of weird to me. " -Student J1

"I almost never share. I am too nervous. " -Student M1

"I don't speak very often, but I try to listen to what other people have to say. " -Student J4

During the first portion of my unit, my approach was to work with students to build their leadership skills so that they could feel more empowered to tackle the activities that were to come in the rest of the unit. Recognizing that many of my students did not view themselves as leaders or feel comfortable and confident expressing their views, I began by having students participate in several collaborative activities (see Appendix F) so that they could practice and understand the importance of collaboration and sharing their ideas and perspectives. One such activity was the "Spaghetti Tower Challenge. " Here,

students were randomly placed into a group of three using an online random group generator. Once in their groups, students were provided an envelope labelled either A, B, or C. Within the envelopes were respective leadership styles: laissez-faire, democratic or authoritative. While I was passing out the envelopes, I could hear murmurs and whispers of, "I am so excited!" throughout the classroom. Students were asked to embody and act like the description written down on their respective papers to lead their group members in building the tallest tower out of spaghetti and marshmallows. Each group member had three minutes to act as the specified leadership style. As this was taking place, I was circulating throughout the room and recording notes around some parts of different conversations taking place. I observed many of the students laughing and smiling as they tried their best to embody the roles assigned to them. I was most interested in listening to how the followers felt and worked together when trying to take direction from the laissez-faire leader as they did not provide any input and left the followers to do all of the work independently. The objective of the activity was for students to understand the differing leadership styles and practice collaboration. Therefore, it was interesting to witness the moments of recognition that they just had to rely on each other.

Field Journal #4

Observing the Spaghetti Tower Challenge – Student to Student Discussions

"This is so hard!" – Student G

"Why can't they just tell us what to do?" – Student A

"I'm really excited. Let's test this together!" – Student V

"I guess we are supposed to do this together since he isn't saying anything." – Student I

"Let's place these two pieces together. I doubt she'll care." – Student J1

"I don't know if we are supposed to wait for him but let's add these two pieces. What do you think?" – Student H

After completing the first portion of my unit with students, I provided them with some real-world opportunities to enact the skills (collaboration, voicing ideas and opinions, and decision making) we had practiced in a meaningful way. One such event included students working together to host our school's annual Sports Day. In randomly generated groups, they worked with teachers from around the school to collaborate and create different stations either geared towards the intermediate Grades (Grades 4-7) or the primary Grades (K-3). Through the creation process of these stations, we would have weekly class meetings to see how far students had progressed in the design of their station and how they were feeling about leading their station for other students in the school. Initially, feelings of anxiety and apathy were present. A few students even asked if they "...could just make a game for our class?" demonstrating their heightened emotions. However, after a couple weeks of planning, students began to get excited about leading this school wide event as they noticed the rest of the students in the school talking about and displaying enthusiasm towards the upcoming day. They began asking me about different extending initiatives they could take on, even without my prompting. They asked if we could create committees for team banners and team cheers as well as hold color days to increase student excitement in the days leading up to the event. I was pleasantly surprised that these ideas were not only initiated from the students partaking in the school's Leadership Team but from some of the students who had identified themselves as being shy and more introverted.

One particularly meaningful example came from Student N. This student often had a challenging time with written output and is extremely introverted. They do not enjoy sharing out any of their thoughts and ideas during class or group discussions, often willing to follow along with anything their other group members decide to do. However, Student N is an extremely talented artist. A few weeks prior to Sports Day, they approached me asking if it would be alright for them to host a badge design contest. They described the purpose of the badges as a way "... everyone can feel included and show what team they are because they might not have those colour [of their team] at home". In wanting to honour their clear display of stepping outside of their comfort zone and asking to take on a new role, I collaborated with Student N and helped them to form a small committee comprised of two other students. They came up with different ways we could promote this idea around the school and developed criteria to help judge the winning badges. From this experience, I could begin to see an increase in the

confidence and engagement students displayed as we found ways to incorporate their ideas.

Field Journal #5

Prompt: How involved did you feel in the Sports Day process? Did you feel your voice and ideas were heard and/ or represented? Please explain!

“During the planning of my group’s game, we had lots of ideas to the point that we overcomplicate it so that is one of the reasons why our game is kind of messy. But I felt included during the planning of it. ” – Student T

“Running the station. Took my job serious. ” – Student J3

“Very because I lead everything and made mine and other peoples ideas heard. ” – Student S2

“Averagely involved because I was able to get some ideas for our banner. ” – Student J4

“I felt pretty involved. I shared a lot of ideas. ” – Student E

“I think I contributed to my group and we all worked together. I felt pretty involved and important. ” – Student E2

“I helped a lot with the cheer and action to go along with it. I was involved running the sports day meetings. I helped think of ideas for our station and was helpful to the people at our station. ” – Student L

In the final stages of the unit, the active-citizenship model was employed and students had the opportunity to assess and design a solution to a potential problem or area for opportunity they found within our school community in a randomly generated group. Students began goal setting using the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goal framework and researched/created an event or initiative that would help tackle a perceived challenge the school was facing based on their own

observations. When enacting an authentic active citizenship model, students should not be led by the teacher into deciding what they are passionate about or what type of leadership activity they are to organize (Thomson, 2007). As students were completing their SMART goals, I heard the following while observing student discussions:

Field Journal #6

Observations of students creating their SMART goals

“We NEED to have a chess club at our school! So many students would be more happy. ” – Student R2

“Our school kinda sucks. We should make a soccer club. ” – Student P

“Let’s have a school store. In case kids want to buy healthy snacks. Oh yeah, we can fundraise at the same time!” – Student V2

“Do you think we could make a soccer field over by the grass area? It might be hard but I think it’s worth it. ” – Student J3

“Having a kindness jar at the office would be fun! We can do shout outs on the announcements like we did a few years ago!” – Student J6

As I provided students with space and they continued to work in their randomized groups to complete their SMART goals, a few of the Grade 7 students came up to me privately to express how they wish that these projects could actually take effect within the school. They also displayed sadness at the fact that they would be moving on to high school and therefore could not stay to implement their own ideas. I suggested that it would be ideal if they felt this passionately about their ideas that they come back and volunteer with the Grade 6s, who would soon become the next group of Grade 7s, to help facilitate this transformation. Student A expressed that they would like to meet with the principal to see if their idea of creating a Chess Club could happen and if there was possibility to begin a district-wide competition.

