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MAKING LEADERS: EXAMINING HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS  
DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP AND SHOW  
EMERGING LEADERSHIP TENDENCIES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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## Dedication

To my mom, with love and an abundance of gratitude

## Acknowledgements

“See first that the design is wise and just; that ascertained, pursue it resolutely. Do not for one repulse forego the purpose that you resolved to effect.” This quote, attributed to William Shakespeare, summarizes the intense focus that was required to finish this dissertation. I did not walk the journey alone, and with immense gratitude I would like to acknowledge several people.

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## Abstract

### MAKING LEADERS: EXAMINING HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP AND SHOW EMERGING LEADERSHIP TENDENCIES

By Sarah E. Evans, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014

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The purpose of this study was to understand how young children develop skills and concepts of leadership, when nurtured in a developmentally appropriate manner. Leadership was defined as a process that people use to bring out the best in themselves and others, while working towards a common purpose. This study examined a leadership curriculum, *The Leader in Me*, as it was being taught in an elementary school, grades K-5. The researcher used a qualitative lens to understand parents' and teachers' perceptions of the program, and the study findings indicated that *The Leader in Me* was used as both a way to teach leadership and for behavior modification. Teachers reported teaching leadership through direct instruction, informal instruction, curriculum materials, and practice. In addition, the children's leadership behaviors were analyzed through the transformational leadership model to find *The Leader in Me* resulted in attempting to



make transformational leaders. The children showed signs of transformational leadership through the behaviors of the 4 I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The data further showed positive gains in school culture, leadership development, and personal growth. Standardized testing pass rates were examined, but the researcher found the leadership program had no discernable impact on student achievement. This study found that there is merit in looking to our nation's educational system to support the intentional process of developing leaders in schools.

*Keywords:* leaders, leadership, leadership development in children, *The Leader in Me*, 7 Habits, transformational leadership

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **Background**

Imagine an educational system in which the three Rs of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic would no longer be sufficient knowledge for students. That time has arrived. The three Rs are important basics, but once a student attains a proficient level, these basics are being pushed aside for skills such as technology, life skills, global awareness, and economical savvy (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2009). There is newfound recognition that students need to be able to graduate with all of the book knowledge needed, along with personal character, social responsibility, and other life skills. Not all children learn personal ethics and responsibility at their homes, so teaching character-related topics in our public school systems would be a logical consideration.

A well-know quote by German writer Goethe said, “Treat a man as he is and you make him worse than he is. Treat a man as he has the potential to become and you make him better than he is.” This concept of educating to a potential goes beyond the academic foundations traditionally found in schools, and looks at educating students as a whole person and not just one possessing a brain. Renowned leadership expert, Stephen Covey, called this "educating to reach one’s primary greatness" (2008, p. 9). Every person has the potential to reach his or her primary greatness and this potential involves who the people are at the core, and their adherence to character-based principles. This study

illustrates that one way to bring out this potential and primary greatness in students is through teaching leadership skills in educational settings.

The field of leadership studies is focused on teaching the skills needed to improve one's capacity for functioning as a leader. Leadership is viewed as a process that ordinary people, young or old, use when they are trying to bring out the best in themselves and everyone else. Kouzes and Posner (1997) stated that if the population could learn how to successfully utilize leadership skills there would be the chance that extraordinary things could happen. Learning leadership skills could be compared to the analogy of making an investment; investors need their assets to grow over time.

Both the fields of leadership and education are concerned with long-range development of people, however leadership education remains an abstract concept that is often ignored in schools. Teachers are charged with cultivating young minds to have fundamental skills and many parents look to public education to provide the optimal foundation for life. Even though all involved want children to have every advantage available, certain skills like leadership are often not being addressed. According to the *National Leadership Index* conducted by the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University, 69% of Americans stated that there is a leadership crisis in the United States (Rosenthal, 2012). Seventy percent of respondents said that unless our leadership abilities improved, giving us more highly skilled leaders, our nation would decline. Furthermore, it showed that the public confidence associated with leadership in the education sector was at 88.7%, in between *not much* and a *moderate* amount. Schools are preparing the future leaders of our country, and these young students could grow up to

change our nation and instill a higher sense of confidence by providing a new wave of leadership. Covey (2008) agreed when he said:

Today's young people, our children, belong to the most promising generation in the history of the world. They stand at the summit of the ages. They also stand at the crossroads of two great paths. One is the broader, well-traveled path that leads to mediocrity of mind and character, and to social decline. The other is a narrower 'less traveled' uphill path leading to limitless human possibilities -and the hope of the world. EVERY child can walk this latter path, if shown the way.  
(p. 1)

The United States Chamber of Commerce (2007) reported on the current state of educational affairs in all 50 states by giving academic report cards showing a grade on how well they were doing. The criteria focused on academic outcomes, innovation, flexibility, management, and fiscal responsibility. Overall, the study found that our nation needed to provide a higher quality of schooling to our children. It also showed we have been going through unprecedented changes in our ways of life by using examples such as the economy, global competition, and the pending retirement of 77 million baby boomers. The study additionally concluded that although our nation has seen unprecedented changes, the K-12 public educational system has remained remarkably stagnant. A follow-up report conducted in 2009 examined how the nation's public school system was preparing for challenges in the future (United States Chamber of Commerce). The report called for an overhaul and remarked that the educational system was archaic, operating with thinking left over from a different era in which students led a prosperous

life with just a high school education. The Chamber of Commerce stated that schools should shift their focus onto educating students for the future in innovative ways that are applicable to today's society.

Historically, schools have taught academic knowledge, test taking, character education, interpersonal skills, and much more, but rarely leadership. The goal of nurturing young students to become leaders is crucial to society, and schools should support the intentional process of developing leaders. Through gaining an understanding of how students develop leadership, educators could create effective programs aimed at enhancing all young children's leadership tendencies and their abilities to lead in the future. If young children were taught appropriate skills at an early stage, these could become habitual. Each child could work on developing his or her leadership capacity on an individual basis, but the institution of education should be concerned with intentionally developing the potential of young leaders. McCaw (2007) queried:

If not in our nation's public schools where will tomorrow's leaders learn how to agree, to disagree, to solve problems on a deep conceptual level, to value self and others, to openly consider new and differing ideas, to ask questions and seek answers? (p. 32)

### **Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how children developed leadership knowledge and if they showed behavioral traits of transformational leadership. In addition, the study examined the applicability of adult leadership skills to children, and gained insight into participants' experiences and perceptions of leadership.

It explored the leadership program of a particular school, and determined whether the students had any leadership skills as a result of their exposure to the program, *The Leader in Me*.

### **Rationale for the Study**

**Understanding leadership and its applicability to children.** The primary aim of this study was to offer researchers and educators further understanding about the applicability of leadership to children and how it could be nurtured in a developmentally appropriate manner. Maslow's (1971) theory of development stated that people would progress through a hierarchy of needs from the basic level of survival to the highest level of self-actualization. As children progress through Maslow's early developmental stages, gaining leadership skills would allow for more personal growth on the way to self-actualization.

In addition, one should understand the foundation of leadership and how a shift has occurred in recent years so that currently it has become acceptable to teach adult leadership skills to children (Covey, 2008). Prior to this shift, much of the literature on leadership theory or development was lacking information pertaining to children (MacNeil, 2006). In his 1981 book, Bass explained how he conducted a comprehensive review of more than 5,000 leadership studies, and found nothing pertaining to children as leaders or youth leadership development. More recent literature began discussing the possibility for having "authentic and meaningful leadership roles for youth within a societal context" (MacNeil, 2006, p. 33). However, MacNeil also indicated more research was needed if there were to be a complete transition to the concept of children

being integrated into leadership theory, as the current state of literature only shows tentative steps.

Developmentally, children are ready for the exposure to leadership skills within a framework of adult guidance. Elementary-aged students are not too young to begin learning self-understanding, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, social skills, and other imperative leadership components (Karnes & Bean, 1996). Instead of using stand-alone leadership or character education lessons in schools, an alternative approach would be to integrate leadership across the curriculum. This integration would allow each student to work towards his or her potential. Karnes and Bean warned, however, that the success of teaching leadership skills hinged upon “total support and commitment of all educators, the willingness of all involved to explore leadership connections across all disciplines, and the willingness to seek opportunities for leadership development in every dimension of school life” (1996, p. 11). Therefore, educators would need to be willing to incorporate leadership across all aspects of daily school life.

In addition, Landau and Weissler (2001) conducted a study to see if the phenomenon of leadership as it manifests in adults would exist among children. They found that children had the ability to show leadership qualities and that there were three stages in the leadership development of children. The first stage of awareness meant a child was just beginning to understand the concept. Interaction, the second stage, included instruction, and at this point the child began interacting in a way that practiced leadership skills. The third and final stage was where a child showed any emerging leadership tendencies.

**Educating leaders for life.** The act of teaching young children leadership skills at school, builds a foundation that will serve them throughout their lives. Leadership, transformational leadership specifically, involves educating a person to his or her full potential. Regardless if there are other benefits involved in teaching leadership, the basic goal of bringing out people's potential through learning leadership skills, offers education the ability to educate toward a higher purpose. Leadership is a valuable skill that needs to be learned and taught. Bass and Riggio (2006) said, "transformational leadership is needed to solve the world's most critical problems" (location 4075). Our world is complex and vastly changing, and if future generations were learning transformational leadership skills then it fulfilled a need for cutting edge leaders that have the skills to transform, to affect change. Transformational leaders emphasize collaboration, accountability, integrity, responsibility, and other traits that lead the way to a higher purpose and shared vision (Daft, 2005). While some may see the ideal in trying to move through Maslow's pyramid toward self-actualization, Bass and Riggio pointed out that transformational leaders will reach another level, the higher pursuit of a group ideal (2006, location 4131). Teaching leadership skills in schools would level the playing field and offer the skill acquisition to all students, regardless of variables such as academic ability, background, familial support, and others. Covey (2008) summarized when he said that teaching leadership skills is the right thing to do because the skills are valuable as stand alone traits. "What these schools are doing is indeed bringing us closer to the *right* thing to be doing in preparing young people for today's realities and tomorrow's challenges" (p. 17).



**Supportive public opinion.** Recently, schools have been criticized by some members of the general public for an overly emphatic concentration on standardized testing. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110, 2002) increased the perception that education was focused on getting all students to pass the mandated standardized testing. Since the act was passed, the primary focus of schools has been on rote learning in order to teach the core curriculum being assessed in the testing (Pappas, 2009). According to Rose and Gallup (2007), data gathered from the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Gallup Poll found that public knowledge about NCLB had grown, and poll respondents were choosing answers that showed they had become less favorable towards the legislation. Two-thirds of respondents further indicated that they felt NCLB had hurt or made no difference in schools. Furthermore, when respondents were asked about those schools being labeled as poor performing for a failure to meet NCLB mandates, the poll found almost half of the participants willing to blame the law over the schools themselves. The poll concluded that the data showed, “the public, despite its desire for high standards and accountability, does not approve of the strategies used in NCLB” (p. 36).

In the Rose and Gallup (2007) survey, 75% of the participants with children in schools also claimed that the government’s emphasis on standardized testing had caused teachers to concentrate on teaching to the test and focus on getting students to pass. Commentary from the poll stated that two-thirds of the public asked for schools to address children’s social and emotional needs in addition to academics. Some researchers, for example McCaw (2007) and Pappas (2009), have supported a shift in

paradigm to reinstate the integrated connection between academic achievement and social-emotional development.

In the years since the passage of NCLB, the government has introduced new legislation initiatives aimed at improving the state of our educational system, most notably *The Race to the Top* (2009), and the Common Core State Standards (National Governor's Association, 2010). The 45th annual PDK/ Gallup Poll of the *Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* sampled a cross-section of households across the United States' population, and included 1,001 participants in the study (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013). Gallup reported that the sample was adjusted statistically to represent United States' adults nationwide. The poll found that 78% of respondents thought the increased emphasis on standardized testing had not improved public schools (2013). A majority of those participants responded that they had never heard of the new educational initiatives and they neither understood nor embraced the concepts. The study found that 77% thought the increased emphasis during the past decade on standardized testing had either hurt or made no difference in schools' performances. In addition, the poll asked questions regarding the importance of educating towards 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. A large majority of participants, between 51% and 80% stated they strongly agreed that schools should teach skills in the following categories: critical thinking, communication, setting goals, collaboration, creativity, promoting well-being, and building character (2013). The initiatives introduced by the government are programs with an emphasis on standards and achievement, which were not perceived as being successful.

**Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** Organizations like the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (2009) have taken data and suggested that schools focus on bridging the gap between factual memorization and skills that students will need in order to be successful in their futures, including technological competencies. To compete in higher education, the global interface, and a competitive work environment, the Partnership recommended schools align classroom objectives and core knowledge with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. As outlined by the Partnership, the new global economy has emphasized the need for students to emerge from school with different skill-sets, possessing traits or characteristics that distinguish them from earlier generations of students, such as creativity, insight, technological talent, and people skills. Many school districts across the United States have embraced the goal of educating students to have 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, including 19 states that have entered into affiliation with the Partnership (2009). Leadership was included in these skills under the category of Life and Career Skills. Finally, the Partnership suggested that educating students to be 21<sup>st</sup> century thinkers may offer them more success than if they received an education filled with a traditional thought and computational focus.

**Updating education.** Arguably, there could not be one answer to the question of how students should be educated to be successful members of society, but leadership would offer some options in moving toward 21<sup>st</sup> century skill education. McCaw (2007) interviewed the author Daniel Pink who said:

We tend to have this garage repair mentality of education – we fix what’s wrong with kids.... Obviously we need to make sure that children are literate and

numerate, but beyond that base of fundamental skills we must believe it is important for children to discover their own strengths. Unfortunately, I believe it is taking hold more slowly in schools than other parts of society. (p. 33)

In addition, McCaw (2007) also interviewed some other prominent figures in education and leadership who expressed the need for higher accountability in education, but also understood the ramifications of negative effects. Findings from McCaw's interviews showed that these educational figures felt that our current public educational system may be antiquated and preventing broader learning from taking place. One of McCaw's participants stated that he wanted students to be able to fully understand the world. "To see themselves as citizens of the world, that they are functioning empathic human beings, that they can see the world fully, that they are not just spewing right answers for the wrong reasons" (McCaw, 2007, p. 33).

**Fill gaps in the literature.** The sixth element in the rationale for this study is that it would fill some gaps in the literature regarding teaching children leadership skills. Currently, there is a small body of available literature pertaining to teaching young children leadership skills. Some authors have focused on leadership skills that are being taught to gifted students. In addition, some authors have mentioned specific skills that students would need to be taught, or listed activities that could be helpful for teaching those desired leadership skills. Very little is discussed in existing literature pertaining to items that should be included in a curriculum and how children can actually gain leadership skills and show mastery. Furthermore, the literature continues to be sparsely populated with empirical evidence. Indeed, the study would fill a gap in the literature, as

it would be one of few empirical studies on leadership skills focused upon children, regardless of their academic ability. At this time, leadership skills are not the focus of most elementary schools in the nation, and this study has the potential to raise the public awareness of the benefits of teaching children to become leaders. Such an outcome would address the gap adverted to by Karnes and Bean when they stated “without more deliberate approaches to youth leadership...only a few students are likely to emerge as leaders, and the world will continue the cry for more effective leaders” (1996, p. 10).

### **Synopsis of the Literature**

The connotations of the words "leader" and "leadership" vary greatly, since leadership involves the personal aspect of making meaning through prior knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. It also depends upon how each person rationalizes and makes sense of the world. After reading the varied definitions and theories on leadership presented throughout history, one definition was chosen to frame this study that encompassed an overall understanding of being a leader. For the purpose of this dissertation, leadership is defined by Daft (2005) as an influential relationship between leaders and followers that involves a shared interest in working towards a common goal. In addition, the review of literature indicated that leadership is fundamentally attributed to a person or group that is working together to achieve a shared purpose (Rosenbach & Saskin, 2007). Leadership was viewed as an ongoing process that does not preclude collaboration.

**Theories of leadership.** In tracing the evolution of leadership, five major theories emerged which included trait, situational, behavioral, transactional, and

transformational theories. These leadership theories offered a foundation for understanding. However, the large body of research reviewed for this dissertation was in support of transformational leadership because this is the overall category where the historical progression of leadership theory has currently paused. Transformational leaders would be concerned with building relationships, facilitating interactions among the group, and encouraging everyone involved to participate in a group decision-making process (Boseman, 2008). These leaders would envision a future, motivate the people involved, and communicate that working towards the common purpose is worth the effort (Daft, 2005). Transformational leaders both inspire others and also develop their own capacity for leadership, so leadership could be occurring at all levels and by any individual (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The emphasis is on shared leadership so that everyone can be involved and work within his or her own strengths in order to facilitate change and adaptation in our global society.

Transformational leadership often involves the 4 I's, or methods to achieve goals, of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leaders demonstrate idealized influence when they act as role models and engage in behavior that is admired, respected and shows determination (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The second trait, inspirational motivation, involves inspiring others to overcome challenges, and work towards a shared vision in a way that includes both optimism and enthusiasm (Humphrey, 2014). Transformational leaders show intellectual stimulation when they use creativity, question, show insightfulness, and encourage the team to offer opinions and engage in the process. Finally, individualized

consideration includes recognizing people's differences, understanding a variety of strengths and coaching everyone towards growth and success (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Humphrey, 2014). These 4 I's are a way of categorizing behavior and skills seen within transformational leadership.

**Innate or acquired leadership.** An often-held belief about leadership is that certain people were born with characteristics that made them innate leaders (Karnes & Bean, 1996). Certain people were born with natural talents that predisposed them to lead, but researchers also found that leadership can be taught. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) found that 86% of teachers surveyed thought leadership skills were both innate and learned, while only 3% thought it was purely innate. Rosenbach (2003) agreed that effective leaders could subsist from a combination of inherent genetic abilities and developed skills. Gardner's theory (1990) corroborated this by stating that part of educators' responsibilities would be to develop children's natural leadership tendencies, but cultivate other areas as well because some children will show leadership promise through events, knowledge, and challenges set forth through schooling.

Feldhusen and Kennedy (1988) conducted a study that found leadership skills could be taught explicitly, and that students needed to have ample time to practice what they were learning. In another study, Owen (2007) found 85% of the teachers surveyed thought that leadership instruction should begin in the formative elementary school years when children are between the ages of 5 and 11. These findings taken together indicated that leadership is a developmentally appropriate skill set that allows children to begin to understand and incorporate leadership within their social and academic growth.

Furthermore, Karnes, Deason, and D'Ilio (1993) found that participation in a leadership program correlated skills being taught with a progression towards self-actualization.

**Cognitive developmental appropriateness for children.** Childhood cognitive development research has been studied for over a century, but Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's theories on development are some of the most well known theories regarding cognitive growth. Piaget proposed stages of cognitive development through which children would progress in a mainly linear manner (1964). Piaget and other cognitive development researchers have acknowledged that children's brain structures process what they observe in the environment and also assimilate information to construct their own cognitive growth. Fischer (1980) elaborated on Piaget's theory by explaining that the brain changes in cyclical cycles called skill theory, the journey from cognition to intelligence that takes place from childhood to adulthood. Skill theory supported the suggestion that children have the cognitive abilities to gain leadership skills through instruction. Lev Vygotsky was another cognitive theorist who supported the idea that through transformational thinking young children would progressively gain levels of higher thinking as the mind developed cognitive function (1994). The acquisition of cognitive abilities would be necessary for higher-level thinking.

