

Leadership Development Program Fulfills Gifted Students' Need

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Gifted individuals have high intellectual, creative, divergent, and problem solving abilities (Davis & Rimm, 1985; Sisk, 1993; Tannenbaum, 1983). The federal definition of gifted identifies five areas in which the gifted and talented excel: intellectual ability, creativity, academic achievement, leadership, and visual/performing art abilities. Of these areas of giftedness, leadership is the least discussed (Karnes & Bean, 1990; Sisk, 1990).

Although much financial, research, and educational support is committed to adult leadership development, little effort or financial commitment has assisted our youth in realizing and developing their leadership abilities during their formative years (Carpenter, 1996, p. 17). Few gifted programs identify students with high leadership potential or include leadership education as part of the designated curriculum within present programs for the academically gifted (Florey & Dorf, 1986). Additionally, many researchers (Foster, 1981; Karnes et al., 1987; Magoon, 1981; Marland, 1972) denounced the paucity of attention and effort expended to assist our gifted youth in reaching their leadership potential (Carpenter, 1996, p. 17).

Because GT adolescents are generally considered to have the maturity to internalize their experiences and are young enough to be open-minded and curious (Black, 1984), they realize the maximum benefit from the opportunities to participate in a curriculum that fosters independent thinking, promotion of decision-

making skills, exploration of various leadership styles, and other activities that help them realize their leadership potential (Carpenter, 1996, p. 11). Torrance (1962) emphasized the importance of youths' creative imagination for the survival of civilization. He also stressed that democracies fail when they do not use intelligent, imaginative problem-solving methods. Because gifted individuals often have high creative, intellectual, and problem solving abilities, Torrance's assertions have lent support for the leadership education of gifted students (Carpenter, 1996, 11-12). The Marland Report (1972) established the premise that offering differential educational provisions was essential if democratic education intended to provide appropriate educational opportunities to benefit students and society. These educational opportunities offer GT students the differentiated curriculum that will permit individuals to have equal opportunity to become productive citizens who can contribute to the best of their ability to society (Carpenter, 1996, p. 12).

Our democratic system promises to each individual, without discrimination, the opportunity to develop as an individual to the extent of that person's abilities, talents, and motivation. Only through special programs for gifted and talented individuals can this goal be achieved. Not only do gifted and talented students benefit from specific programs that recognize and cultivate their talents, but also society benefits because today's gifted and talented students are prime candidates to be the future leaders in political, business, research, and artistic endeavors. Although the

egalitarian society of the United States places a high value on the individual and the realization that progress involves the efforts of all citizens, the reality is that the ideas and plans for progress come from a few of its most able members (Sisk, 1987).

Leadership education is appropriate for GT students because they possess above average or high intelligence, one of the traits most often cited as a trait of a leader. GT students have the ability to comprehend and retain the learning experiences and the sensitivity to perceive the acquisition of the leadership skills and roles in themselves and others (Magoon, 1980). Thus, they are likely to profit from leadership education.

Education in Action is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that fulfills this need by providing leadership development opportunities for gifted 6th-8th students. Education in Action's experiential learning programs empower young Texans to be informed and active leaders. Education in Action's weeklong Lone Star Leadership Academy-Austin and Lone Star Leadership Academy-Houston/Galveston programs extend core curriculum taught in Texas classrooms through visits to historically, politically, environmentally and scientifically related sites. Leadership development activities are carried out throughout the program curriculum with a focus on a different leadership skill each day.

During visits to sites, students learn about leaders of Texas, past and present, and note what qualities made these Texans effective leaders. For example, students learn about the heroes of the Texas Revolution at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, Lyndon Baines Johnson at the LBJ Library and Museum, and their State Representatives and State Senators during visits to their offices at the Texas State Capitol. Each evening, students meet in leadership groups with their facilitator (a state certified teacher) to share and discuss the leadership qualities they learned about during the site visits and through interactions with other participants.

Leadership groups are also the time when students participate in leadership activities and content-related simulations that teach effective leadership skills and concepts. For example, a simulation from the Lone Star Leadership Academy-Austin program focuses on

the ability to lead a group to consensus on a controversial issue. Prior to rafting down the Colorado River, students learn about a conference center being built on the river. Each student is assigned the role of a different community member. Students read actual newspaper articles to provide them with the viewpoint of their assigned community member on key issues including the environment, quality of life and tax abatements. During the rafting program, students see the site and visit with the rafting guides to learn more about the situation. Students then return to their leadership groups and are challenged to build the conference center in a way that is acceptable to the entire group.

Upon completion of the Lone Star Leadership Academy program, students are invited to participate in Education in Action's alumni program, the Lone Star Youth Leadership Council. This organization encourages and motivates Lone Star Leadership Academy graduates to continue their leadership development. Texas leaders talk with members about effective leadership qualities at alumni program meetings. The alumni program also provides opportunities for members to exercise their leadership skills. Lone Star Youth Leadership Council members develop and implement service projects in their schools. Students display their service projects at Education in Action's Annual Texas Independence Day Celebration. Members also work together on committees to plan Education in Action's Annual Texas Independence Day Celebration. Finally, members may return to Lone Star Leadership Academy programs as Youth Facilitators.

Education in Action was founded to provide Texas students with opportunities to develop their leadership abilities during their formative years. Because leadership is one of the five areas of giftedness, gifted students are excellent candidates for the program. Education in Action invites educators of the gifted to nominate students for participation in the Lone Star Leadership Academy. In order to participate in the program, students must be in the 6th, 7th or 8th grade, maintain an 85 or higher average, receive an educator recommendation/nomination, and demonstrate leadership potential.

For more information on Education in Action's leadership development programs or to nominate outstanding students, visit www.eiatx.org or contact

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This article introduces a leadership program for Texas middle school students to supplement this historically overlooked area of gifted education. All cited research is quoted directly from Betsy Owens Carpenter's 1996