This process of engaging with my students in building their capacity to lead and identify as leaders through amplifying their voices was incredibly rewarding. I didn't realize how many of them would connect to crafting their SMART goals to help their school community. The excitement and willingness to engage displayed by the learners who were reserved and often indifferent towards activities in class, demonstrated, to me, the importance of acknowledging and finding a way to bring to life and incorporate their passions at school.

Data Analysis and Discussion

After examining the data from my own field notes and observations, student questionnaires, and work samples, I was able to identify a number of key themes. I used an inductive approach, meaning that I was able to extrapolate the most important and relevant data to find these general trends and themes from my mixed-methods approach. My initial AR question was:

Research Question

How will amplifying student voices (through an active citizenship model) impact student self-perception as leaders?

The pre-unit and post-unit reflections (questionnaires) were helpful in revealing how my students' self-perceptions of being leader had changed after being involved in leadership activities. I began by first investigating their descriptions of what the word leader meant to them. Recall, that of the twenty-four students who submitted their pre-unit reflections, the following were the most common words and phrases associated with the word "leader":

Table 1. 6 most common words / phrases associated with the word ‘leader’ from the pre-unit reflection (May 2023)

Word / Phrase	Occurrences	Percentage
Confident	18	75%
Responsible	14	58%
Powerful	10	41%
Good at public speaking	9	37%
Role-model	4	16%
Caring	2	8%

After the course of the unit, these perceptions had changed and instead demonstrated a more inclusive version of the word ‘leader’ (See Table 2). While the word that they felt had the greatest association to being a leader remained “confident”, it was illuminating to see how the idea of a leader was reimagined into someone who was more collaborative and a team player. During one of the collaborative activities students completed as a part of the unit, we unpacked as a class the difference between a boss versus a leader. From this activity, I believe that they realized that while a leader is the person in charge of a group, they still value and create a sense of ownership amongst their followers. Later on, as students began planning events for our school, I saw them try and use this strategy of being more welcoming of the ideas of others and at times, asking for the opinions and ideas of those within their group to create buy-in.

Table 2. 6 most common words / phrases associated with the word ‘leader’ from the post-unit reflection (June 2023)

Word /Phrase	Occurrences	Percentage
Confident	20	83%
Collaborate	19	79%
Teamwork	11	45%
Thoughtful	6	25%
Brave	4	16%
Organized	3	12%

In looking to find an answer to my initial AR inquiry question, I asked students to rate themselves as leaders. Initially, thirteen of the twenty-four students who completed the survey identified as a leader. It is important to note that of the students who completed the survey, eight of them were students who were already a part of the Leadership Team at the school. All eight of these students identified themselves as a leader. Perhaps this was because of the title associated with membership to the team. Conversely, those students who did not identify themselves as being a part of one of the school's leadership initiatives or the Leadership Team also did not identify themselves as a leader. These were also students who did not exhibit as high of a level of participation in classroom activities and frequently chose to keep their ideas and opinions to themselves (see Data Collection and Findings). However, by the end of the unit, there had been a 21.43% increase in students' perception of themselves as leaders. This is important because it shows that when educators provide students with the leadership skills and more importantly demonstrate to them that their voices (opinions and ideas) matter, students are more inclined to believe that their ideas have merit and their passions are relevant. Therefore, they seem to be more willing to communicate their ideas and find ways to create change; whether that be speaking to staff or creating a committee with their peers on their own.

Table 3. Comparison of students who identified as a leader from May to June of 2023

Students who self-identified as a leader (selection of yes or no) as of May 2023	Percentage of reported self-perception of being a leader (selection of yes or no) as of June 2023
50.00%	71.43%

As part of both my pre-unit and post-unit reflections, I had students rate their perceived leadership abilities on a scale of one to five, based around their ability to communicate and work as part of a group. The eight students who were a part of the Leadership Team gave themselves either four or five. Those who were not participating actively within the school community were much less likely to report feeling confident about their leadership abilities and did not perceive themselves to be leaders often giving a rating between one and three. These students felt that leadership was a verb; something you had as opposed to a quality or characteristic that can be cultivated over

time. After having completed the unit with these students, they moved up on the scale by 0.78. I believe that this means that students need to be provided with opportunities to explicitly practice skills that would be attributed to a leader.

Table 4. Comparison of students’ perceived leadership abilities from May to June of 2023

Average reported self-perception of leadership abilities (scale 1-5) as of May 2023	Average reported self-perception of leadership abilities (scale 1-5) as of June 2023
3. 309	4. 095

As part of my pre-unit survey, I had also asked students whether they felt confident communicating their ideas and perspectives. Again, the eight students with leadership experience acknowledged that they had an easier time with this skillset often stating that they felt okay sharing because they had lots of connections to the material presented. By comparison, the remaining sixteen students who completed the survey revealed that this was a more challenging task for them but stated that if they were part of a group with friends, it was easier for them to share their thoughts (see Field Journal #3). When students completed the final post-unit survey in June 2023, the majority of written responses collected highlighted how much more valued and less intimidated they felt sharing their ideas and opinions in a group (see Appendix I). They described how after having practiced collaborating and working on a new initiative with their group, they expressed that they enjoyed having their group members use their ideas. However, a few respondents also noted that although their ideas weren’t used, they also were not judged or shut down. Instead, their group members tried hard to incorporate all of the ideas mentioned where possible.