Lawson and Wollman (1976) conducted a study with fifth and seventh grade students to find out if instruction could affect thinking and cause a shift from concrete to more complex. Through pretest and posttest data, they found that formal instruction in a classroom did support a higher-level thinking transition within cognitive functioning. A deduction from the experiment supported evidence that children aged 6 to 7, who are still



in the concrete stage of development, could have the ability to cognitively grasp new concepts. Lawson and Wollman (1976), Rogoff (1990), and Flavell (1992) agreed that the learning must take place in a structured environment with activities tailored to their cognitive ability. Under these parameters, the children could reach new developmental levels and gain full understanding of a complex skill.

**Obtaining leadership skills.** Research by Van Linden and Fertman (1998) suggested three levels in leadership development, with each stage supporting different skills and moving towards greater capability. In stage one, children got an overview and began to build their own definition of leadership. The imperative requirement of the first stage was to assist the child in recognizing his or her potential to become a leader. Stage two is where students would take the leadership skill theory they have learned and translate them into actions, with adult supervision guided practice. Acting like a leader became more concrete and allowed for the student to practice and work towards mastery of the skills. Stage three, usually children aged 10 through 19, involved integrating leadership skills into every aspect of life. Students saw their abilities grow and their leadership skills became a foundation for enriching personal behavior throughout all arenas and areas of interest that they had.

**Leadership in schools.** Leadership in schools often is encased within a formal program of character education. Character education in school began around the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remains a common behavior program used in schools today to help students learn how to be respectful citizens (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). The Virginia Senate passed a bill in 1999 requiring character education to become a part of school

curriculums, with a focus on the values of trustworthiness, citizenship, fairness, responsibility, and respect (Va. Sec. 22.1-208.01). While some would say it is laudable for the government to ensure our American students are being taught values education, others may disagree. Two studies concluded that most character education programs are not cohesive and fail to show research-based support that the program can bring about positive behavior modifications (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000).

While character education lacks empirical data for positive behavior changes, leadership studies would offer life-skills foundation, experience, and perspectives that would transfer with a student into adulthood (Chapman, Toolsie-Worsrup & Dyck, 2006). Feldhusen and Kennedy (1988) agreed that leadership skills should be taught in schools in order to provide a basis for learning and practice while students work towards developing their potentials. Schools offer an organized, structured platform of learning that would be a positive place for instruction in leadership skills.

Studies have examined students in order to gain evidence on the manners in which they show leadership knowledge or ability. Karnes and Chauvin (1986) examined the actions of students and observed a commonality of leadership skills in areas such as communication, values, interactions, and problem solving. Feldhusen and Kennedy (1988) also researched how students show leadership skills. They studied youth involved in a gifted and talented summer program, and gave the program's teachers a survey on leadership behaviors they may have observed in their students. The study's results found that the teachers observed leadership behavior within the categories of student ability,

personal, and social. Furthermore, the study results indicated that 57% of the teachers polled found that the students had shown growth in their leadership skills while enrolled in the summer program.

Owen (2007) also conducted a study to gather data on teachers' perceptions of students' leadership knowledge. The study consisted of 190 teachers answering a questionnaire, and 80 additional teachers being interviewed. Results showed that the teachers could identify student leadership traits, such as skills in responsibility, interacting with peers, initiative, and respect. Additional data indicated that it would be important to introduce students to leadership at a young age. The ideal age chosen was between 5 and 11 years old, which are the elementary school instructional years.

These studies illustrated that teachers support the argument that leadership skills can be taught and should be a part of school curriculum. As mentioned prior, there are very few published studies documenting the data collected on teaching leadership skills to young children. However a few researchers and schools have released quantitative data. Chapter 2 of this dissertation contains literature elaborating upon instances where children have been exposed to leadership instruction. Mostly, it contains information regarding schools that have instituted a leadership curriculum and had data published in a study. Although there is a scarcity of studies in the body of literature, all of the schools and districts have reported positive outcomes when leadership is one of the factors involved in their educational curriculum.

**Covey's *The Leader in Me*.** The pioneer in the current field of teaching leadership education to young children was Dr. Stephen R. Covey. Covey, a renowned

author in the field of adult leadership studies, decided to branch out into childhood leadership. His idea to formulate a program for schools happened after people started questioning the applicability to children of his *7 Habits of Highly Effective People (7 Habits)*. In 1999, school principal Muriel Summers decided to take the ideas presented in the *7 Habits* and teach those skills to the students in her elementary school. Almost a decade later, in 2008, Covey published the book *The Leader in Me*, which detailed the experience Summers had teaching the habits and documented other schools that also taught the program. Building upon the success seen by Summers and other principals, Covey's company FranklinCovey built *The Leader In Me* resources, curriculum, and website materials for educators to purchase and use in the classroom. Covey wrote that he hoped the program would help towards, "the betterment of societies and young people of all nations" (2008, p. xxiii).

FranklinCovey's research offered case studies of schools using the leadership curriculum, and data associated with changes at the schools. However, it would be important to note that the data were gathered by either the schools or FranklinCovey and were not from an outside, independent source. Additionally, the studies were never proven on an empirical level by a neutral source. Their data will be presented in Chapter 2, and any findings or conclusions of success are those that have been made by Covey, FranklinCovey, or the faculty involved with the program at the schools. Covey reported that the schools teaching his leadership principles found (2008, p. 4):

- Improved student achievement
- Significantly enhanced self-confidence and esteem in students

- Dramatic decreases in discipline problems
- Impressive increases in teachers' and administrators' job satisfaction and commitment
- Greatly improved school cultures
- Parents who were delighted and engaged in the process
- Businesses and community leaders who wanted to lend support

Covey also stated that almost all of the schools teaching the program were seeing increased test scores. Interestingly, it was not the above results nor the test scores that had Covey excited about the leadership program, but instead a focus on enabling children to gain the skills they will need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2008). Covey contended that we are exiting an era in which facts and accumulation of knowledge are not as highly valued, and because of the internet and our global economy the fact-filled person is no longer needed. Instead, those students who will thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as adults will have such skills as creativity, analytical processes, good people skills, and other strengths that he feels are being taught in his leadership skills programs. Summers agreed, "If we are putting all of our efforts on the almighty test score alone, I am quite afraid that we are going to create a generation of children who know how to do nothing but take a test well" (Covey, 2008, p. 9).

To make universal citizens, Covey asserted three overall themes in the leadership instruction (2008). First, that his leadership principles being taught were timeless, common sense based, and would be familiar to all ages and cultures (p. 13). Second, that the principles were attainable for all children, and would showcase the gifts and true

leadership qualities found within each child (p. 14). Lastly, the leadership skills taught in the program at school would be transferable, and could also be upheld at home and in the students' daily lives (p. 14). When discussing the leadership skills in the *The Leader in Me* program and the student gains from the learning, Covey admitted that parts seemed "too good to be true" (p. 17). However, he firmly held to his belief that leadership skills need to be taught to the next generation in order to prepare young children for both what happens today and also for any challenges they may face in the future (p. 17). With the death of Covey in 2012, his son Sean Covey and his company FranklinCovey continued the *The Leader in Me* leadership skills program.

Researchers from the Center for Research and Reform in Education at John Hopkins University conducted a qualitative case study of two elementary schools that were teaching *The Leader In Me* to their students (Ross, Laurenzano, & Daniels, 2012). Researchers conducted a visit to each school that consisted of observations, focus groups, and interviews. Teachers were asked questions regarding "(a) the benefits of various program components; (b) fidelity of implementation; (c) quality and adequacy of professional development and support; (d) impacts on the school, themselves personally, students, parents, and the community; and (e) strengths, weaknesses, and improvement needs" (2012, p. 3). The students were asked to reflect upon their usage of the 7 Habits in both their academic and personal lives.

Even though *The Leader in Me* does not have any formal or prescribed curriculum, the researchers found similarities in the outcomes of the program at both elementary schools. The teachers and students were using the leadership language and

integrating it into their daily learning activities. The study reported findings of positive gains for students, teachers, and the school culture in the categories of security and order, self-confidence, motivation, getting along with others, conflict resolution, and making teaching more enjoyable and easier (Ross, et al., 2012, p. 5). The teachers stated that the leadership program, “was not an adoption of a program but of a new instructional process with students’ total personal growth and development at its center” (p. 7).

### **Terms and Definitions**

The following terms and definitions were the ones used most frequently throughout the research and discussion.

*Leadership.* “An influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (Daft, 2005, p. 5).

*Transformational Leadership.* A person who works with others to create a shared vision in order to reach cohesive goals and purposes. They often use the methods of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (4 I’s) to achieve goals and create the motivating vision (Daft, 2005; Humphrey, 2014; Owen, 2007).

*Transformational Learning.* “The process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

These foreshadowed research questions helped focus the study and guide the researcher in gathering data. Design was emergent and the researcher focused on the process as well as understanding the data. The questions included in this study were:

1. What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experiences with teaching leadership to children?
2. How are adult leadership skills applied to children?
3. Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?

### **Design and Methods**

The primary data collection method for this study was through a case study analysis of interviews, observations, and data gathering. A qualitative study design was implemented because the research was gathered through interviews in an attempt to analyze individual beliefs and perceptions. Furthermore, this study was humanistic and interactive, had emergent data, and was fundamentally interpretive, all of which made up the characteristics of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A qualitative, case study method was also chosen since this study tried to gain more information pertaining to the virtually unknown phenomenon of students' development of leadership. As a broad definition, one uses qualitative research in order to get findings that could not be derived from quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study was an understanding of leadership experiences so interviewing was the best method that would



obtain the desired information and to allow for a complete understanding of participants' perceptions.

Interview guides were developed by the researcher as a tool to provide structure, but still allow for dialogue aimed at discovering more information with regards to the study's research questions. Each interview was recorded for record keeping and analysis purposes. After conducting the interviews and concluding the document review, the researcher began an inductive data analysis that assigned codes to similar categories and patterns in order to find relationships and interpret the data.

This study used description and interviews to reach an understanding about children and leadership. Results will be shared with elementary school administrators and other people interested in defining best practices and furthering the research associated with teaching young children leadership skills. At this time, the majority of elementary schools in the nation are not teaching any leadership skills and this study has the capability to raise the public awareness of the potential benefits behind teaching children to become leaders.

### **Synopsis of Findings**

The study findings were categorized under the research questions, and examined the three areas of perceptions and experiences of teaching leadership to children, the applicability of adult skills to children, and behavioral evidence of transformational leadership. The teacher and parent interview participants showed two perceptions of *The Leader in Me*, that it was being used as a behavior management program and also as a higher level of personal improvement through making leaders. The teachers found that

they were teaching the program through utilizing four categories: direct instruction, informal instruction, curriculum materials, and practice. The overall perceptions attributed to the leadership instruction were that the children learned the 7 Habits, used them at home, and integrated leadership into their lives. The program implementation accentuated the children's strengths while helping to improve upon any weaknesses.

The adult leadership skills of the 7 Habits were being taught to children with age-appropriate strategies that illustrated the concepts. The participants said the program taught skills that were beneficial to children, by instructing them at their developmental level. The participants' perceptions were that the children could be taught leadership skills, regardless of their age, if developmentally appropriate because they have the cognitive ability to learn. The habits were integrated into the curriculum, modeled, practiced, and taught throughout the school day. Participants stated that the children could say the 7 Habits, give examples, and choose to use them in their personal lives.

The interview data showed that students exhibited behavioral evidence of transformational leadership and the 4 I's of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The children showed behavior traits that were both internal factors and external actions. *The Leader in Me* vocabulary overlapped with traits of transformational leadership, so the outcomes were similar in that the program's goal was to show transformational leadership.

Overall, the participants said the program showed positive gains in students' leadership behaviors. It also affected the school culture and caused them to identify as a leadership school. The researcher examined student reading and math standardized

achievement scores from the past six years, with the last two including *The Leader in Me*. There was no discernable impact of the leadership instruction on student achievement.

### **Summary of Dissertation Chapters**

The five chapters of this doctoral dissertation consist of the overview, literature study, research, and discussion pertaining to the chosen topic of understanding children and leadership. Chapter 1 offered an introduction to the study and an overview of the remaining chapters. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 discussed and summarized all of the studies pertaining to leadership. In order to understand the theories implicit in teaching students leadership skills, the literature section began by investigating the history of leadership and defined related concepts. It also included the historical significance of both the field of leadership and how those skills began being applied to children. After building a foundation through summarizing leadership, the literature review examined the theory behind teaching leadership to students. Finally, the review focused on how students learned leadership skills, and explored the program *The Leader in Me* that was teaching leadership skills within schools. Chapter 3 outlined the methodology involved in the qualitative study. Chapter 4 summarized and analyzed the results of the study in a clear manner that was conducive to presenting the facts. Interpretations of the findings were included in Chapter 5 along with implications and limitations of the results.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Understanding the Basics of Leadership**

People have defined leadership in many different ways. It is a problematic word to define because it has varying connotations to a wide variety of people. Daft (2005) noted that, “leadership has been a topic of interest to historians and philosophers since ancient times, but scientific studies began only in the twentieth century” (p. 4). The difficulty arose because leadership is an elusive idea, often involving the way a person philosophizes about life, or rationalizes events from his or her experience. Boseman stated, “the term ‘leadership’ is used in such a common fashion today that we take for granted that we all have about the same definition for it” (2008, p. 36). But he continued to point out that we are taking for granted something that is amiss because, in fact, we do not all have the same definition of leadership. Scholars have identified over 350 definitions of the word leadership, and it has been called one of the most watched but least understood occurrences in humanity (Daft, 2005).

Karmel (1978) stated that the ambiguity surrounding leadership was a consequence of it not being a single concept but a collection of concepts under the theme of “behavior that makes a difference” (p. 476). This general theme is not adequate as an operational definition of leadership, however it has provided some necessary boundaries. Analysis of the researcher’s intent, or the purpose of the research, highlights one dilemma

in defining leadership because conceptualization of leadership involves the purpose for which it is being considered. There are also varied denotations of the word leader, and some people would easily substitute “manager,” “controller,” or “influential figure” for “leader.” The research done in the field of leadership has been nebulous in its attempts to have a cohesive definition and understanding of leadership. Nevertheless, “this very ambiguity provides conceptual space to evolve a more fully developed understanding of leadership” (Karmel, p. 480). In order to understand leadership and rectify any assumptions within the ambiguity, we need to comprehend the possible definitions and theories that are the most prevalent throughout leadership research history.

### **Early Leadership Conceptions**

Early leadership definitions centered around one person, or the leader, and the followers that he or she was in charge of motivating. Bass’s (1990) research is viewed as an authoritative source on the definition of leadership. He defined early leadership as an interaction between group members that modified the motivation or competencies of other people in the group. Maccoby’s (2007) definition concurred, and stated that a leader is defined as someone people follow within a certain contextual situation. Thus, it was deemed imperative to have the interaction between a leader and his or her followers before leadership could take place.

### **Altruistic Leadership Conceptions**

A second definition of leadership involved fulfilling the needs of followers so that the group could reach a mutually desired goal. This is commonly referred to in literature as working towards the greater good or finding a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1997).

Winston Churchill was famous for defining leadership in this manner, as the ability to set aside personal ambitions and look towards a common good (Boseman, 2008). In addition, Churchill encouraged leaders to strive for greatness to reach the highest level of success. Gardner (1990) earlier defined leadership as the process by which a leader or group pursued objectives held by the leader and followers. More recently, Rosenbach (2003) also defined leadership as a process of working together in a reciprocal influence to achieve a shared goal.

### **Shared Purpose Leadership Conceptions**

A third definition of leadership is a combination of the previous two that interconnects both leaders and followers with working towards a shared purpose. Tannenbaum and Massarik (1957) defined leadership as, “interpersonal influence, exercised in situation and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals” (p. 3). It is this third definition that is the most commonly accepted today. An effective leader is one who can inspire others, relate well, and handle group dynamics (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). In addition, an effective leader must be able to lead a group through the problem solving process in order to achieve goals (Feldhusen & Pleiss, 1994). In summary, leadership is an influential relationship between followers and leaders involving a shared interest in bringing about change that is relevant to the purpose they are seeking (Daft, 2005).

### **Working Definition of Leadership**

There are numerous definitions of leadership, and one can begin to see commonalities. The evident cohesion within the definitions focuses on an individual or

group, usually defined as leader(s), having an influence on someone, usually labeled follower(s). Leadership is fundamentally attributed to the influential process that takes place when people work together to achieve some common goals. An implication included in these definitions also assumes that leadership is a process, and if it takes place in a collaborative context there is still leadership. The definition of leadership chosen for the purpose of this dissertation was defined by Daft (2005) as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (p. 5).

### **Key Leadership Theories**

Daft’s (2005) definition of leadership provides a context within which to begin understanding the broader facets of the major theories of leadership within the literature. There are thousands of traits that have been associated with acting like a leader (Elmuti, Minnis, & Abebe, 2005). It would be problematic to list all of the associated traits, but they include common virtues such as vision, honesty, commitment, integrity, and motivation. Instead of focusing on stand-alone traits, examining the types of leadership and the skills associated with each type yields a broader understanding. When determining the evolution of leadership, there are five distinct theories that delineate the fundamental characteristics of an effective leader. The theories are trait-based, situational, behavioral, transactional, and transformational leadership.

**Trait-based leadership theory.** At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the common belief was that leadership only existed within a few individuals and that one had to possess certain traits to be viewed as a leader (Owen, 2007). The original conception

of leadership involved the theory of traits, or that leaders had these universal, fixed traits that were propelling them towards achievement (Karnes & Bean, 1996; Sternberg, 2004). Leadership effectiveness could be described by understanding the physical and psychological characteristics that differentiated the leader. Trait theory of leadership included three major areas that determined if a leader was successful: motivation, personality, and ability (Bass, 1990).

The “great man theory,” advocated by Galton around 1869, was the earliest representation of trait leadership theory (Karnes & Bean, 1996). Often called the “granddaddy of leadership concepts” (Daft, 2005, p. 23), this theory proposed that a single great man would have natural, heroic leadership traits, and would influence others to follow. Other early researchers suggested that leaders would emerge depending on the particularities of time, place, and circumstances (Karnes & Bean, 1996). Some researchers viewed the trait-based theory as sterile and unreliable because leaders do not function in isolation, and other contexts needed to be taken into consideration, so the emphasis began to move away from examining a leader as a sole entity (Tannenbaum & Massarik, 1957). Boseman (2008) typified a recent perspective on trait theory when he commented, “over the past decades, researchers focused on defining the personal traits of effective leaders but ultimately concluded that it is not so much the traits as it is how individuals utilize these traits” (p. 36).