In using the active citizenship model, I noticed that there was a relationship between student confidence and self-identifying as a leader (see Appendix J). Initially, many of my students had reported that, to them, being a leader meant that you had to be a good public speaker and someone who already displayed and exuded a lot of self-confidence. From the activities and creation of an initiative to help our school community, I believe that they realized that leaders can come in many different forms and perhaps, most importantly of all, they are collaborative people who take the time to listen to others. The definition of leader is not a ‘one size fits all’.

Additionally, there also continues to be a relationship between student connection to their school and the self-perception of being a leader (see Appendix K). I found that by providing students with opportunities to discuss ways they could improve the school community (student voice), this led to a deeper sense of ownership towards the school. In the written reflections of those students who don't normally get involved with the opportunities provided by the school, they especially, felt that they were valued and of value to the school. When students feel this sense of ownership, they are less likely to become disengaged and have a better relationship with the idea of school (Dobson, 2021).

Considerations

I recognize that this AR project was conducted in the final couple months of the school year. Due to this fact, students may have had an easier time working in the randomly generated pairs because they had been provided with a longer period of time to get to know one another. This research having taken place in the final months of school also lent itself to having students feel more comfortable and potentially more honest in their reflections as I had worked towards building a strong connection with each of them beginning in September. I believe that developing leadership skills while using an active citizenship model as a guide is important for all classroom teachers to consider. From my own research, I can see that by acknowledging and implementing the recommendations from my students, has changed the way they perceive their relationship to and with school as well as within themselves. In my opinion, developing students as leaders should not be viewed as an extracurricular activity or one that it only suited towards middle school grade students. I would like to see how the active citizenship model could be used with students in younger grades, perhaps beginning in Grades 2 or 3, and observing the impact has on their self-confidence, identity as a leader and relationship to school as they grow older.

Conclusion

Many propose that one of the purposes of education is to create a person who is well rounded and grows to be an active and engaged citizen. Within the sphere of education, it seems that much emphasis is upon subject areas other than Career Education.

However, Career Education lends itself to learning opportunities for students that can work to build a more positive sense of self.

In working through the leadership unit plan and having students participate in the creation of an event or initiative using the active citizenship model for this AR project, it highlights the ways in which the cultivation of leadership skills can be transformative for students. Not only did student reflections demonstrate an increase in perception of oneself as a leader but also showed a strong relationship in growth of student confidence and connection to the school community. Students showed more dedication and engagement towards the projects done within this unit than I had observed throughout the majority of the year. Within the reflections, many students noted that this was because of the emphasis placed on having their ideas valued, heard, and acted upon both by their teachers and peers.

It is important for us, as educators, to build trusting relationships with our students. One way we can advance this work in the classroom is through a reciprocal transmission of ideas. If we continue this work with perhaps younger students and build capacity within them as leader by valuing their voices, I believe based on data produced from this AR project, that this could help to contribute to greater student success and engagement. Additionally, there are many other possibilities for further research around leadership and student voice to be explored. As Student A seems to have identified (see Figure 18), being a leader does not always have to look like a top-down approach. Instead, one can be a leader while also allowing everyone to have a seat at the table.

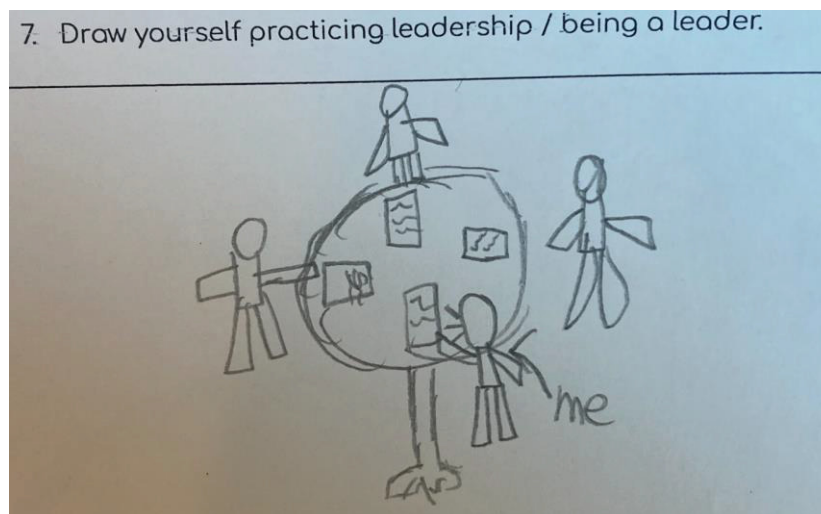


Figure 3. Student A's drawing of "Being a Leader" (June 2023)

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Appendix A. TCPS 2 Certification



Appendix B. Student Assent Form



May 8, 2023

Dear Students of Divisions 1 & 3,

As we have discussed, I am currently studying at Simon Fraser University (SFU) to earn my Masters' degree in Educational Leadership. I am working alongside my teacher, Dr. Michelle Nilson. As both a student and a teacher, I want to find out more about what makes learning engaging and exciting and how I can help every learner feel confident! As part of my studies, I am creating a research project about how I teach leadership. I will be collecting data (information) from our classes that will help me in my own learning journey.

What will we be doing?

During April, May, and into June, our classes will be investigating who is a leader, what traits do they possess, developing our leadership skills through various activities and challenges, and creating your own leadership project! Everyone, regardless of if they want to be a part of the research, will be participating in this unit as part of our Social Studies and Career Education curriculum alongside developing our Social Awareness and Responsibility competency.

Will the study help me?

Part of being a researcher means that I don't know what results I will get at the end of my study! I hope that this study will help me learn how to make leadership skills and service-learning more engaging, interactive, and allow you to feel like you are making a difference within your community. I may also be able to use what we learn together to help support other teachers too!