**Situational leadership theory.** The trait theory approach developed into a set of ideas called situational leadership theory, which further linked leaders’ behaviors and outcomes. Situational leadership theory proposed that the effectiveness of a leader



entailed possessing the leadership characteristics and using them within the demands of the circumstances (Karnes & Bean, 1996). The body of research on situational leadership attempted to find common elements between the circumstances that a leader would encounter (Tannenbaum & Massarik, 1957). A situation is defined as “those aspects of the objective context which, at any given moment, have an attitudinal or behavioral impact...on the individuals in the influence relationship” (p. 5). The qualities and skills of a leader would be dependent upon the particular situations in which he or she needed to function because the environment would always be a factor.

**Behavioral leadership theory.** Behavioral leadership theory began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Frederick Taylor Winslow’s support of scientific management, which was supposed to increase productivity in the industrial factories (Maccoby, 2007). Winslow proposed the best way to shovel ore, and also declared that the engineer should develop job descriptions so workers could follow their duties without any deviations in order to increase productivity. From 1924 to 1932, some landmark studies were conducted by May and Roethlisberger of Harvard at The Western Electric Hawthorne Factory. The studies were supposed to find the best way to make managers more effective leaders. An enduring concept that emerged from the studies recommended that managers should increase their human relations skills in order to improve leader and worker relations. These two ideas, that a manager or leader should tell followers how to act but also include some feelings-based interactions were the precursors to the thinking behind current day behavioral leadership studies.

Another researcher and prominent psychologist, B. F. Skinner, thought that all behavior could be defined as a reaction to environmental stimuli (Sternberg, 2004). He applied his theory to all forms of phenomena including language acquisition, problem solving, and other skills taught in education. Researchers elaborated on Winslow, May, Roethlisberger, and Skinner's theories in the mid-twentieth century and concluded that leadership involved goal and productivity behaviors, and that these behaviors focused on people and relationships (Sternberg, 2004).

**Transactional leadership theory.** More recently, the 1980s and 1990s saw a focus on transactional and transformational leadership theories (Daft, 2005). These two theories have many similarities, but the major difference lies in the way that the leader is thought to motivate others. To begin with, transactional leaders were believed to motivate through task behavior, which was focused on directives and management (Karnes & Bean, 1996; Boseman, 2008). Transactional leaders also favored systems of rewards or negative feedback that only allowed for one-way communication (Bass, 1990). The transaction was the exchange between the leader and the follower for rewards in payment because of good performance. According to some authors (for example, Bass, 1990; Sternberg, 2004; Boseman, 2008) Burns and Bass are often called the fathers of transactional leadership concepts, and they have said that rewarding followers for good performance and taking corrective measures when necessary are effective leadership behaviors. Bass's (1990) studies found that leaders who engaged in transactional behaviors fostered positive attitudes and actions in employees. Quite comparable with the process that takes place in formal education, the followers saw correlations between

correctness and rewards. However, it is important to note that there is the possibility the follower may only deliver behavior that is expected and being rewarded, without making any attempts to do more (Boseman, 2008). Bass (1990) stated that an effective transactional leader must have well-formed cognitive, technical, and interpersonal skills.

**Transformational leadership theory.** In contrast to the transactional leader, transformational leaders have been found to concentrate on building relationships and facilitating interaction filled with two-way communication and decision-making (Boseman, 2008). These behaviors inspire above and beyond expectations by creating a shared vision and encouraging new, out-of-the-box ways of thinking (Karnes & Bean, 1996). Transformational leaders are role models who not only provide a clear vision and mission, but also typically share power and teach others how to help find success (Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership presumes the leader possesses cognitive, conceptual, and interpersonal skills (Elmuti et al., 2005). There is a focus on finding common ground to build vision, shared values, and ideas in order to facilitate the change process (Daft, 2005). Thus, transformational leadership is a combination of moral proclivities and actions centered on achieving transformational changes in society (Owen, 2007). Brown and Posner (2001) see this as being “morally purposeful and elevating, which means...leaders can...move constituents to heightened degrees of consciousness” (p. 275). Most importantly, the transformational leader is able to envision a future, motivate the people involved, and communicate that working towards the common purpose is worth the great amount of effort involved (Daft, 2005).

Today, according to Owen (2007) transformational leadership has evolved to include a focus on sharing leadership and power in order to get everyone involved working toward the shared vision. This emphasis on building a shared outlook and power base shows how leadership theory has emerged from the traditional into a new hybrid definition of transforming the organization, elevating the vision, and working toward a new future. Owen (2007) stated, “transformational leaders identify their own values and those of people in the organization to guide their actions, thus developing a shared conscious way of behaving and acting” (p. 14). Current thought about leadership has been undergoing a transformation itself as the world enters into a paradigm shift. The turbulent aspect of our world has translated into new concepts of what it entails to be a leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, transformational leaders are expected to show an ability to facilitate change and to help people adapt in order to keep pace with our environment (Daft, 2005). In summary, the new transformational leader works with other people to create a shared vision in order to build organizations and groups that have a cohesive purpose and directional goals.

### **Transformational Leadership as the Current Theory**

After examining the five leadership theories of trait-based, situational, behavioral, transactional, and transformational, one could see how the emphasis has shifted slightly over time, so that now the prevalent thought is to focus upon transformational leadership. Leadership theory is always changing and adapting to current issues and focus areas within the field. For the purpose of this dissertation, transformational leadership theory will serve as the working definition for the theoretical foundation of the paper.

**Four I's of transformational leadership.** Studies have shown that transformational leadership consists of four main tenants, or methods, which leaders use to achieve their goals (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Humphrey, 2014). Transformational leaders use the four methods of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to motivate people towards a collective vision (Humphrey, 2014, p. 406). Idealized influence is defined as when a person behaves in a manner that serves as a role model for others. The second I, inspirational motivation, involves being inspirational through adding meaning and challenge to any work that must happen (Humphrey, 2014). Intellectual stimulation is a method of transformational leadership that uses innovation and creativity to examine ideas or problems from a new angle or insight (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The last I, individualized consideration, encourages leaders to act in a coaching or mentoring manner. These I's are behaviors that would be seen when one is showing transformational leadership.

### **Correlation Between Leadership and Learning**

When examining the question of how one learns, scholars over the last three decades have supported transformational learning as a theory that built upon previous research into adult learning. Mezirow (1994) defined it as, “the process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action” (pp. 222-223). Transformational learning is fundamentally about change, either in the way that people see themselves or the world (Brown & Posner, 2001). “Transformational learning shapes people, they are different afterwards in ways both they

and others can recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47). Thus, transformational learning is a necessary step to becoming a transformational leader.

### **How Adults Learn to Lead**

Kouzes and Posner (1997) examined thousands of case studies in order to understand more in-depth about how people learn to lead. They found three commonalities: trial and error, making observations, and education. Further research by Zemke (1985), and The Center for Creative Leadership (McCall, Lomardo & Morrison, 1988; Dalton, 1999) illustrated the importance of learning in leadership.

To add to the existing research on leadership and learning, Brown and Posner (2001) conducted a study to elaborate on the 1995 Kouzes and Posner data. The study had 312 respondents: group one were managers enrolled in a university management program, group two were working professionals also attending an evening MBA course, and group three were managers enrolled in an executive MBA program.

Respondents took both the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 1988), and the Learning Tactics Inventory (LTI) (Dalton, 1999). The first measurement, the LPI, reported the frequency that the respondents demonstrated characteristics in a set of 30 leadership behaviors, measured using a 10-point Likert scale. The test produced five categories: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. For this part of the study, the Cronbach’s alpha scores varied between .66 and .84. The LTI had a 32-item set of statements “intended to assess how people report learning when faced with the challenge of an unfamiliar task or experience” (p. 276). Each statement was measured on

a 5-point Likert scale and answers revealed four tactics for learning: action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others. The Cronbach's alpha for this measurement ranged between .62 and .70.

Brown and Posner's (2001) study results found that the learning tactics being assessed were correlated significantly with the leadership indices ( $r = 0.33, p < 0.001$ ). The strongest correlations were between leadership and learning via thinking, and the weakest correlation was between leadership and accessing others. Brown and Posner felt the results of their study analysis "gives strong support to the argument that learning is subsequently related to leadership" (p. 277). In discussing study implications, the authors said, "the effective development of future leaders will require leveraging adult learning principles as well as creating the conditions that foster transformational learning" (p. 279).

### **Leadership as Applied to Children**

An underpinning assumption in the leadership genre is that people are born knowing how to be a leader. Some people do seem to be born with natural talents and are predisposed to lead; yet researchers have said that leadership can be developed (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Rosenbach, 2003). Although researchers, for the most part, have decided that leadership is both a skill and an innate behavior set, they are still debating how it could be successfully taught. An accepted postulate is that people have the ability to learn, grow, and therefore change, which can show an increase in effectiveness (Elmuti et al., 2005). Thus, all adolescents and perhaps younger children may have the potential to become leaders. In a study conducted by Owen (2007), when teachers were asked if

leadership is a quality one is born with, learns, or a combination, 85.6% of respondents saw an amalgamation of innate qualities and teaching. Only 3.3% thought that children were predisposed to be leaders.

Landau and Weissler (2001) conducted a study to see if the phenomenon of leadership as it manifested in adults would exist among children. They performed the study at the Young Persons' Institute for the Promotion of Art and Science of the Tel Aviv University Technical College in Israel, which had run an enrichment program for gifted children, aged 5 through 15, for 20 years. The subjects who participated in the study were 63 gifted students enrolled at the Young Persons' Institute, aged 10 through 14, who were given a leadership questionnaire formulated from both reviewing literature and previous interviews with gifted leaders. Twenty-five of those students participated in the center's leadership courses and were given the questionnaire prior to beginning classes and again after completion of the program. In addition, their teachers scored those 25 students on leadership ability. When Landau and Weissler examined the data from the 25 students, a statistically significant correlation of .33 was found between the leadership scores on the questionnaire and those scores given by the teacher. The findings of the study indicated a confirmation of the hypothesis that "leadership characteristics appear at a very early age in a form similar to that evidenced among adults" (p. 686). Even though these results were statistically significant, Landau and Weissler acknowledged the low correlation and accounted for a possible lower correlation due to inconsistency in children's behavior.



Even infants as young as 6 months have shown the ability to demonstrate leadership when engaged in play with other children the same age (Hillman & Smith, 1981). As children get older, other studies have shown that preschoolers possess leadership tendencies (Stone & Church, 1973). At this age, children typically demonstrated behaviors associated with two kinds of leaders, a bully or a diplomat (Thompson, 1962). The bully preschooler in the Thompson study used physical presence or force to coerce others into doing what he or she wanted. In contrast, the diplomat tried to use words and rational persuasion when leading other children. When the preschoolers were asked which leadership style they preferred the majority indicated a preference for the diplomat.

A study done by Jack (1934) found that preschoolers could even be taught leadership skills and then show ownership of the new knowledge. Eighteen 4-year-old children were grouped into high, middle, and low categories based upon their ascendancy scores, or the amount of position or power they showed over the other students. The scores were resultant from the preschooler's attempts to further his or her own interests and needs and also how frequently they tried to direct or change other students' behavior. In addition, Jack took into account whether the child's attempts were successful, and if he or she was able to convince others to follow this new pattern of behavior. During the study, Jack took five preschoolers from the low group and familiarized them with materials to be utilized later on in the training session, making sure they gained the skills and knowledge necessary to be comfortable using the materials. When these children were paired with the other children in the study while using the training materials, 4 out

of 5 in the low group increased their ascendancy scores. They also scored higher than a control group of same-age children showing no ascendancy tendency. Jack's study showed that even 4-year-olds could exemplify the ability to gain knowledge and change behavior when taught leadership skills.

Merei (1973) studied Hungarian elementary school students and observed them demonstrating behaviors related to following or giving orders, imitation, group play, attacking, crying, or telling on each other. The children who scored an average rating on these mannerisms were then put into experimental groups for 30 to 40 minutes a day. One child from each group was found to change from an average leader to a high leader. The researchers noted an increase in the child's frequency of giving orders and being imitated by the other children. Merai's study indicated that a young child could show leadership influence even though they were in early stages developmentally.

The above group of studies may be counterintuitive to some who still view leadership as a skill-set or way of acting that is associated with adults only. However, the literature showed that children could be born with latent leadership abilities. In the absence of studies tracking a person from infancy through adulthood and measuring his or her leadership abilities, the literature has shown that a progression is possible when applying the same standards of understanding adult leadership to those of children. Leadership could be taught, even to preschoolers or younger children than previously imagined because, regardless of age, they too have shown the aptitude for transformational learning. The next section will address the question of whether this

application could be successful due to children's widely varying developmental and cognitive growth.

### **Childhood Cognitive Development**

After cognitive development had been studied for almost a century, Flavell (1992) explained that developmental psychologists concluded that the phenomenon is complex and multifaceted, but especially so when being applied to children. Between birth and adulthood, children experience diverse and extensive cognitive growth. Piaget (1964) explained that the development of knowledge was tied to the expansion of the nervous system and mental functions, two processes that continue growing until reaching adulthood. A theory popular in the past alleged that children were like blank slates and would copy whatever they encountered in their environment.

Flavell (1992) explained why some psychologists disagreed with this theory when he said:

The cognitive structures and processing strategies available to them at that point in their development lead them to select from the input what is meaningful to them and to represent and transform what is selected in accordance with their cognitive structures. (p. 998)

Thus, as Piaget originally purported, recent cognitive research has found that children's brain structures are using both what they notice in the environment and assimilating that knowledge in order to construct their own development. Research that will be discussed further along in this chapter, using newer methods, found infants and young children to be more competent in their cognitive abilities than was earlier suggested.

**Stages of cognitive development.** Some developmental psychologists have said that although cognitive growth may not adhere strictly to stages of development, there are regular increases with age through some general stage-like capacities (Flavell, 1992). Piaget's third and fourth stages would be those applicable to teaching young students leadership skills because they involved concrete operations usually learned in elementary school. For example, ordering and constructing a numerical sense would occur in the third stage, and by the time a child has progressed into the fourth stage, one would see an ability to take the knowledge and use deductive operations and more complex thinking. Piaget used the following factors to describe the intricate transition one makes while developing through the stages: maturation, experience, social transmission, and equilibration. In the beginning, the child would need to be mature enough in his or her development to understand the leadership curriculum, and then go through the experience of what is being taught and practiced. This experience would need to take place within a supportive, social environment that would lead to the child having the ability to self-regulate the knowledge or actions that have been taught.

Others have explained this progression through cognitive development as moving away from associating it with steps in a ladder, and understanding that the brain may change in patterns that can resemble cycles (Fischer & Rose, 1998). "A useful metaphor for some of the dynamic properties is a developmental web, with thinking and learning changing in parallel along multiple strands or domain" (p. 56). In his earlier work, Fischer (1980) explained that the technical term for this developmental web is skill theory, which attempted to explain the psychological transformation of cognition and

intelligence. This journey from cognition to intelligence illustrated the development that occurs when one travels from infancy through child to adulthood. Fischer said skill theory would be applicable to the explanation of learning because it “characterize[d] the general information-processing system of human beings” (p. 521). His skill theory was useful in supporting the proposition that children could show developmental changes through the cognitive sequences of gaining leadership skills. “Skills of thought hierarchically incorporate the skills of action that they have developed from” (Fischer, 1980, p. 523) thus allowing a student to learn leadership ideas and translate those into behavior patterns.

**Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive development.** Vygotsky, a prominent theorist, also analyzed the fundamental nature of cognitive development in his extensive research. His large body of works supported that cognitive development is not a linear process, but according to Gredler (2009) consisted of a series of transformational thinking. Vygotsky embraced the idea that the young mind progressively develops cognitive tools that would improve intellect, which would eventually lead to higher levels of thinking. He said the apex of development is the mastery of stimuli in order to achieve a cognitive function that would not have been possible previously (1994). School-aged children begin with developing the capability to master internal cognitive thinking through regulating external stimuli, which also allows for the child’s verbal thinking to develop and build a bridge between concrete and abstract thinking. In accordance with the developmental stages children undergo, Vygotsky said the highest level of mastery was the ability to develop and subsequently utilize a system for conceptual thinking. Mastering one’s

thinking included the individual going through a lengthy period of development, which continues into adolescence and transforms mental capacity to a higher functioning ability. Applying this Vygotskian perspective to leadership development is valid since the skills being taught to a young student would help the learner think and develop some internal transformations. Vygotsky summarized “any new step...in development of the content of thinking, is also inextricably linked with the acquisition of new mechanisms of behavior and with the raising of intellectual operations to a higher stage” (1994, p. 193).

**Maslow’s theory of development.** Maslow’s (1971) theory of development also supported the theories behind childhood cognitive development. It stated that humans have a hierarchy of needs that begins with the lowest levels of survival and safety, and progresses through the top, which are aesthetics and self-actualization. Self-actualization is the highest level of fulfillment in Maslow’s pyramid, representing the realization of one’s full potential. When the lower level needs of physiological/survival, safety, self-esteem, and belonging or love are fulfilled the person’s desire to satisfy these needs is sated. The higher level needs of knowing and understanding, aesthetics, and self-actualization will not ever truly be fulfilled because people will usually strive for greater success in these areas once they reach a basic level of attainment. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) summarized Maslow’s points by saying “therefore, the more success people achieve in their search for knowledge and understanding, the more likely they are to strive for even greater knowledge and understanding” (p. 27). Relating Maslow’s pyramid to leadership involved understanding transformational leadership theory. This kind of leadership would elevate followers from focusing on the lower level needs to

those higher needs inherent in personal growth development. Daft noted “therefore, the leaders sets examples and assigns tasks not only to meet immediate needs but also to elevate followers’ needs and abilities to a higher level and link them to the organization’s mission” (Daft, 2005, p. 154).

In a study reported by Karnes et al. (1993), 95 students in grades 6 through 12 took the *Leadership Skills Inventory and Reflections of Self by Youth* (Schatz & Buckmaster, 1984) in order to see if there were correlations between leadership skills and self-actualization concepts. The students were enrolled in a residential leadership program and took the inventory as a pretest and posttest. The leadership skills being evaluated on the instrument were: fundamentals of leadership, written communication skills, speech communication skills, values clarification, decision making, group dynamic skills, problem solving, personal skills, and planning ability. Once the test was given, the researchers found significant Pearson correlations (.78-.93) between the leadership skills and the students’ self-actualization.

### **Cognitive Developmental Appropriateness for Leadership**

The above literature builds a rationale for associating children’s cognitive development with the possibility of gaining skills in leadership. The period between infancy and adulthood sees extensive cognitive growth, but also corresponds with an entire lifetime of knowledge attainment. Piaget’s theory supports that children’s brain structures would have the capacity to learn leadership instruction and assimilate the knowledge into their development. Fischer’s (1980) skill development theory concurred that young children would have the capacity to take learning and translate it into

behavior. Also, children's minds have the capacity of using the intellectual cognitive tools that lead to higher levels of thinking, according to Vygotsky's theory. Maslow asserted that humans would always strive for more knowledge and greater success, which aligns with transformational leadership's purpose for a greater good. In conclusion, the literature sustained the association of the emergence of the possibility of leadership with a growth in complexity of children's cognitive processes.