What does participation in this study mean for me?

IF you choose to participate in this research, it means I will include you in my data that I collect. I will be sharing the results of your self-reflections/assessments, examples from your worksheets, and quoting your ideas with the other members of my cohort (class) and my professors through a presentation at SFU and a report that is published through SFU's library. I will not include any identifying information (your name, you age, what class you are in) and will use a pseudonym (ex. "Student A") if I am quoting you directly. You will not be asked to spend any extra time to participate in this study outside of the work we are already doing in class and normal homework you have.

Are we being marked on this?

This study will not impact your grades or influence how I write your report card. I will not base how I mark your work based on your choice to participate or not participate in the study. Everyone will still receive their regular report cards with proficiency scales and comments for Term 3.

Do I have to join the study?

You do not have to join this study. Asking for your assent means that I will respect whatever decision you make. You can say yes now and change your mind later and say you want to stop. I will not be disappointed in you if you don't want to be in the study or if you join the study and

change your mind later and stop. I have asked your parents/guardians for their permission for you to participate in this research too, but it is important to me that I ask you too.

What if I have questions?

Before you say yes or no to being in this study, I will answer any questions you have. If you join the study, you can ask questions at any time. We will also discuss as a class what it means to collect data and how researchers can help make our society stronger (if used correctly).

If I sign-up for the study, can I change my mind?

During my research, if you decide for any reason that you do not want to be part of the study anymore, you can revoke (take away) your assent. This means you can ‘quit’ being part of the study. There will be no consequences for you. I will not be mad or disappointed! If you do not want to participate any more, just tell me (in person, over e-mail, in a note) before the end of May so I can remove you from the study.

Sincerely,
Ms. Ramen

Assent Form (Students)

Please circle or highlight YES or NO:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| Has somebody explained this study to you? | Yes / |
| No | |
| Do you understand what the study is about? | Yes / |
| No | |
| Have you asked all the questions you want? | Yes / |
| No | |
| Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand? | Yes / |
| No | |
| Do you understand it’s OK to stop at any time? | Yes / |
| No | |
| Do you want to be in the study? | Yes / |
| No | |

If you want to take part in the study, please fill in the information on the next page. If you do not, leave the next page blank.



Assent Form (Students)

I, _____ (your name) have been explained this study and agree (assent) to participate.

By agreeing to be part of this research study:

- I understand my data will be used in Ms. Ramen's research at SFU but she will not use my real name or any private/personal information
- I know my participation in this study will not influence how Ms. Ramen views me as a person or affect my grades
- I can end my participation in the study at any time by talking to my parents/guardians and/or Ms. Ramen

Signature

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Ms. Ramen will sign this part of the form:

Signature

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Appendix C. Parent/Guardian Consent Form



May 8, 2023

Dear Families of Divisions 1 & 3,

My name is Danielle Ramen. I coteach Divisions 1 & 3 and I am currently working on my Masters' of Educational Leadership through Simon Fraser University. This program enables me, as an educator, to reflect upon my own teaching practice, as well as on the learning of my students to further enhance and develop my own best practices. This research is being supervised by Dr. Michelle Nilson.

What is this study about?

As part of my studies, I am looking at how leadership practices that students learn in class enhance their ability to articulate their perspectives with increased confidence and motivation to actively participate in their school.

What does participation in this study look like for my student?

Students will be investigating who leaders are, what traits leaders possess, and how we can integrate some of these traits into our own lives. They will work to develop and hone leadership skills through various activities and challenges, including creating their own leadership project. Everyone will be participating in this unit as part of our Social Studies and Career Education curriculum alongside developing our Social Awareness and Responsibility competency, regardless of their participation in the research.

My inquiry will be primarily informed by observations and reflections of my work as a teacher. Over the next two months, I would also like to collect student work samples, self-reflections/assessments and hold group conferences to inform my understanding of my practice as well as student willingness to voice their opinions, motivation, and confidence. All elements of my inquiry will take place within the context of my normal instruction and practice. I will be writing the results of this research in the form of a report that will be shared via a public presentation at SFU during the summer of 2023.

In addition to producing my final report and presentation required as part of my M. Ed. program, I may potentially share the findings through professional development presentations (Pro-D-Days) in both the Burnaby School District and other districts. Once I complete my M. Ed. degree, the data will be kept for no more than five years following the completion of my project and only myself and my supervisor will have access to this information.

Does my student have to join the study?

This letter of notice is part of my ethical responsibilities as a teacher inquirer. I am giving notice that I would like to use student work samples, self-assessments/reflections, and group conferences to present to members of my graduate cohort and my instructors to demonstrate my learning. As part of my responsibility as an educator, professionalism around issues of privacy and confidentiality will be ensured. Consistent with the ethical protocols of teacher inquiry, if your student's work is mentioned in the presentation of my work, an alias (pseudonym) will always be

used to respect and protect their privacy. Additionally, this study will not impact the grade your child receives or influence their report card in any way.

Are there any potential risks and/or benefits for my student participating in the study?

As this study will be conducted as part of my regular teaching practice, there are no known risks associated with participation. The benefits of this study could potentially include establishing greater leadership

initiatives at our school in the future as well as helping other educators and students facilitate leadership practices within their own schools meaningfully. Furthermore, this will hopefully help me to reflect upon my own practice and pedagogy and improve as an educator as well as build and enhance the leadership capacity of students.

Can my student withdraw consent from the study?

Parents/guardians as well as students may contact me at any time (via email, in person at school, a note, etc.) to withdraw their consent. In this case, I would remove the student's work samples from my study. Consent may be revoked at any time, without consequence, before the end of May.

What if I have questions or concerns?

I would like to reassure you that regardless of my inquiry process, my ethical best practices as a teacher will remain the same and the integrity of the relationship I have with your child will not be affected.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me via email or by phone. If you would like to talk to my faculty supervisor, you can reach Dr. Michelle Nilson.

If you have any concerns about your child's rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, please contact the Director of SFU's Office of Research Ethics.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Danielle Ramen
Grade 6/7 Teacher – Division 1



Invitational Consent Form (Parents/Guardians)

Please return the following form to Ms. Ramen if you would like to allow your child to participate in the research being conducted.

Signing this consent form indicates that:

- You are providing consent to your child’s participation in this research
- You understand that your child may stop participating in the research at any time without consequence
- By consenting, you do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research – related harm
- By consenting, you are allowing Ms. Ramen to collect and use your child’s work as a sample to supplement the research findings

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Name of Student Participating

Thank you 😊!

Appendix D. SFU Ethics Approval



Minimal Risk Approval – Delegated

Study Number: 30001691

Study Title: How does the active citizenship model contribute to increased opportunities for student voice and choice?

Approval Date: April 24, 2023

Expiration Date: April 24, 2024

Principal Investigator: Michelle Nilson

SFU Position: Faculty

Faculty/Department: Education

Student Lead: Danielle Ramen

SFU Collaborator(s): N/A

Research Personnel: N/A

External Collaborator(s): N/A

Funder: N/A

Funding Title: N/A

Document(s) Approved in this Application:

- Assent Form V.1 – DRamen – Dated January 28
- Leadership Unit Plan V.1 – DRamen – Dated February 25
- Consent Form V.3 – DRamen – Dated April 18
- Danielle Ramen Letter from Admin – Dated March 13, 2023
- TCPS Certificate – DRamen – Dated July 26, 2022

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human participants.

The approval for this Study expires on the **Expiration Date. An Annual Renewal must be completed every year prior to the Expiration Date. Failure to submit an Annual Renewal will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.** The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the authorized delegated reviewer at its regular monthly meeting.

This letter is your official ethics approval documentation for this project. Please keep this document for reference purposes.

This study has been approved by an authorized delegated reviewer.

Appendix E. Burnaby School District Research Approval



May 5, 2023

Danielle Ramen, SFU

Dear Danielle,

Re: How does the active citizenship model contribute to increased opportunities for student voice?

Your application to conduct this research in the Burnaby School District has been approved.

You may proceed to contact school principals in the Burnaby School District.

As you know, district permission does not compel staff or students to participate, as involvement in research is always done on a voluntary basis. Upon completion, please send me a summary of your results.

I wish you the best with your study and if I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kevin Brandt
Director of Instruction

cc: Secondary Principals and Elementary Principals

Appendix F. Leadership Unit Plan

Unit Overview

How does the active citizenship model contribute to increased opportunities for student voice and motivation?

UNIT OVERVIEW:		
GRADE 6/7	CROSS-CURRICULAR	3-4 WEEK STUDY
FIRST PEOPLES' PRINCIPLES: Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place). Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge. Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.		
LIL'WAT PRINCIPLES: Emhaka7 - encouraging each of us to do the best we can at each task given to us		
AREA(S) OF FOCUS: Building confidence as learners and leaders. Crafting culturally-responsive, decolonized, and creative service-learning opportunities. Observing student engagement + enjoyment of leadership activities. Amplifying student communication (voice and choice)		
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will amplifying student voices (through an active citizenship model) impact student self-perception as leaders?• What, if any changes, can be observed in how connected students feel to their school community?• Will students report feeling more confident sharing their ideas and opinions after participating in leadership initiatives?		

MATERIALS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership Reflections• Maybe Something Beautiful by Campoy & Howell• Kamala and Maya's Big Idea by Meena Harris

VIDEO VISUALS:

- The Circles of Control Explained (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h-I7fm1lQw&t=18s>)
- Resilience (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iuPewWbp2U)
- Positive Mindsets (Brain Games) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO1kgl0p-Hw>)
- Spirited Debates (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3Egu8zU79s>)
- Debate Skills (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TSkkxu8on0>)
- Sample PSAs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj88niHbVE0> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Us69fSM9M>

WHAT IS A LEADER?

Lesson 1: Here we will begin to understand and unpack which traits best define a leader.

- **Opening Discussion:** When you think of the word “leader” draw what comes to mind. Write down at least 5 words that you feel describes their personality. Who did you see? What traits did you say they possess? Brainstorm leadership traits on the board. Have students describe and explain their thinking around the attributes of a leader (ex. Someone who voices their opinion, stands up for their beliefs, has a strong moral compass, motivated to make an impact, collaborative, etc.).
- **Activity:** Complete the Spaghetti Challenge. Rotate different leaders with different leadership styles. Discuss with students the impact the different leadership styles had on their progress of building the spaghetti tower.
 - Have students create an outline of their ideal leader and label their attributes.
- **Reflection Prompt(s):** When completing the Spaghetti Challenge, which leadership style identified the most with our class definition of a leader? Which leadership style did you feel was the most successful? When you were working as the leader did you find it easy to share your opinions and ideas? How did you feel sharing your opinions and ideas as the follower?

Activity adapted from Hello Fifth’s Leadership For Upper Grades

Lesson 2: Here we will begin to understand and unpack the difference between a leader vs. a boss.

- **Opening Discussion:** In groups of two, sort the provided prompts into the appropriate section of the chart (Leader or Boss). Be prepared to explain your

choices. Pair up with another group and check to see if your ideas matched. Discuss all answers and create a class T-Chart.

- **Activity:** Who has the power? Who do you think is more powerful, a leader or a boss? Explain your thinking.
- **Reflection Prompt(s):** Set up expectations for reflections.

Activity adapted from Hello Fifth's Leadership For Upper Grades

Lesson 3: Here we will begin to understand and unpack that strong leaders often face challenging situations but it is what we learn from them that counts!