### **Instruction Affecting Cognitive Development**

Lawson and Wollman (1976) conducted a study with 32 fifth-grade students and 32 seventh-grade students to determine if instructional procedures could facilitate a shift in students' thinking from concrete to a more formal level of operation. Each group was divided into experimental and control groups, and then given instructions and tasks to complete across four sessions. Pretest and posttest data indicated that instruction supported a transition from concrete to formal cognitive functioning in the students. Lawson and Wollman deduced from their experiment that formal cognitive operation could develop in the concrete stage, from ages 6 to 7 years old.

In order for children to be successful in the fundamental process of intellectual growth, they must be exposed to a variety of experiences involving conceptualization and useful activities. As an implication for curriculum, Lawson and Wollman (1976) suggested, "what seems called for is a very gradual introduction and continued reintroductions of lessons involving concrete materials and activities which enable students to make comparisons and to make judgments on the basis of their comparisons" (p. 48). Flavell (1992) agreed that the activities and environmental settings under which



a child learned would play a critical role in cognitive development. Rogoff (1990) elaborated that children acquire knowledge and skills by participating in socially structured activities. They would need guided participation and instruction that was tailored to the child's current cognitive ability. Each new developmental level would reach an optimal point, with the child being able to have a complex skill or understanding. They could usually only reach this level with contextual support, such as that given by a teacher (Fischer & Rose, 1998).

### **Leadership Developmental Stages**

Emerging from their research on adolescents and leadership development, Van Linden and Fertman (1998) proposed three stages in the attainment of leadership skills. The three stages they proposed were awareness, interaction, and mastery, with each stage supporting a group of behaviors and progressing towards a higher level of capability. They proposed that the first stage a child went through involved thinking that leadership was optional for his or her life. Children in this stage could benefit from a basic introduction to leadership and learning about leaders so that they could formulate an understanding about what leadership entails. Ideally, Van Linden and Fertman suggested, this stage would include an emphasis on transformational leadership and getting the student to build his or her own definition, quite apart from fulfilling societal traditions or even parental expectations. They proposed that the crucial learning during stage one was to assist the child to recognize his or her leadership potential, thereby providing a successful foundation for the next developmental stage.

Stage two, Van Linden and Fertman (1998) suggested, involved students learning how to take leadership ideas or theories and convert them into actions. Teaching students to do this would be necessary because, in Van Linden and Fertman's understanding, there is a gap between what the students know and what they still need to learn in order to show leadership ability. Van Linden and Fertman were careful to point out that students in stage two still need adults to provide support and guidance. They also stated that the assistance of adults could help alleviate any anxiety students may have about developing their leadership skills. They anticipated that once students possessed a sense of what it means to act like a leader in the context of adult support, their inherent expertise would enable them to advance to the third stage of leadership development.

Stage three was akin to Maslow's self-actualization because it involved using one's knowledge to work towards a personal vision. For the adolescents Van Linden and Fertman (1998) studied, children aged 10 through 19, they defined stage three as using leadership abilities to create new energy and interests in their lives. Since the first stage taught the basics and the second offered guided practice, the final stage included incorporating knowledge into behavior. In stage three, students would begin to realize their leadership potential and show emergent leadership ability.

A study done by Conger and Benjamin (1999) concurred that leadership development needs to take place over time and include a large amount of exposure. They compared leadership development to the gestational period needed for vegetation and argued that it needs to be part of a daily life in order to come to fruition. Conger and Benjamin also recommended a paradigm shift in the way one thinks about creating a new

generation of leaders because there needs to be a new understanding. Leadership development for children should focus on the fact that it is a never-ending process that should be fine-tuned, starting in the beginning and proceeding throughout life.

### **Transformational Leadership Development**

In the absence of many empirical studies examining the development of transformational leadership in children, one can still consider the thoughts on transformational leadership and adults. Bass and Riggio discussed studies that looked at business executives who were identified as transformational leaders by their success and style of leadership (2006). When the executives were questioned about how they became leaders, the answers reflected commonalities in that they have high standards of excellence, learned from past mistakes, and wanted to make a difference in the world (location 2699). “When speaking about the most important influences in their personal leadership development, the vast majority mentions the role of one or both parents” setting superior expectations for behavior and high standards of excellence (Bass & Riggio, 2006, location 2669). Furthermore, they found that the executives’ leadership behaviors were not deemed “play” but rather that they were “an integral part of their persona, based on long-term development” (location 2699).

Bass and Riggio (2006) reaffirmed that it would be possible to both teach and learn transformational leadership, and postulated on how those behaviors could be taught (location 2750). They said it was important to ensure that people gained proficiency in areas of problem solving skills, creative thinking, interpersonal relationships, verbal acuity, diversity awareness, global perspectives and a forming a shared vision. Once the

skills are learned, the education also needs to include counseling, feedback, and guidance in order to develop self-understanding, awareness, and comprehension of leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006, location 2762). Conger and Benjamin concurred when they suggested the 4 I's of transformational leadership could be learned by focusing on the following five areas: problem solving and critical thinking, communication skills, planning for the future, empowering others, and managing impressions (1999). The leadership development should also include a person's commitment to developing his or her own capacity and personal value system. Daft (2005) proposed that leadership is both an art and a science. It involves practice, hands-on experience, personal development and learning knowledge about how to utilize leadership skills (p. 29). Although some researchers have a sense of how transformational leadership could be developed, there is a need for more research on the developmental foundations of this leadership style (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They said that it is necessary to expand our understanding of the specifics behind developing transformational leadership.

### **Student Leadership in Schools**

Formal education and schools may offer the first glimpse for many children into the world of leadership. Beginning in preschool, children start to learn about civics, prominent leaders in the world today, and those people having historical significance or accomplishments (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998). History teaches students about leaders who founded the country and made critical decisions throughout time. Science also features leaders including Curie and Einstein who made groundbreaking discoveries. Other classes within the educational culture help students form ideas about leadership,

and potentially guide them to begin developing basic abilities. Although these leadership intimations are embedded in the curriculum, leadership is not often being taught explicitly. Most likely, educators are hoping that students will learn leadership skills through participating in classroom or school-wide character education programs.

The pedagogical foundation for teaching character skills would be under the label of social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning incorporates building behavioral traits that a student will use both during school and at home (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). It is “the process through which people learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors” (Fredericks, 2003, p. 4). The label character education is often interchangeable with the term social and emotional learning, with both having similar goals of teaching values (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identified five competency goals to achieve through social and emotional learning: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, and relationship aptitude (CASEL, 2003). A survey of 600 college and university deans found that 90% of the respondents supported the necessity of having social and emotional learning, or character education in our nation’s K-12 public school systems (Cohen, 2006).

The current framework of schools promotes an emphasis on character education as the method for values instruction. The goal of character education is to build and strengthen skills that would enable children to be successful adults (Park, 2004). Another definition is to “promote a set of values and directive approaches that presumably lead to

responsible behavior” (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003, p. 2). Educators have always been interested in both conceptualizing and cultivating character strengths. Formal character education in schools began around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and continues today with a focus on acquiring desirable traits (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). While this is laudable, in order to fully appreciate character education, it must be considered in the context of moral education. The roots of character education can be traced to the origins of moral conscience and its foundation (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Carr, 2007). Piaget (1932) gave an account of moral reasoning and judgment through cognitive development. Kohlberg (1984) is known for his cognitive moral development theory and the six stages of sequenced constructions, which help develop a sense of justice. These and other theorists of moral education set the foundation for the concept of age-appropriate development of character in children.

Even though character education may be the prevalent choice for schools, some research concluded that current character education programs are often non-cohesive and lack any proof or substantial research that there is a positive correlation between behavior changes and the program (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Senge et al., 2000). In 1999, the Virginia Senate Bill 817 was passed, requiring character education to be added to the curriculum in schools (Va. Sec. 22.1-208.01). The bill focused on values of trustworthiness, citizenship, fairness, responsibility, and respect. While these are potentially valuable skills for children to possess, an intentional focus on leadership studies would provide a foundation for growth and a systematic approach to life instead of teaching only isolated skills.

Further, student leadership programs should be examined in the context of meaningful involvement in the educational process, engaging all students as stakeholders and recognizing their unique knowledge, experience, and perspective, as they contribute to the direction and development of learning for themselves and for the group (Chapman et al., 2006). Feldhusen and Kennedy (1988) said that leadership skills and theory should be taught explicitly in order to allow students to explore leadership tendencies along with understanding changes in society, thinking skills, and current world issues. Most importantly, they asserted that children needed to be given the opportunity to lead and practice in order to develop to their potential. Senge et al. (2000) took Feldhusen and Kennedy's assertion regarding the development of children's potential a step further when they proposed that instructing students in leadership studies could change the way schools function as developers of learners.

### **How Students Show Leadership Behavior**

Students would show leadership behavior in ways that are specific to their ages and the context in which they are operating. In terms of specificity and context, students' leadership behaviors are no different from the adults whose leadership behaviors they would emulate in due course. However, lest they fail to detect leadership behavior among students, observers would need to take into account the non-adult ways in which students communicate with their peers.

An especially well-known work of Karnes and Chauvin (1986) established nine skill areas that good student leaders possess. They included a fundamental understanding of leadership and skills in: communication, values, decision-making, group dynamics,

problem solving, personal conduct, planning, and other special areas. Karnes and Chauvin demonstrated that all of these skills were indeed teachable, but needed to be present in both leadership programs and in the actions of graduates of such a curriculum. The *Leadership Skills Inventory*, which is used to assess leadership ability, was developed from Karnes and Chauvin's research.

Feldhusen and Kennedy (1988) conducted a study on leadership development traits among gifted and talented youth attending a two-week summer program. The program served approximately 400 children in sixth through eleventh grades. Twenty-one teachers of the summer program were asked to complete a survey with nine open-ended questions pertaining to the leadership behaviors they observed over the course of the two weeks. The survey responses indicated that the teachers saw leadership behavior in personal, social, and ability categories. Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated noting a high ability in listening, while 71% saw the students having great decision-making skills. When asked if the students showed any growth in their leadership abilities over the two-week period, 57% said yes, 19% no, 14% were unsure, and 19% of the respondents also felt that the observation period was not sufficient.

### **Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Student Leadership**

Owen (2007) conducted a study in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales to establish how teachers thought about students and their leadership potential. The study included 190 teachers who completed a questionnaire, and interviews with 80 additional teachers. The teachers were asked how they knew if children had leadership ability, and the majority of the answers focused on students interacting with others. The



teachers deduced leadership potential from the students' interactions with peers. In addition to looking for these group dynamics clues, the teachers also looked for traits of expressing opinions, having good organizational skills, listening to others, exhibiting confidence, taking on responsibility, and acting independently. When the teachers were asked to list six characteristics that identified a child as a potential leader they chose: initiative, responsibility, respect, positive interactions, delegation, and listening.

When asked about the importance of having early exposure to leadership, most respondents indicated that it was important or very important (Owen, 2007). The next question asked respondents at what age leadership development should begin. Replies indicated that between 5 and 11 years old was the ideal time, with 20% stating 3-5, 34% stating 5-7, 31% stating 8-11, and 10% stating 12-16. The majority of the respondents, 85%, agreed that leadership education should begin taking place between ages 5 and 11, which corresponded to kindergarten through fifth grade, all of the elementary grades.

After gathering some research on how students and teachers felt about leadership, Owen and her research team (2007) conducted a pilot study in 25 primary schools in England. They began by working with the entire school staff and training them in pertinent leadership concepts. The students' parents were included in the training so they could learn how to foster skills in their children. The researchers' next step was to work with the students in each grade of the participating schools to have discussions, watch videos, do group activities, and engage in other facilitations about leadership. An example of one activity was that the students were asked to brainstorm ways to improve

their school and then make an action plan. The findings from this study indicated that the majority of the student data supported the belief that leadership could be taught.

### **Leadership Education Within Schools**

Certain areas of the United States have begun to focus on developing leadership skills in students. As one example, Victor Elementary School District in San Bernardino County, California, has built leadership retreats focused on teams of elementary school students (Bonstingl, 2006). The retreat provided a context for students to practice personal leadership, teamwork, and creative problem solving. The superintendent of the school district asserted that the leadership retreats helped students achieve at higher levels of success.

By teaching our students the tools and strategies to successfully lead their own lives, we give them the keys to succeed in every aspect of life. Their motivation for learning and personal achievement goes up, their grades and test scores improve. Students begin to look at themselves and their potential in a different way. (Bonstingl, 2006, p. 35)

A Pre-K through eighth grade school in Vermont with 850 students, of whom 35% qualify for free or reduced lunch, had been fostering students' individual leadership abilities (McKibben, 2004). Faculty formed a student leadership club that accepted all interested students who acted in accordance with the school's core values of responsibility, respect, and relationships. The leadership club focused on practicing the two skills of listening and consensus building. McKibben stated that participants understood that listening is part of a democratic underpinning, and that it helps to build

respect. In the leadership club context, consensus building included gathering input, reflecting, and facilitating reaching a consensus. McKibben reported that a seventh grader at the school summed up her new leadership knowledge by saying, “all people see themselves as leaders in their own minds. I mean that when you are alone, you know you are a leader in your own way” (p. 79).

### **What Students Understand**

There are very few research-based studies of how children develop leadership, especially when compared to the amount of studies conducted on adults and leadership. However, one study was done by Owen (2007) with students aged 5 to 11 in order to gain an understanding of what children think of leadership. The entire student population of eight primary schools in England (the exact number of children was not reported) was divided into various subgroups consisting of children aged from 5 to 9, and 10 through 11. The younger children were asked if they considered themselves to be leaders, with 90% agreeing in the 5 and 6-year-olds, and fewer agreeing in the aged 7 and 8 group. However, when the 7 and 8-year-olds were asked if they could learn to become a leader, 100% agreed. Owen noted that she felt that some of the younger children raised their hands regardless of whether they understood the question because they were eager to participate. When asked why they were leaders the most common response was, “I don’t know” (p. 38). The students were asked to identify whom they thought was a leader and the most common answers were “a soldier...the head teacher... my mum... my sister... my dad... my friend... my teacher... the Queen... my best friend... a sports captain... a boss...best friends” (pp. 38-39). The younger children were also asked what makes a

leader and they responded with answers such as: “being good, not being bossy, doing everything right, helping others, being polite, sharing, and giving people food and money” (p. 39).

In Owen’s research, the older children ranged from 60% to 100% feeling as though they were not leaders, depending upon the school (2007). When they were asked to elaborate on why they did not feel like leaders most of the students responded with “I don’t know” or “I’m not bossy” (p. 42). Their answers to what leaders do found the most repetitions of “help people... control people... they don’t panic... show people there’s something better... fight wars... take people somewhere good... teach you...” (p. 43). The older children also listed leaders as those influential people in their lives that held positional leadership roles such as a teacher, parents, and sports heroes.

### **Outcomes of Leadership Education for Youth**

Dr. Stephen R. Covey was an internationally acclaimed author, teacher, organizational consultant, and widely considered an authority on leadership. He was recognized in 1996 as one of *Time* magazine’s 25 most influential Americans, and authored numerous best-selling books such as *First Things First*, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (7 Habits)*. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was named one of the two most influential business books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by *Chief Executive* magazine (Lund, 2012). In 2002, *Forbes* magazine called it one of the 10 most influential management books ever written.

Covey earned a MBA, a doctorate, and cofounded FranklinCovey Company (FranklinCovey), a global professional services firm (Lund, 2012). FranklinCovey is a global consulting and training business that focuses on “leadership, customer loyalty, strategy execution, and individual effectiveness and provides these services in 147 countries” (FranklinCovey, n.d.). FranklinCovey also runs the Center for Advanced Research, which has a website where they collect and publish leadership studies, white papers, special reports, and other research.

Covey was firmly respected and lauded in the adult leadership and management skills arena, when he took his focus one step further and published a book entitled *The Leader in Me*, which applied adult leadership ideas to young children. The idea for *The Leader in Me* began around 1998 after Covey published the *7 Habits* and people said that the program could also play an important role in the field of education (Covey, p. xxi, 2008). In 1999, school principal Muriel Summers approached Covey and said she was interested in teaching the 7 Habits to her elementary-aged students. Covey’s (2008) *The Leader in Me* was the account of Summers’ path through teaching the adult-based leadership skills to the students in her elementary school, and of the subsequent programs that followed. It was the alleged success of Summers’ program that caused Covey and FranklinCovey to further focus on partnering with schools, parents, and community leaders to create more resources to help young people (Covey, 2008, p. xxiii).

Covey summarized his feelings on the applicability of adult leadership skills to children:

I feel a vested interest in the progress, well-being, and happiness of all young people. They are the society and hope of the future – *our* future – and I firmly desire that future to be in good hands. Finally, as a business executive, I want to be able to look into the eyes of today’s young people and see a vibrant coming workforce, a pool of future leaders who are well prepared for the challenges that we all know lie ahead (Covey, 2008, p. xxiv).

### **The Covey Approach**

Although lacking in previously published quantitative research or data, *The Leader in Me* (2008) highlighted schools and systems that successfully implemented the program with their students. The efforts of Covey in focusing on the leadership education of youth have been noteworthy. The remainder of this literature review focuses on the implementation of *The Leader in Me*’s concepts with children, and the literature related to this emphasis.

Covey’s *The Leader in Me* leadership program was based upon his beliefs that the 7 Habits could be taught to young children (Covey, 2008). The program was developed to begin with a three-year support by FranklinCovey to train the educational staff and teachers. After completing training, teachers would incorporate the 7 Habits into their daily lessons and instruction, while also having the habits displayed prominently around the classrooms and school. The last year would include renewal training for teachers, in order to increase positive results of the program (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The program also provided training for adults in the school neighborhood community, and access to a FranklinCovey facilitator. Researchers Fonzi and Ritchie said:

*The Leader in Me* is not a one shot program it is a process that provides a common language for staff and students at all grade levels, expects teachers to create and teach daily lessons informed by the habits, and is supported through displays on the school walls and conversations in the classrooms. (2011, p. 4)

*The Leader in Me* was based on three fundamental beliefs, with the first being that all individuals have the capacity to lead and become leaders (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). Covey believed that leadership is a choice that everyone can make in order to strive towards his or her greatest potential. Leadership was not viewed as a position or title, but rather as an integral day-to-day way of acting. The second fundamental belief of the program was that it would be applicable to any child regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, disability, etc. (Covey, 2008; Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The last belief, focused on supporting a new paradigm of leadership that would travel from the school out into the community (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The program would cause a student to recognize his or her potential and self-worth, which in turn would positively impact the school culture and then eventually inspire the community (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011, p. 4). As part of the program, schools purchase *The Leader in Me* from FranklinCovey Education. The purchase includes professional development implemented by FranklinCovey trained facilitators, participant materials including *The Leader in Me* and the *7 Habits* books, materials for use by teachers and schools, and access to a teacher social media network (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011).

***The Leader in Me and the 7 Habits.*** Due to the focus on *The Leader in Me*, it is relevant to understand the vocabulary associated with Covey's program. The following

definitions are the tenets being taught that are based upon the original 7 Habits but given a child-friendly explanation (Covey, 2008, pp. 21-22). The complete definitions are available in Appendix A.

Habit 1: Be Proactive. Be a responsible person who is in charge of his or her actions, choices, and life.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind. Always make a plan and focus on the steps to reach the end result.