- **Opening Discussion:** Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuPewWbp2U> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO1kgl0p-Hw> - discuss how these athletes overcame the challenges they faced. What did they NOT do? What is important for leaders to do to be successful when they encounter obstacles?
- **Activity:** Complete the handout "Famous Mistakes".
- **Reflection Prompt(s):** When you are faced with a challenge, what do you do? Do you think it is important for a leader to demonstrate resilience and/or motivation?

Activity adapted from Hello Fifth's Leadership For Upper Grades

ENHANCING OUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Lesson 4: Lesson 7: Here we begin to practice sharing our ideas, opinions and decision making skills.

- **Opening Discussion:** Ask students what they know about debates. Show students <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3Egu8zU79s> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TSkkxu8on0>
- **Activity:** Each student will choose a debate prompt out of a hat. Students will get into their pairs and decide who will argue for and against their assigned topic (ex. Should pineapple be allowed on pizza?). They will then have 5-10 minutes to write down their reasons. Students will debate in small groups and then will have a chance to debate in front of the class.

Reflection Prompt(s): Describe your feelings before partaking in the debate vs. after. What do you feel you did really well? What could you have improved? Why is it important for a leader to be able to share their opinions?

Lesson 5: Here we learn to recognize our leadership strengths through understanding different types of leadership styles as well as practicing giving instructions in a constructive way.

- **Opening Discussion:** Review leadership traits that students have brainstormed as a class. Discuss how an important attribute of a leader is clear and effective communication.
- **Activity:** Have students complete a drawing challenge wherein students partner up. Students are back to back and one student must provide their partner with clear instructions on how to draw a basic picture provided by the teacher. Once they are finished, students can complete the “What is your leadership style?” questionnaire.
- **Reflection Prompt(s):** Describe your communication skills during the activity. What did you do really well? What could you have improved? Why is it important for a leader to be a clear communicator?

ENGAGING IN SERVICE-LEARNING

Lesson 6: Here we begin to practice evaluating the supports within our school and community.

- **Opening Discussion:** Read *Maybe Something Beautiful*. Have students get into groups and discuss what supports and services there are within their community

and school. Have them analyze and reflect on what might be missing/ what they can do to improve their community. Create a class brainstorm on the board.

- **Activity:** Tell students they will be creating a service, a resource (proto-typing a device that will serve to benefit their school) or act as an activist for a problem they have discovered. Students individually identify and briefly research three topics which are of interest to them.
- **Reflection Journal Prompt(s):** Why do you think that it's important to get involved with and help support your community? How comfortable do you feel working on an issue within our school/community with a group?

Lesson 7: Here we begin to practice ways we can help support our school community to thrive.

- **Opening Discussion:** Read *Kamala and Maya's Big Idea*. Discuss the events from the books and how Kamala and Maya overcame challenges when they were trying to create change within their community.
- **Activity:** Students are organized into random groups and begin to work together to create a possible solution (activity or proto-type where applicable) using the SMART goal framework.
- **Reflection Prompt(s):** After working with your group for the first time, how did you feel sharing your ideas/opinions? How willing were you to collaborate and use the suggestions provided by others in your group? Does working on this project make you feel as though you are contributing to making your school/community a better place?

Lesson 8: Here we begin to practice ways we can help support our community to thrive.

- **Activity:** Work Period #1
- **Reflection Journal Prompt(s):** How willing were you to collaborate and use the suggestions provided by others in your group?

Lesson 9: Here we begin to practice ways we can help support our community to thrive.

- **Activity:** Work Period #2

Lesson 10: Here we begin to practice ways we can help support our community to thrive.

- **Activity:** Work Period #3
- **Reflection Prompt:** Ask the following questions:
 - Now that you have been collaborating with your group for a few work periods, how did you feel sharing your ideas/opinions?

- How willing were you to collaborate and use the suggestions provided by others in your group?
- Does working on this project make you feel as though you are contributing to making your school/community a better place?
- Has your confidence grown as a result of having to share your ideas and interacting with other community members?
- Do you feel more connected to your school / community as a result of doing this project?
- What skills do you think you demonstrated very well while working on this project?

Lesson 11: Here we begin to practice ways we can help support our community to thrive.

- **Possible Activity:** Presentations to the class.

Appendix G. Pre-Unit Reflection

Name: _____

1. Using the stars, please share how confident you feel in your ability to communicate and work as part of a group? (1 being not confident at all, 5 being extremely confident):



2. When your class is having a class discussion, how often do you share your ideas? Why do you think this is?

3. When you are working as part of a group, how comfortable do you feel sharing your ideas, thoughts, and opinions? Explain your answer.

4. Do you feel connected to and comfortable at your school? Explain your answer.

5. Do you consider yourself to be a LEADER?
- YES
 - NO

Please explain WHY or WHY NOT:

Appendix H. Post-Unit Reflection

Leadership Final Reflection

1. After having participated in and leading some school wide events (Poetry Cafe, Sports Day, etc.), how confident do you now feel in your ability to communicate and work as part of a group? Rate yourself using the star system below.



Please explain the rating you gave yourself above.

2. When completing these leadership initiatives (Poetry Cafe, Sports Day, etc.) did you feel like your opinions were **valued** and your ideas **mattered**? Explain your thinking.

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc. ; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

4. Has your confidence after participating in different leadership activities changed this year? Explain/show your thinking.

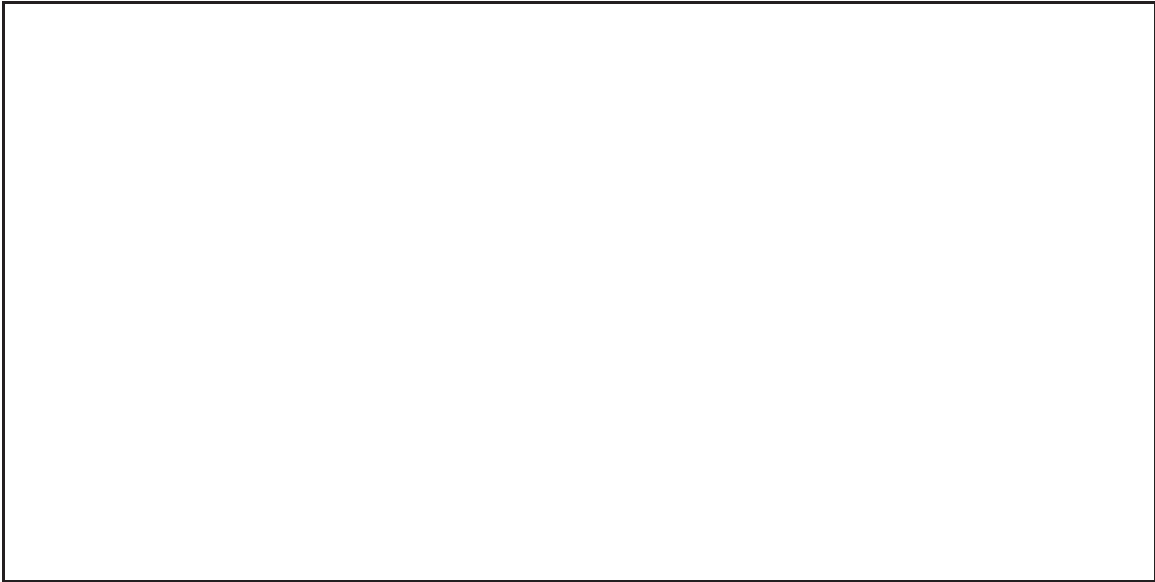
5. Would you consider yourself to be a leader?

- YES
- NO

Please explain WHY or WHY NOT:

6. Do you think being able to share your opinions and ideas is an important skill to have? Why or why not?

7. Draw yourself practicing leadership / being a leader.



Appendix I. Post-Unit Reflections on Being Valued and Heard

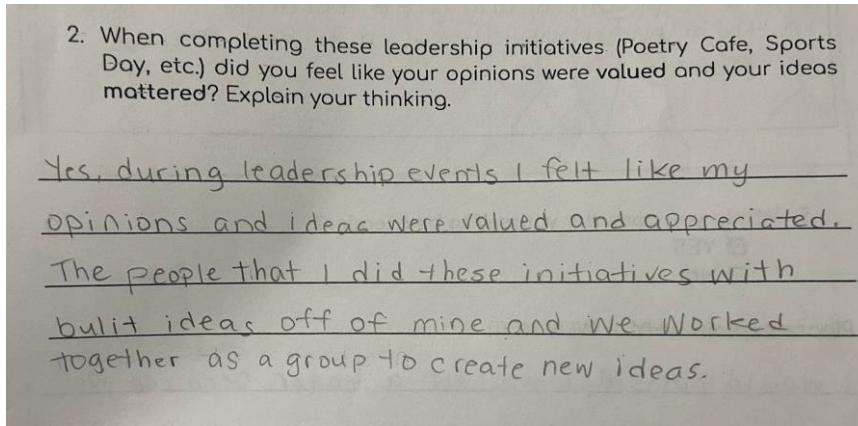


Figure I. 1. Student T

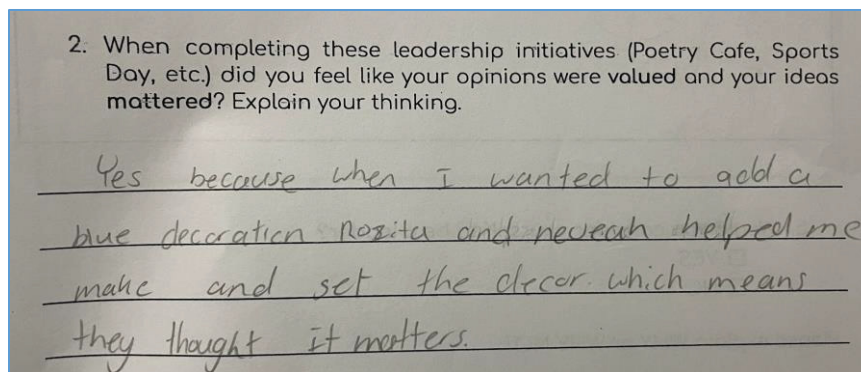


Figure I. 2. Student J4

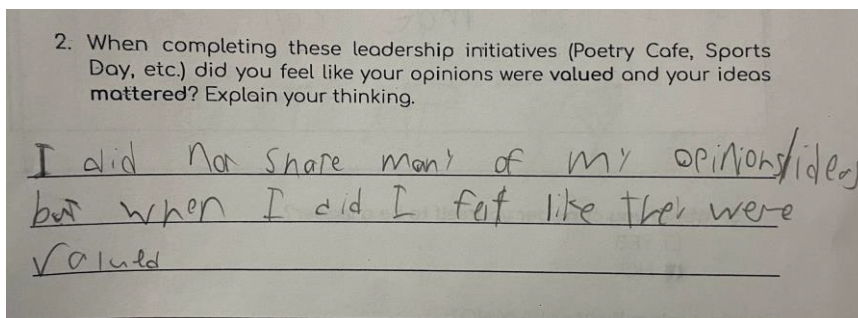


Figure I. 3. Student E

mattered? Explain your thinking.

When I participated in events like the poetry café and sports Day, I felt my opinions and Ideas really were heard and valued. For example, me and Jacob got to write and change the MC Script to our liking. In addition I really liked how everyone in the class got the chance to express their opinions like the people who made the slideshow or picked the music. This helped make everyone feel included.