Habit 3: Put First Things First. Prioritize, have discipline, and spend time on the important matters.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win. Consider what you want, and also what others may want. Look for a compromise when possible.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood. Listen to others without interrupting and see things through their viewpoint.

Habit 6: Synergize. Team up with others to work together while utilizing everyone's strengths.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw. Make sure that you take care of yourself and look at any situation as an opportunity for learning.

Covey claimed the program focused on bringing transformational results in the areas of student achievement, discipline, and student teacher engagement (2008). An additional result was that children gained 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that helped them become successful adults (FranklinCovey, 2011). Further support of the habits would “lead to a transformation of a school’s content and culture which will result in students developing



skills such as leadership, accountability, adaptability and problem solving, the 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies that are essential for students to become successful” (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011, p. 4). Overall, Covey summarized his program as filling a need to create a “well rounded student who knows their strengths” (2008, p. 4).

### ***The Leader in Me* and Transformational Leadership**

Students as transformational leaders are role models who encourage a vision and use shared values to facilitate positive changes. The main theories of the *The Leader in Me* program show many overlaps with the basics of transformational leadership. What scholars would perhaps label as transformational leadership, Covey (2008) called primary greatness (p. 9). He said:

Primary greatness has to do with a person’s integrity, work ethic, treatment of others, motives, and level of initiative. It also has to do with a person’s character, contributions, talents, creativity, and discipline...Primary greatness is measured not by comparisons with other people, but by adherence to timeless, universal principles. (Covey, 2008, p. 9)

These universal principles are foundations of leadership that have been present throughout leadership studies, and can be understood with an in-depth study of Covey’s 7 Habits.

*The Leader in Me*’s first three habits, Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, and Put First Things First, all promote independence, focus on learning basic leadership skills, and utilize self-leadership. Self-leadership is defined as a process where a leader is finding the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to the job that needs completion

(Neck & Houghton, 2006). The leaders need to have their focus and attention directed towards the goals or shared vision that has been chosen, and ensure that they remain committed and avoid any possible distractions (Humphrey, 2014). Self-leadership also involves tasks such as regulation, self-observation, goal setting, self-rewards, practice, feedback, learning your own strengths and weaknesses, and constructive thought patterning (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Humphrey, 2014). Covey's first three habits involved learning basic leadership skills within the foundation of self-leadership. Covey (2008) explained:

When put into practice these three habits enable a person to be more responsible, to take more control of their life, to map out their future, to establish priorities, and to execute a plan by staying disciplined and focused. (p. 46)

The fourth, fifth, and sixth habits return the focus to transformational leadership within the framework of collaboration, or shared leadership. The habits, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood, and Synergize all include a focus on working well with others, conflict resolution, creativity, listening skills and an overall emphasis on teamwork. The seventh habit, Sharpen the Saw, is Covey's way of reminding leaders to slow down and focus on yourself and the renewal process that bodies need, while maintaining a balance in the areas of physical, social-emotional, and spiritual. In summary, the first three habits help a leader learn the basics about his or herself as the prerequisite for the transformational leadership process of facilitating a change or that happens when using the following four habits. Taken together as a theory, the 7 Habits and *The Leader in Me* develop the self-leadership behaviors necessary to

engage in the shared-leadership process that causes transformational leaders to work towards making a change.

Table 1 is a three-way comparison of the 7 Habits, *The Leader in Me*, and transformational leadership. Column one shows Covey's 7 Habits, and column two takes each habit and lists some characteristics of what the students would exhibit after being exposed to the *The Leader in Me* program (Covey, 2008, pp. 47-48, p. 213). Covey reiterated that he did not invent the habits, but took basic leadership skills and organized them into a logical manner, after conducting extensive interview research with effective people and also studying the literature on leadership (2008). He said, "They are based on timeless, universal principles that have been around for ages, and that transcend all cultural boundaries and socioeconomic layers" (p. 47). The third column shows characteristics from transformational leadership that appeared the most frequently across examination of the relevant literature (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Daft, 2005; Humphrey, 2014). Also listed, are the categories of the 4 I's of transformational leadership that correspond with the 7 Habits and desired traits. Some of the 7 Habits are similar to the 4 I's of leadership, and others utilize characteristics from across more than one of the areas of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. For the purpose of this paper, the basics of each of the 4 I's were matched with the 7 Habits to show leadership cohesiveness within the foundation of the *The Leader in Me* program.

Table 1

*Comparison of 7 Habits and Characteristics of Transformational Leadership*

7 Habits of Highly Effective People	7 Habits and <i>The Leader in Me</i> 's Goals for Students	Characteristics of Transformational Leadership
	Independence	Idealized Influence Inspirational Motivation
Habit 1: Be Proactive	Initiative, Self-motivation	Active leadership
Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind	Self-confidence	Optimistic, Empowerment
	Planning skills	Plan
Habit 3: Put First Things First	Goal setting skills	Goal congruence
	Organization	Develop organizational goals
	Have dreams and plans	Innovate, Shared vision
	Meaningful contributions	Meaningful contributions
	Focus on being your best	Inspiring, Set good example
	Do the right thing	Act in a way that builds respect
		Interdependence
Habit 4: Think Win-Win	Conflict management skills	New way of looking at things
	Communication skills	Effective communicator
Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood	Honesty and Courage	Honesty and Courage
	Fairness, Respect for others	Moral purpose, Respect
Habit 6: Synergize	Openness to suggestions	Seek differing perspectives

	Teamwork	Build relationships, Coaching
	Synergize	Build consensus, Insightful
	Decision making	Input from others, Question
	Creativity	Creativity
	Empathy, Listen to others	Good listening skills
	Optimize others' talents	Motivate, Understand individuals
	Value strengths	Shared power
	Renewal	Idealized Influence Individualized Consideration
Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw	Balance	Energize, Develop own strengths
	Emotional stability	Shared values, Core belief system
	Analytical skills	Challenge, Examine problems
	Do meaningful work	Facilitate change, Envision future
	Serve others	Mentor, Growth, Coach

*Note.* Partially adapted from *The Leader in Me*, by S. Covey, 2008, pp. 47-48.

As shown in Table 1, there are commonalities between *The Leader in Me* and transformational leadership, with the 7 Habits and leadership columns showing many similarities. The major difference is the use of slightly diverse vocabulary words to get the same desired outcome of transformation.

### **Data on the Covey Program**

A study published on the FranklinCovey's Center for Advanced Research's website by Baile (1998) found evidence that the 7 Habits program caused positive improvement within student leadership in schools. Baile identified six school districts,

which included the following with elementary schools: Elementary Center in Blacklick Valley School District, Pennsylvania; Concord Community Schools Corporation near Goshen, Indiana with four elementary schools; Floyd County Schools in Northwest Georgia with ten elementary schools; and West Side Elementary School in Marietta, Georgia that serves 450 students. Baile interviewed 140 individuals who had received the 7 Habits training, including classroom and resource teachers, students, support staff, superintendents, board members, custodial staff, and others. These interviews accumulated 1,376 pages of transcripts that were coded into six distinct categories, or organizational conditions, affected by the leadership training: workplace satisfaction, communication between employees, teamwork, organizational goal focus, conflict management/collaboration, and organizational resilience (p. 3). When reviewing the transcripts, Baile stated that the respondents all had positive comments. The study documented strong perceptions by the participants that the Covey leadership training improved the organizational culture in terms of leadership.

**Fremont Elementary case study.** The Center for Advanced Research (2011) reported a similar organizational culture change when documenting the achievement of John C. Fremont Elementary School, situated in an ethnically diverse and potentially at-risk area of Salt Lake City. The school served between 520 and 560 students, with a population of 50% free or reduced lunch and a large portion of English Language Learners or immigrants with over 29 different languages spoken by students. Since the school district, composed of 70 schools, had not met the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) set forth in the NCLB Act for five years, a federally mandated team of auditors named

STATIS (School Team Appraisal for Teaching and Instructional Support) came to study various schools throughout the district. The STATIS team of auditors studied Freemont as part of their research. For two weeks they conducted interviews and observed in the classrooms, with the goal of discovering what should be done to get the school reaching federal standards. They also evaluated and ranked the school in accordance with 28 rubric areas of educational best practices. The team of auditors credited *The Leader in Me* for high performances in such areas as: highest ranking of student on-task behavior in the school district, positive school learning climate, differentiated instruction, high academic expectations, parental satisfaction, and applying learning to outside the classroom (p. 2). The school also attributed the leadership program to a 60% decline in serious student disciplinary referrals. After one school year of leadership instruction, science scores went from 21% to 62%, a 41-point increase, language changed from 49% to 78%, a 29-point increase, and math rose from 31% to 59%, a 28-point increase. The school did not specify any details on these scores other than the general subject reporting categories. Dr. McCarty, Freemont Principal, said the leadership instruction,

goes beyond seeing the program helping our students acquire the necessary self-mastery and leadership skills that will help them succeed in life. Rather, [it] has become a lifeline for our children. It teaches children how to be more resilient when facing life challenges. (Center for Advanced Research, 2011, p. 3)

**Welsh Elementary case study.** The Center for Advanced Research conducted a study from 2006-2010 to document Joseph Welsh Elementary School's training and participation in *The Leader in Me* (2010). The school, located in Alberta, Canada, was a

kindergarten through fifth grade school with 351 students, 17 teachers, and strong community and parental support. The school embraced the motto “Leaders for Life” and worked to integrate that vision and the 7 Habits’ philosophies into all aspects of school life. *The Leader in Me* training began in April 2007, and a May 2008 survey found that 94% of students said they knew most of the 7 Habits, and 92% reported using them in their lives at school (p. 2). After the program was implemented for three years, the Center for Advanced Research investigated any potential impact *The Leader in Me* was having on educational outcomes at the school. Examining disciplinary data, they found the average referrals in the two years prior to the program were 88.5, but saw a 68% reduction to 28. In-school and out-of-school suspensions combined went from an average of 31 to 13, a 58% reduction (p. 3). When asked about the changes in disciplinary actions, the school secretary (30 years experience, 11 at the school) shared her experience of the positive changes:

One of the things that most impressed me about incorporating the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* into our character education program was the decrease in the number of students being sent to the office for various negative reasons....I’m sure that each of the 7 Habits has inspired students and staff, as well as parents, to take responsibility for their actions and truly care about each other and our world. The entire school exudes a totally different atmosphere of safety, caring and love. (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 4)

Also examined were students’ academic performance on the standardized Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT). The percentage of students performing below



standard on the English test when *The Leader in Me* was implemented in 2007 started at 4.5% (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 4). After a year of the program, the percent failing fell to 1.9% and by two years, 2009, the school had 0% below standard on the English PAT. However, students performing at the standard of excellence level did show a 12.5% increase (16.4-28.8) in the first year of the program, but the following year inexplicably found student achievement level dropped from 28.8% to 26%, a 2.8% decrease (p. 5).

The percentage of students failing the mathematics PAT drastically dropped from 11.8% the year the program was adopted, to 2% two years later (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 6). School data also reported that the percentages of students performing at the standard of excellence level in mathematics from 2007-2009 saw a 24.2% increase from 11.8 to 25.9 to 36 (p. 7). The Center for Advanced Research reported that this rise in excellence level performances reversed the previous negative, declining trend seen in mathematics scores, as over the other previous three years the numbers had dropped 12.7%.

Also included in survey were questions aimed at understanding teacher, student, and parental opinion on the leadership curriculum program. After a full year of using *The Leader in Me*, 95% of teachers at Joseph Welsh said the quality of education had improved as compared to the previous year (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 9). Surveys from students in the fourth grade showed 79% reported that most students followed the school rules, a 12% increase from the prior year (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 10). Comparing the data from before the leadership program was

implemented to afterwards, the data from the fourth grade surveys showed an 18% increase to 88% in number of students saying they helped each other at school. There was also a small 5% increase in the number of students reported respecting each other at school (74 to 79). Additional statistics of note (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 10):

53% of parents thought the quality of education at Joseph Welsh had improved after implementing *The Leader in Me*

100% of teachers thought the program helped them teach students principles they would need to use in their daily lives

97% of parents wanted to see the program continue

95% of students said they had chances to be leaders within the classroom

These results and data from *The Leader in Me* at Welsh Elementary cannot be claimed as a sole direct result of the leadership program, but there were correlations in a mostly positive direction. The Center for Advanced Research admitted that possible other factors could have caused the improvement, as there was no control for outside influences on the reported results. However, the Center and those at the school felt that, “the improvements are the result of the Leader in Me process...[it] provided teachers and administrators with the tools needed to move an already good school to the level of a great school” (2010, p. 10).

In an addendum to this case study, the Center for Advanced Research (2010) issued a new accountability report for Welsh Elementary that showed continued improvement in every measured category. The school also continued to exceed the

average reported scores for their district. The data showed increased scores on the PAT student learning test, with 36.1% earning excellence (increased from 26%), compared to district scores of 19.4%. The school also reported gains from the previous year in the categories of work preparation (86.4%-100%), citizenship (86.9%-93%), parental involvement (83.1%-91.8%), and school improvement (84%-89.4%) (Center for Advanced Research, 2010, p. 11).

**Additional school data.** Other elementary schools in the nation also have incorporated the 7 Habits as a way of teaching leadership skills. English Estates Elementary in Fern Park, Florida had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for a while and was considered a ‘School in Need of Improvement’ when the principal began introducing leadership. Results included raising test scores 35% in some subjects, and meeting AYP for the first time (Covey, 2008, p. 111). Discipline referrals also dropped from 225 to 74, and parent approval of the school on the annual survey reached 98% (p. 111).

Dewey Elementary School in Adams County, Illinois was a K-3 school with about 220 students, 63% of whom received free or reduced lunch. After beginning *The Leader in Me*, the school reported a doubling in PTA attendance, tardiness declining 35%, and disciplinary referrals dropping 75% (Covey, 2008, p. 120). The students’ scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) increased as well. After 15 months of leadership instruction, reading scores went from 57.4% to 89.7%, a 32.3 point increase, and math rose from 77.4% to 100%, a 22.6 point increase (p. 120).

## **The Covey Original Prototype: A. B. Combs**

In 1999, A. B. Combs Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina was a magnet school consisting of more than 800 students with a population of 18% ESL, 45% free or reduced lunch, 21% special programs, and 15% academically gifted (Covey, 2008, p. 2). They were the lowest performing school in their district until the principal decided to focus on a model of leadership. The school started teaching the 7 Habits in combination with authentic opportunities for all students to practice leadership both in school and the community. They adopted the mission statement of, “To develop leaders one child at a time” (Covey, 2008, p. 41). The first year, A. B. Combs had one teacher per grade level pilot the program and they saw a 3% passing rate increase in end-of-grade tests, raising from 84% to 87%, which they attributed to the improved scores in the pilot classes (p. 5). The following year, when the entire school began the program, they saw a 7% increase and, eventually, the school was able to maintain a passing rate of 97% of the students (p. 5). In addition, as a result of the focus on leadership, the principal reported an increase in students performing on grade level from 67% to 97% over a six-year period.

A. B. Combs decided to make leadership the pervasive approach to their educational existence. Leadership was the focus of their magnet school, in their strategic blueprint and mission statement, and the foundation of their school culture. Leadership and the 7 Habits were taught every day in each grade level. The students began with instruction in kindergarten learning the basic principles in fun and authentic ways. Each year the school spent the first week reviewing the leadership taught last year and

establishing expectations and classroom rules. The leadership instruction was inherent in all of the subjects and teachers reported that instead of adding to their workload it was “simply a better way of doing what they were already doing” (p. 53). Throughout the school there were hallway displays, motivating messages, quotes, and other reminders of the school’s focus. Teachers tried to make the learning fun by including leadership games that also taught the core skills aligned with their state standards. Each child would have the opportunity to be a leader of something, such as the categories of classroom greeter, timekeeper, public speaking, science, music, or physical fitness (Covey, 2008, p. 76). Students who excelled in an area, or those who wanted to widen their talents could choose an area of leadership either in the classroom or within school-wide leadership arenas. In addition, A.B. Combs utilized Peer Leaders, for example the principal would have asked an older student to mentor a younger child in how to learn appropriate school behavior.

### **Effectiveness of *The Leader in Me***

Researchers from John Hopkins were asked by FranklinCovey to design a study to test the effectiveness of the *The Leader in Me* program (Ross et al., 2012). A qualitative, case study was conducted at two separate elementary schools, with a design that focused upon outputs and outcomes of the program implementation. Focus groups and interviews were held with principals, teachers, students, community members, and parents and the questions were designed to gather both positive and negative data about the leadership program (p. 12). Student achievement data on state assessments was

examined beginning with two years prior to the schools' implementation of *The Leader in Me*.

The first school in the study, labeled for the study as Southeast Elementary (SEES), was located in a small suburban town in the southeastern part of the nation, and served 840 students in grades Pre-K through 5 (Ross et al., 2012, p. 15). Fifty-five percent of the students were Caucasian, 41% African American, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 52% of students received free or reduced lunch (p. 15). The study was conducted during the second year of implementing *The Leader in Me*, at a time when school morale was lacking, achievement was declining, the student population had become more socioeconomically disadvantaged, and the school failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (p. 15). Data found participants credited *The Leader in Me* with positive changes in school climate, student motivation and confidence, personal skills, conflict resolution, and fostering positive attitudes. The data on student achievement was inconclusive since the school had only adapted *The Leader in Me* for seven months prior to their state assessments (p. 39).

The second school in the study, labeled West Coast Elementary School (WCES), was located on the nation's west coast in a residential neighborhood, "largely populated by families of Asian decent" (Ross et al., 2012, p. 42). The school served 660 students in grades K through 6, and they reported many students with an at-risk socioeconomic background and about 84% qualifying for free or reduced meals (p. 42). The racial breakdown included 63% Asian or Pacific Islander, 34% Hispanic, and the remaining students were Caucasian. In addition, 56% of the students enrolled were English

Language Learners. The same interviews and focus group studies were implemented at WCES that the researchers conducted at SEES.

The principal of WCES attributed *The Leader in Me* to helping cut down on poor student behavior. He cited a reduction in suspensions from 18 to the current number of zero (p. 45). Students responded that the program made the school a happier place with less bullying. All of the students said that they understand the program vocabulary and tried to incorporate the skills into their lives at school and home (p. 53). Two teachers interviewed indicated they thought *The Leader in Me* was more successful than any other program they had experienced in their careers, including any character education programs (p. 54). The data on the school's math and language achievement test was taken in the second year of the program's implementation. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced status on the mathematics state assessment rose slightly, but researchers cautioned that the scores, "do not reflect positive impacts associated with the *The Leader in Me* implementation" (p. 58). Scores on the language arts state assessment reflected an identical trend, and the study researchers stated, "The *The Leader in Me* adoption in 2009-10 does not appear to have affected student achievement as measured by the state assessments" (p. 59).

### **Assessing *The Leader in Me*'s Transformational Leadership Within Schools**

Examining *The Leader in Me* through the lens of transformational leadership would allow for a comparison of the 7 Habits with a leadership model that has been widely researched and studied. *The Leader in Me* is a program focused on bringing out transformational change and leadership from students, through the utilization of the 7

Habits. Humphrey explained how transformational leaders used the 4 I's to achieve goals when he said, "Transformational leaders use idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to transform followers' beliefs and to create a new, more motivating vision" (2014, p. 406).