Figure I. 4. Student P

Appendix J. Post-Unit Reflections on Confidence

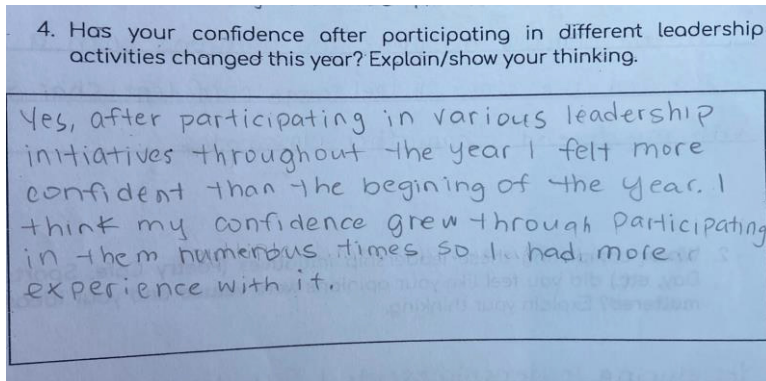


Figure J. 1. Student J2

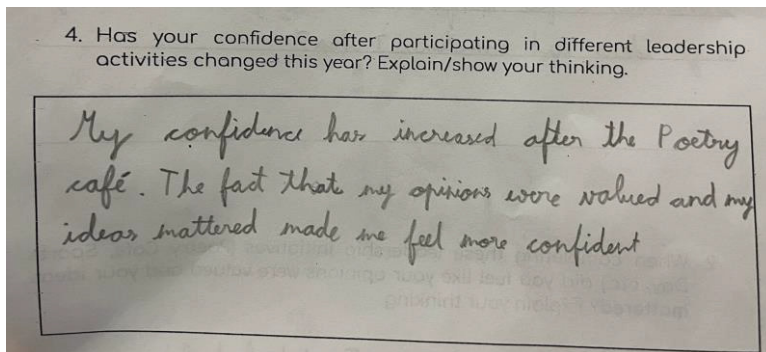


Figure J. 2. Student T2

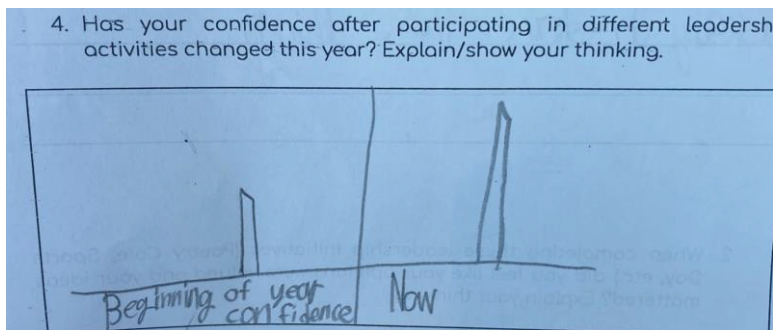


Figure J. 3. Student A2

4. Has your confidence after participating in different leadership activities changed this year? Explain/show your thinking.

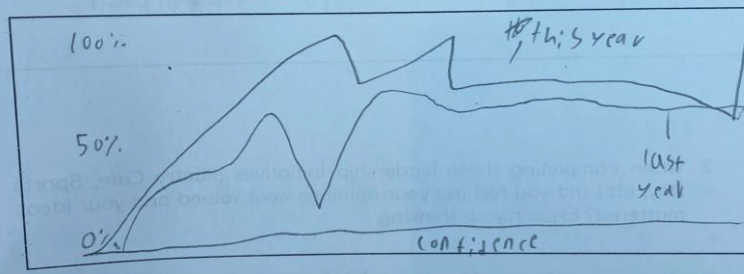


Figure J. 4. Student M

4. Has your confidence after participating in different leadership activities changed this year? Explain/show your thinking.

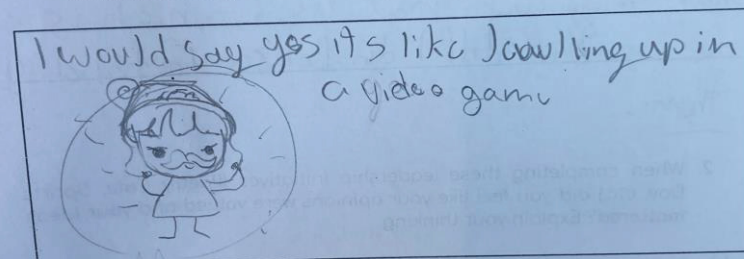


Figure J. 5. Student N

4. Has your confidence after participating in different leadership activities changed this year? Explain/show your thinking.

Yes, I think it has because it has helped me have more of a leadership role which has changed this year since now I have more of an understanding of being a leader which has helped me become more of a leader

Figure J. 6. Student T

Appendix K. Post-Unit Reflections on Connection to School

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc.; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

Yes, definitely, I usually don't get involved in much school activities or jobs.

Figure K. 1. Student A

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc.; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

Yes it has. I've always wanted to be helpful to our school and it's community and now that I've helped with these things, I feel more included.

Figure K. 2. Student V

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc.; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

Yes, because when we do these activities, you can make new friends, and you can spread your ideas.

Figure K. 3. Student J6

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc.; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

Yes, it has helped me feel more involved with our school community because planning, helping, and organizing for the poetry café and for sports day is helping our community and helping our community is being involved with our community.

Figure K. 4. Student K

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc.; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

Yes it has. I've always wanted to be helpful to our school and it's community and now that I've helped with these things, I feel more included.

Figure K. 5. Student V2

3. In creating an initiative for our school next year with your group, helping with the Poetry Cafe, planning Sports Day etc.; has this helped you to feel more involved with our school community?

Yes it helped me feel more involved in our school because I want to do as much as I can for the school

Figure K. 6. Student E2