Transformational leaders would also be seen acting in accordance with the examples of the following behaviors: emphasizing values, encouraging people to achieve goals, challenging assumptions, being creative and efficient, working towards productive change, and many more (Daft, 2005; Humphrey, 2014). Bass and Riggio (2006) further elaborated when they said idealized influence could be seen through such actions as setting examples, showing determination, being dedicated, and showing behaviors that would be admired, respected and trusted. Inspirational motivational leadership included providing challenges and meaning, planning ahead, and focusing on the inherent teamwork. Intellectual stimulation was present when one was questioning, having insights, creating and examining things from many angles, and looking for varying opinions. Lastly, individualized consideration would be apparent in partaking in mentoring, showing growth, being concerned for others, and encouraging self-development (Bass & Riggio, 2006, locations 675-683). Table 2 compares *The Leader in Me* and 7 Habits and the literature summaries on transformational leadership to reach an understanding of what behaviors may be visible when a researcher looks for signs of transformational leadership within a school teaching the program.



Table 2

*Comparison of 7 Habits, Characteristics of Transformational Leadership, and Student Behaviors*

<i>7 Habits and The Leader in Me</i>	Characteristics of Transformational Leadership	Possible Student Behaviors Shown in School
Independence Habits 1, 2, & 3	Idealized Influence Inspirational Motivation	Act as Role Models Be Hard Workers
Initiative, Self-motivation	Active leadership	Show leadership
Self-confidence	Optimistic, Empowerment	Optimistic, Confident
Planning skills	Plan	Planning, Use best effort
Goal setting skills	Goal congruence	Set and achieve goals
Organization	Develop organizational goals	Organizational skills
Have dreams and plans	Innovate, Shared vision	Plan for the future
Meaningful contributions	Meaningful contributions	Meaningful interactions
Focus on being your best	Inspire, Set good example	Positive, Set good example
Do the right thing	Act in a way to build respect	Responsible, Respectful
Interdependence Habits 4, 5, & 6	Inspirational Motivation Intellectual Stimulation Individualized Consideration	Make Good Choices Get Along with Others Show Helpful Behaviors
Conflict management	New way of looking at things	Conflict management skills
Communication skills	Effective communicator	Effective communicator
Honesty and Courage	Honesty and Courage	Honesty and Courage
Fairness, Respect others	Moral purpose, Respect	Fair, Morals, and Values
Openness to suggestions	Seek differing perspectives	Seek different perspectives

Teamwork	Build relationships, Coaching	Show people skills
Problem solving	Build consensus, Insightful	Good problem solver
Decision making	Input from others, Question	Thoughtful decisions
Creativity	Creativity	Creativity
Empathy, Listen to others	Good listening skills	Good listening skills
Optimize others' talents	Motivate, Know individuals	Empower others, Motivate
Value strengths	Shared power	Understand people
Renewal Habit 7	Idealized Influence Individualized Consideration	Make a Difference Be Best You Can Be
Balance	Energize, Grow own strengths	Focus on whole self
Emotional stability	Share values, Core beliefs	Control emotions
Analytical skills	Challenge, Examine problems	Analyze and Challenge
Do meaningful work	Facilitate change, Future focus	Working towards change
Serve others	Mentor, Growth, Coach	Care for others

*Note.* Adapted from *The Leader in Me*, by S. Covey, 2008, pp. 47-48, pp. 216-217

### Summary

There is a sizeable gap in the literature pertaining to research-based studies of students learning leadership skills in schools. As Karnes and Bean (1996) asserted, “the need for more study and action of leadership is imperative. Well designed effectiveness studies of existing programs for leadership development are sorely needed” (p. 1). Much of the evidence of effectiveness data relating to leadership programs in schools is anecdotal or does not disentangle the effects of the leadership program from the effects of other improvement efforts. This study used a qualitative lens through which to analyze a

leadership curriculum as it was being taught. The study contributed towards the clarification of what students learn when they are being taught leadership skills, and how students began to show actions that would portray ownership of the knowledge. In addition, the students' leadership behaviors were analyzed through the transformational leadership model to see if the *The Leader in Me* program resulted in making transformational leaders. Daft (2005) called leaders social architects because they are concerned with building relationships and helping others become the best possible version of themselves. The next generation needs to become proficient in building a relationship of trust and confidence with constituents, no matter who those constituents are. An understanding of how students develop leadership abilities would empower educators to develop effective programs with the potential to enhance young children's leadership tendencies and therefore their abilities to lead in the future.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Overview**

A case study design is a detailed examination of one setting using empirical inquiry to observe some aspect of the occurring phenomenon (Yin, 1994). The focus of this research case study was on an elementary school that taught the leadership program *The Leader in Me* school-wide. The research examined a school that was teaching leadership to gain a better understanding of students' emerging leadership tendencies and associated perceptions of the program. A qualitative method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views.

### **Setting**

The chosen site for conducting the case study, a local public elementary school, was pinpointed through online research on the FranklinCovey website. The site listed schools across the nation, which were teaching the *The Leader in Me* leadership program (FranklinCovey, 2013). After narrowing down school choices to those in a close geographical range, the researcher emailed four principals to ascertain if they would be interested in participating in the study. The specific elementary school was chosen because it had geographical closeness, was teaching *The Leader in Me*, and the administrative staff was willing to work with the researcher. The school offered access to

a data-rich environment, and the ability to interview subjects about teaching leadership skills to children.

This elementary school was located in a metropolitan area surrounding Richmond, Virginia. The population of the area was approximately 315,000 at the time of contact, and the geographical location covered about 245 square miles. The school district reported a student population of 49,343 with the ethnicity categories of 4% other, 8% Hispanic, 9% Asian, 36% Black, 43% White, and 40% of the total students enrolled having economic deprivation. These statistics were taken from the district's website, current as of February, 2014 and were gathered by their Department of Research and Planning. The large district operated 72 schools and had approximately 6,600 total employees. Other statistics of note were that the school district had a 90% overall on-time graduation rate, and was budgeted to spend about \$9,369 per student in the 2014-2015 school year.

Prior to beginning the research, permission was gained from the research department of the school district who gave the stipulation that the district, school, and participants needed to all remain anonymous. Therefore, in order to provide confidentiality to its students and staff, the school was referred to as ABC School. ABC School provided an education for students in grades Pre-K through 5, in the format of a state-funded, public elementary school. The school facility was a one-story building on 18 acres, with 29 classrooms, and 43 educational staff members. At the time of the study, the school's student enrollment was 610 students with the following demographics: 37%

Hispanic, 34% African American, 29% Caucasian and Other, 72% receiving free and reduced lunch, and 28% getting special education services.

### ***The Leader in Me***

ABC school was chosen as the research site because they were teaching a leadership curriculum called *The Leader in Me*. It was a program developed by Covey, aimed at teaching the practices in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1990). It was designed for schools to teach children the 7 Habits in an age-appropriate manner (see Appendix A for a list of the 7 Habits). The program was made to be non-scripted but did offer curriculum suggestions and materials. To cultivate universal citizens, Covey emphasized three themes in the leadership instruction (2008). First, that the leadership principles being taught were timeless, common sense based, and would be familiar to all ages and cultures. Second, that the principles could be accomplished by children, and would showcase each child's strengths. Lastly, the leadership skills taught in the program at school could also be used at home, and in the students' daily lives.

### **English Language Learners**

As the school population statistics showed, ABC School had a large English Language Learner population that provided barriers for both the students and their families. There was a translator employed at the school that helped with family questions and ELL services. The *The Leader in Me* forms from the school also went home in Spanish, which was the school's largest second language.

## **Study Participants**

Study participants were the principal of the school, teachers, and parents of enrolled students, which totaled 15 participants. The school district and Virginia Commonwealth University's Institutional Review Board gave permission for the study to include 6 to 8 teachers and 6 to 8 parents, as well as the school principal.

**Teacher participants.** The principal was interviewed first to gain an initial understanding of the program. Then the research consent form (Appendix D) was placed in teachers' school mailboxes if they were a classroom teacher of grades K-5 that had been at the school for the prior year and taught *The Leader in Me*. Teachers who were interested in participating contacted the principal who provided a list to the researcher. An additional stipulation was that the contact information of possible participants would not be released to the researcher until after they agreed to possibly volunteer for the study. Initially, there were not enough volunteers so the research consent form was placed in teachers' mailboxes a second time. This yielded no response so the principal put the opportunity in her weekly newsletter to her staff, and one additional teacher volunteered to participate. The total number of teacher participants was seven, and they included one teacher from each grade, K-5, and two from third grade. The school district requested that the research be conducted after contractual hours so the teacher interviews took place after-school over a three-week time period, and were held in the teachers' classrooms or the conference room. Five of the teacher participants were also on the school's Lighthouse Team, a group responsible for the implementation and data gathering

included in the program, so they answered additional questions pertaining to that responsibility (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011).

**Parent participants.** Initially, the principal explained that it would be difficult obtaining parent participants because the school's socioeconomic status included a large majority of parents who had time constraints. The school's large population of parents who did not speak English as their first language also presented a language barrier issue when getting study participants. Due to these constraints, the principal requested that the study's research consent form be presented and made available at a PTA meeting and PTA board meeting. This tactic did not generate any volunteers, so the principal volunteered to call parents that she considered information-rich, active in their children's lives, and available to participate. Prior to this point, both the district and the principal did not let the researcher have any contact with parents nor would they allow access to parental contact information. Once potential parent volunteers were contacted and agreed to learn more about the study, the principal provided a list to the researcher. Seven out of eight parent volunteers from the list were interviewed. Parent participants were given the choice of having an in-person or phone interview, whichever was the most conducive to their schedules, and all of the participants chose a phone interview. The phone interviews were conducted over a two-week period during a prearranged time that was mutual and convenient for both the researcher and parents. The parents gave verbal permission for the research consent form (See Appendix E).



## Methodology

### Research Questions

1. What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experiences with teaching leadership to children?
2. How are adult leadership skills applied to children?
3. Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?

### Data Collection Methods

This study used a three-part method for data collection that included document review, interviews, and observations.

**Document review.** Documents included any supplemental material that was used to further understand the observed phenomenon in the case study. They were considered materials rich in data so the researcher ensured that they were examined in a naturalistic, inductive process that was focused upon constructing meaning connected to the case (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Documents that were reviewed included: a school mission statement, a brochure of the leadership program, *The Leader in Me* teaching guides and student workbooks, student leadership binders, standardized testing data, and a 7 Habits training manual. If the documents contained any sensitive student data, the rules set forth by the IRB and the school district were followed. The researcher's adherence to confidentiality remained a priority at all times.

**Interviews.** An interview was defined as, "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more that is directed by one in order to get

information from the other,” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 93). This study was an understanding and extrapolation of meaning straight from the source of an elementary school teaching leadership, so therefore interviewing was the only method that would get the desired information. Once a preliminary understanding of the program was established, in conjunction with an in-depth perusal of related documents, the researcher conducted a series of individual interviews. The interview method consisted of open-ended questions based upon an interview guide (Appendices B & C), which served as a foundation for discussion. Interview guides served as an organized way of obtaining comprehensive data in a systematic manner (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The interview guides used during this research were peer reviewed by five teachers, and also aligned with the study’s research questions. Additionally, the interview guide was field tested during a practice interview with a parent who had a child at a daycare that taught *The Leader in Me*. The interview guides had outlined topics, but clarifying questions were also asked in order to elicit more details on participants’ perceptions and experiences with teaching leadership.

It was important for the researcher to conduct the interviews in a friendly, conversational manner while also trying to gather the necessary information for the study (Patton, 1990). The interviewer attempted to establish a trusting relationship with each participant and ensured that each interview was conducted in a non-threatening manner or environment. Each participant was advised of their right to stop the proceedings at any time. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher ensured that each participant either signed or gave verbal permission to provide consent for participation (Appendices

D & E). The interviews were semi-structured with the use of the interview guide, which allowed for the researcher to make omissions and addendums as needed, while remaining conversational. However, the core questions remained phrased the same and were asked to each interview subset to ensure a foundation for comparative data analysis.

During the interview process, the teacher participants were made to feel comfortable by choosing the location of the interviews and also where to sit. The researcher also offered them a selection of candy to enjoy while talking. Before starting the interview, the researcher began with some light conversation and made sure the participant understood the process and line of questioning. The parent interviews also included a summary of what would happen during the interview and they were asked to make themselves comfortable and to speak clearly into the phone.

Interviews of participants from three distinct areas were included in order to gain a multi-faceted understanding of the students' understanding of leadership and emerging tendencies. First, the school principal was interviewed since she was the expert on the school. The principal offered a unique perspective because she was privy to all of the information and happenings throughout the school that involved the entire body of stakeholders, and she was the person who decided to bring the *The Leader in Me* program into the school. Secondly, the researcher conducted interviews with teachers who were implementing the leadership program in their classrooms. These interviews allowed the researcher to gain knowledge of what their students had learned and how they were developing any leadership tendencies. Lastly, the researcher interviewed parents who had students enrolled at the school. In conclusion, after gathering the background data

on the program, then interviewing the school principal, teachers, and parents, the study offered numerous perspectives on the leadership being taught in order to examine the data from every possible angle. Each interview was audio taped with the participant's consent, and later transcribed by the researcher. After completing each interview, the researcher wrote some interview elaborations, which noted self-reflections and how the interaction went with the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

**Observations.** The researcher visited the school on two occasions for formal observations, and numerous other times to conduct interviews. The first observation was completed during an afternoon gathering that the school held about *The Leader in Me*. The second time, the researcher observed two classroom lessons for over an hour each in fourth and second grade classrooms. While in the school, data was also gathered that visually examined classrooms, student work, lessons, and any other experiences and interactions that provided information relevant to the leadership skills being taught. A special focus was on gathering data about student leadership behaviors, roles, skills, and transformational leadership. Prior to conducting the classroom observations, the guardians of students were notified that a researcher would be observing in the classroom and they were given the opportunity to have an opt-out and alternative assignment for their children (Appendix F). While observing, the researcher focused on any behaviors or interactions that pertained to *The Leader in Me*. An observational protocol checklist (Appendix G) was utilized to guide the researcher in pinpointing specific 7 Habits and transformational leadership traits. The protocol checklist was made from a summary of the literature on transformational leadership, and this research study's Tables 1 and 2.

## **Researcher's Roles**

The dominant researcher roles for this study were that of interviewer and observer. During the interviews, a relationship was established with the participants in the study. However, the researcher maintained a degree of empathic neutrality while conducting and analyzing the research (Patton, 1990). It is important to note that the researcher had experience as an elementary school teacher prior to conducting this research. This familiarity with the generic school setting offered a better understanding about how schools function and also how to appropriately interact within the educational day. The previous experience teaching children and interacting within an elementary school environment offered an insider's reaction and viewpoint.

However, Strauss and Corbin (1990) said that the researcher must also maintain a theoretical sensitivity in order to have insight and the ability to assign meaning to the data, while delineating what is useful. The researcher focused on being an impartial observer and kept her other role as a former elementary school teacher from impacting the study. With the purpose of keeping the two roles separate, the researcher wrote notes that recorded her feelings as a method of controlling bias. Along with being a method for accounting bias, feelings also served as an important source for reflection and an additional way to understand what the participants experienced.

## **Data Analysis**

Once permission was obtained from participants, the interviews were conducted while being audio recorded on a digital recorder. Any significant body language, visual cues, or other non-verbal behavior was identified on the field notes taken during and after

each interview. Following the interviews' conclusions, they were transcribed from the digital tape recorder into a Word document. The teachers' and principal's transcripts were given to the corresponding participants to ensure accuracy of statements and to allow for correction of errors or discrepancies. A former educator who listened to the audio recordings and checked the transcripts for errors and reliability validated the parent transcripts. All of the interviews were coded with an identification number, time, and date for further organization of data. Another strategy for organizing the data collected was the utilization of a log of data gathering activities that listed the date, location, activity, participant, and observations.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that the data analysis of qualitative research was an investigation of description, analysis, and interpretation that focuses on discovering relationships and underlying themes. This caused immersion in the data as the researcher organized the narratives (Patton, 2002). The researcher coded, categorized, and interpreted the data gained through conducting the interviews. Specifically, through inductive analysis, categories and themes emerged from examining the data (Patton, 2002). Once the initial interviews were transcribed, the researcher began recognizing recurring patterns. Marshall and Rossman (2006) encouraged researchers to identify salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and linking patterns. After some patterns were established, the next step was to assign codes to the data while continuing to generate new codes and categories of meaning when necessary. The codes were revised when needed, and additional immersions into the data were necessary to look for alternative understandings.

A constant comparative method of data analysis was used in order to find emerging themes and patterns in the interviews and codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This helped the researcher identify commonalities within the data and to locate any meaningful findings. Patton (2002) stated, “Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order,” (p. 480).

The interviews were coded and analyzed as an individual source, larger groups of teachers or parents, and then as a whole. The coding involved the use of topic and individual detail codes. This individualizing and triangulation allowed the researcher to look for internal consistency, repetition, themes, and commonalities. The interviews were also examined for frequency of statements, emphasis, and extensiveness of perceptions. The interpretations were compared to and organized by the research questions in order to have further understanding of the phenomenon. Lastly, the interviews were analyzed for contradictions, negative examples, and inconsistencies.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that once the patterns emerge, the researcher should find internal convergence and external divergence, meaning that they are internally consistent but they should also be distinct within their own meaning. Saturation, or the inability to find new information or findings, signified the end of the interpretations. The saturation level was reached in both the teacher and parent interviews when the data codes were repeating and not finding any additional categories.

## **Institutional Review Board**

The Virginia Commonwealth University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversaw the project in accordance with their governing rules and regulations. With their approval, the research proceeded with an assurance that human subjects were protected from any harm, as mandated by the National Research Act, (Public Law 93-348, 1974). Written or verbal informed consent was received from all participants.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are limitations on the study that the researcher imposed, and most of the delimitations in this study involved the research setting. The school chosen by the researcher caused delimitations because it had to teach elementary students, and the school also needed to be teaching a leadership curriculum. ABC School itself caused an additional delimitation because it was one public elementary school with varying students. Also, the teachers there were choosing to continue teaching at a leadership school using *The Leader in Me*, and may or may not have an allegiance to the program. All of these factors affected the sample, sample size, and caused restrictions within the ability to generalize results. In addition, the literature study contained only the research associated with teaching leadership to children, and not the larger body of works attributed to leadership learning in young adults, or adults.

## **Rigor and Limitations of the Study**

The researcher tried to control any threats to credibility through establishing trustworthiness, transferability, and dependability (Hoepfl, 1997). Specifically, these threats were controlled through the design of the study and in the researcher's role,



participants, and data selection. Credibility depended upon the richness of the information and analytical abilities of the researcher (Hoepfl, 1997). Credibility was also addressed through the use of a peer review process in order to have some participants and colleague check the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, an informal inquiry audit was conducted by a retired educator to assess the study as a whole. The auditor examined the study research questions, literature report, interview transcripts, data, and findings and gave the researcher verbal recommendations to ensure rigor. The credibility of the study findings were examined through the emphases used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure that: participants' perceptions were accurately described, the data authentically represented the occurrence of leadership, and inferences were precise.

The findings did not lend themselves to any large generalization, just an understanding of the participants' perceptions and emergent skills of leadership during this specific time period. Furthermore, the generalization was limited because the school in the study was a specific case study and not a typical situation. The population of the school may not be similar to other elementary schools, nor would their education be identical to that received at other public schools. This study offered a glimpse into how students developed leadership skills, but there are numerous other variables involved including the type of program, how it would be implemented, student population, etc.

The participant recruitment became a limitation when the researcher experienced difficulty getting participant volunteers. Those study participants that were interviewed may not have offered the representation of the school's majority since there were few volunteers and the inability to have a random selection. The study was further limited by

the lack of longevity and the time restrictions imposed by the need to conclude the research. There were other limiting variables because education involves ever changing children, and is not the same in any two places, so it would be extremely difficult to generalize across type of school and school districts. Additionally, leadership development manifests itself differently across the age spans and length of time exposed to the program. This study provided the foundation for future research and it showed that it was possible to teach leadership skills to a wide variety of students with various personalities and abilities.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher described the study design, setting, and participant selection. It also discussed data collection, organization, and the relevant analysis procedures. The three processes of interviews, observations, and document review were explained as the methods of triangulating the data. A discussion of the researcher's role acknowledged previous experience as an elementary school educator. Lastly, the researcher addressed limitations, rigor, and credibility of the study findings and interpretations.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Purpose and Overview**

The purpose of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of how young children could be taught leadership skills, and the perceptions that went along with the leadership instruction. Data and findings from this chapter were obtained from interviews, field notes, observations, and document analysis. During interviews, teachers and the principal were asked to share their opinions of and experiences with the leadership program *The Leader in Me* being taught at their school, and also perceptions about their leadership beliefs in general. Topics included were: (a) definitions of leadership; (b) application of adult skills to children; (c) behavioral evidence of transformational leadership; (d) program implementation, impacts, benefits, and weaknesses; and (e) future implementation, improvements, and best practices. Parents were then interviewed and asked to share their opinions and experiences with the 7 Habits and to convey the effects of *The Leader in Me* on their children. Topics included were: (a) definitions of leadership; (b) application of adult skills to children; (c) children's leadership knowledge and tendencies; (d) parental opinion about program and school leadership curriculum; and (e) program outcomes, improvements, and best practices.

The 15 interview participants consisted of the principal, teachers, and parent volunteers who were all chosen for their potential to serve as information-rich sources. The principal was interviewed because she was the administrative staff in charge of the program. The seven participating teachers volunteered by contacting the principal if they were interested in sharing their opinions on *The Leader in Me*. Recruitment of parent volunteers proved extremely difficult so the principal assisted in identifying sources that would (a) be information-rich; (b) have the time to participate; (c) not have a language barrier; and (d) would be somewhat knowledgeable about their children's 7 Habits and leadership skills. Seven parent volunteers were interviewed from a list of eight possibilities. Further details on participants may be found in Chapter 3.

Data analysis began after the researcher conducted the interviews and converted interview audio recordings to text-based transcriptions. Data reduction and the choice of preliminary categories occurred after multiple readings and listening to the audio files of each interview numerous times. Several themes and codes became apparent during the initial immersion into the interview data. During the open coding process that followed, the researcher found distinct categories present in the data, and they are discussed by their applicability to each research question. The data analysis found evidence that participants looked at *The Leader in Me* with dual perceptions. The leadership program perceptions had two emphases of being a behavior modification program and also serving a greater good for personal improvement.

In addition, the researcher conducted observations that focused on student activities, leadership, and behavior. The first impressions showed a school with happy

children and staff, organized classrooms, and fun learning environments. Although the school resided in an older building it was always clean and maintained a decorative and academic concentration on leadership. Document reviews included these leadership related items: pamphlets, a teacher manual and student workbook from the program, and students' leadership binders. Lastly, the researcher examined the school's performance on their state's reading and math standardized testing scores (SOLs) and analyzed the data for changes. The trend analysis was comprised of testing data from three years prior to the implementation of the program through the school's current scores.

### **Research Questions**

Chapter 4 presents the findings, as the data related to the following research questions:

1. What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experiences with teaching leadership to children?
2. How are adult leadership skills applied to children?
3. Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?

This chapter is organized in accordance to the data that applied to each research question.

### **How ABC School Implemented *The Leader in Me***

ABC School first started the 7 Habits in the 2011-2012 school year after a former principal decided to teach the student population about the habits. They began to teach the students the 7 Habits and associated vocabulary. School administration spent that year working on a grant for funding to implement the entire program and expand from

solely using the vocabulary words. The 2012-2013 school year brought a new principal who, coincidentally, had been using the *The Leader in Me* program at her former elementary school and was interested in continuing with it at ABC School. The new principal had become interested in *The Leader in Me* after seeing it implemented at A.B. Combs Elementary School in Raleigh, N.C., the program's flagship school. The principal said that she was attracted to the program because, "It's a philosophy of how to live. The 7 Habits can be used for the rest of their [students'] lives and they can be used to make the world a better place."

When they signed up for *The Leader in Me*, ABC School committed to a 5-year process. That process began when they wrote a grant to secure money from the FranklinCovey foundation. Then FranklinCovey provided *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* training to all members of the staff, gave them program materials, and sent in a representative to help get the program started. *The Leader in Me* cost \$5,000 per year and was being supported at ABC School by grants from the I Am a Leader Foundation, federal Title 1 funds, the school PTA, sponsorship by a local contracting firm, a grant from the school district, and a substantial donation of \$10,000 from a national food product company.

This school year, 2014-2015, marked the third year of the program but the fourth year that students had been using the 7 Habits vocabulary. *The Leader in Me* at ABC School was integrated into everything and called an "all encompassing program." Teachers said that they taught the habits constantly in all of the core subjects, as the language and concepts can be applied to the curriculum, lessons, and activities. School

staff sought the children's opinions, input, and gave them "opportunities for empowerment." The principal stated, "All of our kids are leaders, but they...will do kid things because...that's what they do. However our children know that we have high expectations and for the most part they try to live up to them." Some program goals were to look for the good in every child and help students with confidence in the hopes that they would have a sense of pride and feeling of accomplishment. "That's the best way to feel for a human being is that you've helped others and that you're proud of yourself," explained a teacher. Another teacher remarked that the program offered a way to teach character-based skills with a process so they did not have to come up with ideas on their own.

The leadership skills were taught at the developmental level of the kids, although the same language for the habits were used at all ages. The teachers tried to bring the instruction to the kids at their level by using pictures, examples, modeling, and redirection if needed. Mastery happened when students showed a clear understanding and they expressed the 7 Habits in their own words, utilized the leadership skills in their lives, and taught the habits to someone else. A teacher summarized with "you start small...in this classroom, but once they get the hang of it, then you challenge them to go out in the hallways...into the community and then...to their goals and dreams later down the road."

### **Study Participants**

There were seven teachers interviewed for this research, a representative from each grade K-5, and two teacher participants from third grade. The age span of the

teachers ranged from 27 to 45, with an average age of 33. Every participant had taught at least two years at ABC School, and many had spent most of their teaching careers there, but the average length of time teaching at the school was five years. Additionally, the span of total years taught varied from 4 to 14, with the average having taught for nine years. The principal, as the leader of the school, was also interviewed and had been leading ABC School for three years. The principal had spent 15 years in education, with 10 of them in administration and five as a teacher. All of the school staff interview participants were Caucasian and female.

The parent interviews consisted of seven volunteers, all female, aged between 35-45. They had a total of 12 children currently enrolled in ABC School. Their children were in grades K-4 and all but one child had been at ABC School since the beginning of their education. Those children in second grade or higher had received the leadership instruction for two full years prior to the start of this year. The parent participants were all Caucasian, however some of their children were of other ethnicities.

**Lighthouse Team.** The Lighthouse Team was a group consisting of the principal and one teacher representative from each grade, who were in charge of guiding *The Leader in Me* at ABC School. They met at least once a month and discussed leadership theory, issues with the school or program, and tracked the school's progress towards Lighthouse Status. Lighthouse Status is a title and recognition conveyed by FranklinCovey after a school completes an evidence binder with data collected on the program. Each grade level representative on the Lighthouse Team was responsible for



reporting back to her grade and gathering ideas and a consensus as a grade level to present at Lighthouse meetings.

Five of the teachers interviewed were on the Lighthouse Team, and additionally the principal was a member. The principal reported that she was considered a member but had the same say as the rest of the team and that this group of teacher leaders “drive the ship” and made decisions for the school. ABC School also put together Action Teams, where each team of teachers and staff were in charge of something that needed attention. The Action Team assigned to address behavior issues in the cafeteria, was one example given by the teachers.

**Question 1: What are Parents’, Teachers’, and an Administrator’s Perceptions of and Experiences with Teaching Leadership to Children?**

**How ABC School Taught *The Leader in Me***

Teacher participants were asked to explain how they taught the program and developed leadership skills in their students. Four instructional themes emerged as the teachers spoke about the ways in which they taught leadership. The methods utilized included: direct instruction, informal instruction, curriculum materials, and practicing.

**Direct instruction.** The teachers and student body at ABC School began each day with televised morning announcements, which detailed the Habit of the Week. The morning announcements were run by fifth graders who applied for that leadership job and were viewed as role models by many of the younger students in the school. Most teachers followed the announcements with a morning meeting, where they gathered as a class to discuss important class issues and talk about the Habit of the Week. One teacher

also used that time to teach team building. The class meeting often involved discussions about leadership. A teacher explained, “After the announcements I just do a quick debrief, you know, the Habit of the Week is this, I’m looking especially for students who are doing this...you know, you’re exemplifying this habit.”

Interview data showed that the teachers integrated the 7 Habits into their daily lessons, and they reported using them in direct instruction to create parallels between the learning and the habits. The program gave autonomy to the teachers in using the habits as it does not have a script or required plans, but does offer some lessons that teachers could access. All of the teacher participants said they integrated the habits throughout the entire school day, constantly connected learning and behavior back to a habit, and used modeling and whole group instruction to emphasize the leadership learning. A teacher stated,

I reference the habits just constantly. You know, it’s kind of interesting because its just become a habit for me, it’s a part of my teaching language. Um, I used to have to plan out in my plans when I would say, you know oh this is a habit...but now it just kind of flows. It just happens....They’ll recognize a habit whether it’s a character in a story or a math lesson....there’s lots of things in the...curriculum that lends itself to the 7 Habits.

Reading stories, doing author studies, and teaching with books were the instructional methods referenced the most frequently. Numerous teachers said they would read a book to their classes and then discuss whether the characters were showing behaviors associated with the 7 Habits. “A lot of times we’ll read a story...and then tie in

whatever habit I could tie into that so they could relate it to something,” said a teacher. Other direct instructional methods included singing, acting out habits, and watching videos that showed examples. A large amount of repetition was assimilated into the direct instruction. Teachers remarked that integrating the habits and using them repeatedly had become “second nature,” and they identified as being enmeshed because “it’s who we are, part of us and we are part of it.” Repetition was also thought to be an integral part of their instruction process. A teacher explained, “the more they hear it the more they believe in it and you know this does kind of sound like brainwashing, but you know, the more that they will use it.”

**Informal instruction.** The second method of instruction, informal instruction of the leadership, involved the premise that the “habits come up informally all day long.” Teachers personalized the leadership by serving as role models themselves and by utilizing examples from their own lives to illustrate tenets of the 7 Habits. This modeling helped make the skills more relatable for the students. Both the teachers and students shared personal stories and discussed how they related to the 7 Habits. One teacher said:

I’m setting an example for everyone in the classroom as well...just today I was telling them about before you go to bed at night make sure you have everything ready for the next day. I said before I go to sleep I pack my lunch and I set out all my clothes that I’m going to wear the next day.

The personal examples used by the teachers served as a discussion platform in combination with modeling, as the teacher moderated her own behavior to serve as a good example. One teacher said of leadership behavior, “...because if they don’t see me

taking it seriously then it's not something that they're going to want to do on their own."

The teachers reported sharing their thought processes:

We talk about how teachers make mistakes and things like that but how we're going to solve them and how we listen to each other and take turns....so I think them also knowing that I am going through the same things they are just maybe at a different level...makes it a little better for them.

At times the modeling required teachers to lead by example and participate in the leadership expectations as well. A third grade teacher said she set her own goal in order to model personal success. She was trying to learn to play the guitar so she made the goal that by a certain date she would be able to play a song. The teacher plotted her goal progress for the class and discussed the steps she would take to learn how to play the guitar. She said that her goal end date arrived and that her students said, "It's time for you to play us a song [teacher's name], so I brought in my guitar and played it for them....Just kind of showing them that...having them set their own goal and reach for it."

In addition to modeling, informal instruction also involved the general concept of educating students to gain skills that would help them be the best that they can be. A parent described this process as "basically taking what is inside of a child and showing that that child is important." A teacher concurred when she said, "they might not make the best grades or they might not pass their SOLs but they have that inside...to help propel them forward." Student academic achievement will be discussed further along in Chapter 4.

**Materials.** The third instructional theme that emerged from the data was the use of materials to aid the leadership learning. The *The Leader in Me* curriculum materials used at ABC School included leadership notebooks, teacher manual and student workbooks, and *The Leader in Me*'s website.

**Leadership notebooks.** Leadership notebooks were used for students and their teacher to track leadership and goal setting progress. The notebooks were cumulative; they began in kindergarten, and traveled with the student throughout their time at ABC School. Examples of possible items included in the notebooks were personal and academic goals, grades, performance on literacy screenings, leadership work, reading levels, working number ability, and writing samples.

**Workbooks.** Each grade, with the exception of kindergarten, had a class set of *The Leader in Me* workbooks that were filled with activities related to learning the 7 Habits. The class set also included a teacher manual to facilitate the activities. Teachers explained that the students liked to look at their workbook at the end of the year to see how much leadership learning took place. A teacher said, "They were able to look back in their *Leader in Me* workbooks...and just that pride in knowing I know these 7 Habits...and I can go [to the next grade] with that knowledge and be able to share it with other people." Instead of using the workbooks, kindergarten teachers focused on starting with the first habit and incorporated activities and whole group lessons.

**Website.** The website access was a part of the subscription to the program and offered teachers sample lesson plans, "great online resources," and curriculum information. Also, the website had "kid friendly videos" and an area that was a type of

virtual bulletin board for ideas and lesson plans. Teachers could create their own lesson plans and upload them to the site. “I know a lot of the ideas that we’ve come up with in the school we’ve posted, and other schools have reposted them or used the same things,” explained a teacher.

**Practice.** The last instructional theme emerging from the data, that teachers used to teach leadership, was practice. Five specific ways that children practiced leadership were: goal setting, mission statements, leadership jobs, habit of the week, and actual practicing. Three of these ways of practice are discussed further to learn supplemental information about goal setting, mission statements, and leadership jobs.

**Goal setting.** Goal setting was an integral component to *The Leader in Me*. At ABC School every child chose a personal and academic goal that they tracked in their leadership notebook. Examples of personal goals varied from running faster to becoming a better player at a video game. Some academic goals were to learn new information in a subject, increase proficiency at multiplication, or raise their reading ability three levels. When they first chose the goals, teachers had a conversation with the students that it was acceptable if they did not reach their goal at the end of the year. At check-ins along the way they talked about what could be done to help reach their goals. A teacher of older students remarked that their goal setting abilities improved with age, and that in her opinion the leadership program helped students be more realistic. She cited the example that in the past a student may have set a goal to “be the next LeBron James” but now they would say “I want to be LeBron James but I have to go to college first, or this is what I have to do to get there, instead of just saying I’m going to be him....and be famous.” A

different teacher called this process “setting smart goals” and made sure that they were measurable, achievable, could be tracked, and that the student had a chance of finding success.

***Mission statement.*** Every class worked with their teacher to share ideas and incorporate them into a class mission statement. The class used the statement to hold themselves accountable for their behavior and for reaching the chosen goals. Examples of some class mission statements are below:

- As student leaders we will do our best to show the 7 Habits and make an IMPACT on our world!
- We, the captains of [the teacher’s] class will use the 7 Habits to:
  - be in charge of our own choices
  - respect all students and adults
  - build a plan to reach our goals
  - work together to help others be better captains
  - be happy and love our leadership schoolNOT A PROMISE, not a rule, this is WHO WE ARE!
- [ The teacher’s name]'s class mission is to be leaders, helpers and friends. We will learn new things, sing and have sparkly fun!
- We will be ready to learn everyday. We will accomplish this by listening, focusing, and being responsible and respectful. We will use the 7 Habits to help us become better leaders. We will remember to be good citizens in our community.

***Leadership jobs.*** The third way for the children to practice leadership instruction involved the utilization of leadership jobs. Every child in each class at ABC School had a leadership job, some were assigned and older children applied for their jobs. Once their job was over they were responsible for training their successor before they moved on to claim responsibility for a new job. A teacher explained, “It’s kind of about finding things that kids can do and then giving them the power to do them.” Finding 25 or more jobs per classroom often needed the ability to “think outside the box” but it was an important piece of practicing leadership that the children have a responsibility. The leadership jobs created “a sense of pride because they’re responsible for making it look like this and...they enjoy doing it.” The staff also believed that their students’ behaviors improved with having job responsibilities. The principal said, “they just walk taller, and focus on you and there’s less distractions among our student[s].” Below are a few examples of leadership jobs that the kindergarten through fifth grade teachers mentioned in their interviews.

- Turning off the lights
- Cleaning the lockers
- ABC order of lunch cards
- Straightening desks at end of the day
- Pick up classroom trash
- Door holder
- Greet visitors
- Responsible for charging the computers



- Change calendar
- Stack chairs
- Erase board
- Run the announcements
- Deliver notes to the office

One specific example of a student leadership job was to volunteer in the cafeteria during lunch and “hand out the condiments and whatever so the ladies who are the café monitors don’t have to spend so much time handing stuff out and can spend more time monitoring the behavior and the noise level.” These cafeteria leadership jobs were cited as being highly sought after, with a lot of student applicants showing interest in the responsibility. If a student did not display leadership habits and ignored his or her job it was taken away. If a student was not doing a good job “I’m going to ask somebody else to take it over and give you some other job that’s different and that’s not quite so intense,” explained one teacher.

### **Parental Perceptions of *The Leader in Me* at ABC School**

Parents had a basic understanding of what *The Leader in Me* entailed and how teachers were using the program at school. They said that their children were being taught the habits, with an emphasis on a habit a week, and that they also used the habits in their home lives. Parents told examples of their children memorizing the habits and showing the behavior, but most participants remarked that it was difficult to get their children to talk in-depth about their school day. Although the parents reported that the children were using the habits, the data from the teachers suggested that the children were

more likely to use or discuss the habits during school. Parent participants said that the teachers looked for “students who automatically gravitate towards doing...the right thing.” The school’s reward system of fake money was discussed as offering a positive opportunity to get caught being a leader. A parent explained that the money were “incentives for the kids to do the right thing.” The school also used positive reinforcement by announcing a child’s name over the intercom if they were being a leader. Overall, an emerging theme from the parental interviews was that the school used the leadership program to accentuate a child’s strengths, and positive reinforcement encouraged leadership and other desired behaviors.

### **Two Categories of Perceptions about *The Leader in Me***

While coding the data from the teacher and parental interviews, the researcher noted that participants spoke of *The Leader and Me* as having the dual outcomes of changing who you are as a person but also improving behavior choices. This dichotomy of working towards a bigger picture or a greater good but also using the program for behavior management was present in every interview conducted for this research. Often, the participants failed to realize that they were speaking about two separate program needs and goals. Overall, the program was being used at ABC School to make leaders and to help students reach their potential, but they were also using the program as a behavior management system in order to decrease students’ negative behaviors.

**The program as behavior management.** Teachers often mentioned that the school utilized the 7 Habits as their behavior system. Certain teachers tracked how often students used the habits, and the school had a school-wide system of earning fake money

to trade for prizes if you were caught showing one of the habits. Although, they were using it in a manner of positive reinforcement, they did expect it to restrain undesired, negative classroom behaviors. Students sometimes needed to be reminded of the 7 Habits behavior during non-structured activities and other times that called for modeling of good behavior. Explained a teacher, “We have no behavior system school wide, the 7 Habits are our behavior system. So any type of movement, whether it’s in the hallway, lining up, transitioning in the classroom, down in the cafeteria...it’s a lot of repeating.” Another teacher said, “It’s just a lot of repeating like this is my expectation, you’re in charge of you, your hands are in front of you, beside you, or behind you, be proactive, you know, that kind of thing.”

A teacher offered the example that a kindergartener got up at an assembly and sang a 7 Habits song to the adults present and talked about the habits. Her teacher was amazed at how far she had come because that student had gotten into a lot of trouble in preschool so “for her to turn around and embrace a program and be asked to do something in front of a room full of adults was huge.” Other teachers said that the program was similar to how they always handled behavior in their classrooms it just “put a name to it.” “I feel like it’s a new terminology for things, but good teaching you kind of do most of these things anyway,” explained a teacher.

Parents also noted that the children had potential but needed to have a change in behavior patterns. “...I think at least just kind of saying the words, giving them the other choice they could have made....hopefully when they’re older they make better choices,” said one parent. The emphasis on making better choices may have caused less bullying,

which was a data code that appeared in both the parent and teacher interviews. One parent explained, “if you’re teaching kids to have that positive sense of self and see themselves as leaders, there’s a lot less need to bully.” The principal reported a 70% decrease in office referrals since the start of the program, but did not offer any additional statistics on student behavior. Overall, many teachers and parents were looking for an outcome of *The Leader in Me* to improve behavior.

**A bigger picture.** The teachers, principal, and the parents agreed that the higher-level goal of the leadership program was to help the children learn skills that made them better individuals all around. A teacher said, “I believe that it helps create students to be better...the best that they can be...I just want the students to reach their full potential.” All of the habits had the possibility to be applied to each student. The teachers cited Think Win-Win with regards to the fact that they said school was not a competition, so their time was about embracing all students’ strengths. “There is respect, um, they’re working towards the vision or goal which is usually the objective set by the teacher,” explained a teacher. Parents often used the words maturity or growth to discuss how they saw their children changing. A parent shared that her son has “matured as far as empathizing with others, learning to show appreciation, and taking responsibility for his actions and emotions.” A parent agreed and said that it may be difficult for the children to see the larger picture. “It’s hard for 7-year-olds to verbalize the greater aspect of it, but I think as they get older they will be able to recognize it.”

## **Perceptions Specific to ABC School**

**English language learners.** The teachers reported perceptions that the language barrier present at ABC School affected both the students' grasp of the leadership and the parents' abilities to use the 7 Habits at home. A teacher explained that for the ELL students it was "taking them a little bit longer to process what the whole program is about." In addition, teachers said that some parents have told them about the students using the 7 Habits at home but the language barrier often prevented parents from vocalizing the stories. They reported difficulty with getting families and the community involved in the program "just because it's a language barrier, nothing to do with them not being interested." A parent explained that the school had a lot of parents for whom English was not their native language but that the school did the best they could by sending home forms in Spanish and trying to cross the "language barrier gap." This language barrier gap may have affected more than just utilization of the habits, as it was also a probable factor in standardized testing results. However, teachers were just stating their own perceptions as it would be impossible to completely quantify how the language barrier affected *The Leader in Me*.

**Home life.** Another variable that arose in the teachers' perceptions were their opinions of and experiences with their students' personal lives. As the teachers and administration continually referenced the type of student population that they served at their school, a code emerged as students' home life. The teachers described an environment that could be tough for many students to overcome. Some of the students at the school came from difficult situations at home. A teacher said, "there are going to be

kids in this school, they're handed a difficult set of cards in their life and they're going to have to think about how they respond to that in a positive and appropriate way." The teachers hoped that students would "take those things [being a leader] and really have that be what defines them and not the circumstances in their lives."

For some students, the leadership skills being taught became a source of possible empowerment and the ability to perhaps improve their lives. Since many students came from an at-risk family environment the teachers said that they wanted students to "do better for themselves than what they're coming from." A teacher explained that the leadership program,

allows school to be peaceful. In our building it's very hostile and kids are angry and lots of times at our school this is the only place they get to eat. We're the only people that love them....Their leadership has allowed things to be more at peace, things are calm and I can actually teach.

Another teacher agreed, "it's really powerful to see a kid who comes from nothing, who has no leadership in his life, no examples, no mentors, no heroes...yet he could tell you about...leadership habits." A common theme in the teacher interviews was that they wanted their students to internalize the habits so they could continue using them in middle and high school, on their own, without the guidance of a formal leadership program. They wanted students to "believe in themselves enough to know that they deserve better than what they've seen." A teacher said:

I'm thinking of the fact that we have lots of students who go home and mom and dad are not there whether it be because they're working or other circumstances, or

children who the shining light of their day is coming to this school and knowing that when I look at them I see leadership potential in them.

Descriptions of some parts of the school community showed struggles and disparity. One teacher stated that in the community “education is sometimes not a priority. It’s where they’re going to get their next meal to put on the table for their family and you know, we have parents working two and three jobs at night.” Although some families did have those time and economic struggles, other families were able to provide a more stable environment so there was a dichotomy present when trying to discuss the parental or guardianship community. The principal explained that, regardless of their home situation, the parents have shown a lot of appreciation for the school teaching their children leadership skills, and she has gotten compliments of the program’s success. Although there was clearly a disparity between students’ home lives, the teachers still perceived that as an important variable in their experiences with implementing the *The Leader in Me* program.

### **Question 2: How Are Adult Leadership Skills Applied to Children?**

Leadership is unique in that everyone has a different opinion on what the definition of leader is and how that becomes applicable to recognizing those traits in others. For the purpose of this research, the participants were asked to elaborate on their own personal definition of leadership. The question was posed to gain both an individual understanding of the participants, and to see if there were any similarities in leadership definitions arising from the school culture affecting the way participants thought. They

were also asked to reflect upon how a set of traditionally adult skills were being taught to the children.

### **Participants' Definition of Leadership**

The participants' personal definitions of leadership showed three emerging categories of: behavior traits, practicing leadership, and focus on a greater good.

Behaviors mentioned were traits such as being accountable, taking initiative, having self-sufficiency and follow-through, and using thinking skills to be a good problem solver.

Seventy-one percent (5 out of 7) of teacher participants gave answers focused partially on a leader taking initiative. Participants also mentioned the need to practice being a leader by having a leadership role, making important contributions, practicing in general, and being an active leader by using leadership skills. Others spoke of acting for a greater good by using words like believe in yourself, being a role model, having confidence, achieving goals, inspiring respect, and being independent. A teacher defined leadership as "...knowing that you're capable of doing something good for yourself. So I feel leadership is knowing that you have something that's important to contribute...."

Another participant spoke of leadership in the students and said, "...I think of children being able to be the best they can be and have others recognize that in them."

When looking for commonalities that would have pointed to a common school culture that contributed to a cohesive definition of leadership, the participants all related leadership to action and the purpose of getting something done, helping out, and problem solving. They saw leadership as taking action, whether it was through setting and achieving goals or serving as a role model who looked out for the needs of others.



Parents mentioned the practice of leadership in a more traditional manner of having a leader and followers. One parent said that leadership was when you “know what you want for yourself and being able to lead others in the same direction.”

An important discrepancy to note is that the questions asked for their own personal definition of leadership and 88% (7 of 8) of the school staff participants replied with an answer comparing leadership to students. Almost all of the teacher participants elaborated and discussed leadership and its applicability to adults, but the majority were unable to take their responses out of a teacher-student relationship and answer with just their opinions. In contrast, 29% of parents applied the definition to children and the remaining 71% (5 out of 7) gave a definition of leadership from an adult perspective. In addition, all participants said leadership happened in conjunction with others and did not take place in isolation. One summarized, “...When you are leading you’re not in front of them you’re shoulder to shoulder with them.”

### **Applying Adult Skills to Children**

To further understand the study participants’ views on leadership, they were asked in the interviews to share their opinions on how one could take leadership skills conventionally thought to be for adults and apply those skills to young children. Covey’s 7 Habits were originally intended for adults to use in their personal lives and in business, but when he began *The Leader In Me* the habits’ names were not altered. *The Leader in Me* has child-friendly descriptions and illustrations of the habits, however the essence remains the same as those habits practiced by adults. One teacher commented that it was interesting to her that the program was originally made for businesses, and that she was

not sure if it was thoroughly planned or premeditated enough to meet the scale of teaching the 7 Habits to millions of children. However, most of the teachers pointed out that they were not applying adult skills to children, but rather teaching something beneficial that the children could understand on their level. A parent agreed when she said that the leadership skills were “basic attitudes and perspectives that are going to be helpful for the kids...throughout their lives.”

When the program was first implemented there were many non-believers who thought the 7 Habits were not child-friendly. A teacher told a story about how a parent stood up at a PTA meeting and said that she did not want her child learning the habits because children do not use those kinds of vocabulary words and, additionally, it would stifle creativity. All of the study participants stated that it took time for the staff, parents, and community to understand that it was possible to teach children these leadership skills. Some parents and members of the community were still lagging in their support of teaching children leadership skills. A teacher said that before her 7 Habits training she thought her student leaders were the ones who knew all the answers, had great behavior, and were perfect “go getters” in the classroom. After learning more about leadership skills she said:

Everyone in the classroom is a leader whether they are, um, the highest type of leader...or have minimal leadership or are a leader in everything they do, but I would say that, um, leaders can be at any level....it’s just a habit...how they conduct themselves. Then in my eyes they are a leader.

The key to taking an adult concept and applying it to children appeared to be using devices like simple explanations, cartoon pictures, relatable examples, and anything else that would be developmentally appropriate for a young child. The following statement from a teacher summarized those feelings.

If you put it into kid friendly terms, things that they're able to apply to themselves they start believing it, and they start doing it, and when you start using it regularly it becomes part of like their culture within themselves.

The children were taught the habits from whenever they enrolled at the school and learned the language and meanings like it was another subject in their curriculum. Both teachers and parents said it was necessary to teach the leadership skills and habits. "If you want adults to be strong leaders [the skills] need to get taught in childhood," explained a parent.

The teachers repeated numerous times that most of their students could tell you the habits by name, give examples of how they use them in their own lives, and also explain what the habits mean. This was more prevalent as the child progressed in age through school and had increased exposure to the program. Teachers of the younger students remarked that they were building the "foundation", while the older students had the ability to expand their knowledge and use higher level thinking to find the habits' applicability to a greater extent. A teacher of younger children explained, "second graders can tell you all the habits and how to use them. They can use a word like synergize because they've been taught it in a language that they understand." In summary, the principal said, "Well all of the 7 Habits are easily applied to children just

like they are to adults. ...It's been done very successfully and been proven to do so at this school and at other schools in the country, in the world.”

### **Teachers’ and Principal’s Usage of Leadership Vocabulary**

The method for teaching leadership at ABC School, was to utilize Covey’s program *The Leader in Me*, which was based upon his book that detailed *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1990, 2008). These 7 Habits were the core of the program and the vocabulary that were used by teachers as the mode of instruction. See Appendix A for an in-depth description of each habit, as defined by *The Leader in Me*. The table below shows the number of times the teachers and the principal referenced one of the 7 Habits during their interviews. In addition it illustrates the amount of times they said the phrase 7 Habits, and the abbreviation habits. Lastly, the table shows the frequency that the interview participants discussed leadership, leader, or any other truncated form that detailed leadership in general.

Table 3

*Habit or Leadership Term Mentioned by Teachers and Principal*

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	Totals
Habit 1: Be Proactive	1	2	8	1	6	1	3	4	26
Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind	1	0	0	2	12	0	1	2	18
Habit 3: Put First Things First	0	0	7	3	3	3	4	3	23
Habit 4: Think Win-Win	1	2	1	0	3	0	2	3	12

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood	0	2	2	0	2	0	2	0	8
Habit 6: Synergize	5	5	1	7	1	2	0	3	24
Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw	0	0	1	2	3	3	3	1	13
“7 Habits” or “Habit”	13	50	41	7	20	15	15	19	180
Totals	21	61	61	22	50	24	30	35	304
“Leader” or “Leadership”	26	62	25	12	4	19	35	22	205

*Note.* Number of times each habit or leadership term was mentioned by the teachers and the principal interview participants; Listed by interview number.

**Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood and Think Win-Win.** Habit 5, Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood had the lowest amount of mentions at eight. Habit 5 required a child to listen to other’s ideas and feelings while they put their viewpoints ahead of their personal needs. A few examples of students using this habit were given when teachers used descriptive words such as leaders are good listeners, maintain eye contact, and try to work out conflicts with others. One teacher said Seek First to Understand was her favorite habit because the student population in the school has difficulty getting over issues without yelling or having physical altercations. She reported “spending a lot of time using I care language and having them just talk with that person....and be respectful.” Children took turns listening and then used their “I messages” to repeat back what they heard the other person say, as an exercise in learning to communicate well with others. This habit included teaching children how to listen

when they were upset, which the teachers reported as “really hard for elementary school kids to do.” At school they would use Habit 5 when conflict arose among students, to have them take a time-out and think about what choices they should be making. Habit 4, Think Win-Win, was similarly low with 12 references. Think Win-Win required balancing needs and having consideration for others while also looking for compromises and third alternatives. These two habits are closely related and were the ones that appeared to be the most difficult for children to incorporate into their lives.

**Sharpen the Saw.** Habit 7, Sharpen the Saw, had the third lowest occurrence with 13 mentions and this habit appeared full of ambiguity. Teachers referenced that this habit was difficult for young children to understand because they did not see people in their lives using saws and they failed to connect why a saw would need to be sharpened. Fifty-seven percent (4 out of 7), of the teacher participants mentioned that the name was not ideal, and that they would suggest a change in the vocabulary. Five of the 13 mentions, (38%), of the habit were in this negative manner. The analogy was confusing to children of this generation, however when they understood that sharpening the saw involved taking care of yourself through nutrition, exercise, learning, playing, and helping others it became a favorite habit of the children. “It’s ok to have fun, it’s ok to watch TV, it’s ok to go outside and play with my friends, but I have things that I have to get done first,” was an example cited by a teacher using both Habit 3 and Sharpen the Saw. A teacher told the following story:

Sharpen the Saw...it’s so weird to them because you know, saw, they don’t know, but they do understand....Our Sharpen the Saw goal was to run two laps

every day at recess to see if we could, um, get healthier.... We kept track and we had like a graph and we put stars on it every time we ran our two laps so it was a big, huge deal.

**Begin with the End in Mind.** Begin with the End in Mind, Habit 2, had 18 mentions, however, 12 of those were from one teacher. If we assumed that teacher to be an outlier and took her answers out of the compilation, that habit would have six references and would be the category with the lowest number. Habit 2 involved planning, setting goals, contributing to personal and school mission statements, being a good citizen, and trying to make a difference. “Begin with the End in Mind... can be very vague for a child and hard to grasp but if you bring it down to their level and you say, well, it’s making a plan then they understand.” That teacher further elaborated that she showed the students her plan book so they could see that even the teacher had to begin with a plan before moving forward.

It is valuable to note that although the specific phrasing of Begin with the End in Mind was not utilized as frequently, the habit was referenced the most in examples given by the teachers and the principal. It had the overwhelming majority of the examples stated in interviews. Instead of using the habit name, they often said phrases like goal setting, good citizen, and beginning with a goal in mind. A common practice in the school was having the students graph their grades in order to help them “make the right choices to reach the goals that they’ve set.” Goals were made to be measurable and attainable so that students could reach their achievements and were able to examine the goal on a daily or weekly basis, which helped the students stay on track.

Making a class mission statement would also be considered practice for Habit 2. One teacher explained how her class was reading a picture book about people helping the planet. She used the book as an example to help the students understand the need for a class mission statement. Together they decided to include three goals into their mission statement: learn to read, do math, and Be Proactive. The students wanted to “leave the room every day saying that they were able to try their best today” and together they combined those thoughts into their class mission statement.

**Put First Things First.** The third habit of Put First Things First meant that a child was organized and made a plan that spent time on getting the most important responsibilities finished before having fun. This habit would be a common occurrence in most elementary schools, as students are taught organizational skills and to finish work before having free time. The 23 references in the interviews often discussed work completion, and doing tasks in order. Examples were “...let’s Put First Things First, we need to put our name on our paper in order for us to continue” and “are you Putting First Things First,...finish your paper before you can go over here to centers.” A student example was “oh [teacher] last night I put First Things First and I made sure that I got my homework done before I went to my baseball game.”

**Synergize.** Synergize, Habit 6, was mentioned 24 times and mostly in the context of students doing collective work and learning how to get along well with others in a group situation. A teacher related that in the third week of school she had her students do partner work on a math worksheet and she noticed that most pairs were sitting next to each other but not working together. So she noted that she needed to focus more on



synergizing and reminding the students to help each other because it was up to the teacher to facilitate that practice. In contrast, a different teacher said she could put her students into groups and they would synergize and meet the expectations for the assignment.

**Be Proactive.** Lastly, Habit 1 Be Proactive had the most mentions throughout the interviews with 26. This was the first habit taught in the program because it encompassed being a responsible person that took initiative and ownership over his or her actions and feelings. One teacher defined proactive as “good leaders see what needs to be done and then they do it, and they don’t ask for anyone to pay attention to them while they do it, they just make sure that it gets done.” “Be proactive...and make sure you’re looking at me so we can get all of this information in, um because the goal is for you to learn,” was an example from a different teacher. Yet a different teacher remarked that proactive behavior was rewarding as a teacher because they were teaching children to show leadership behavior at all times. She explained, that the “choice is yours even when you don’t think anyone is looking.”

An example given by a teacher described a third grade girl who got into trouble at lunch for throwing things. The teacher gave the student a consequence but also talked with her about why the behavior happened. She told the student that it was good leadership because she took responsibility for the situation and didn’t blame the behavior on anyone else. Part of being proactive included teaching students that “everyone is going to mess up but take responsibility for your own actions and move forward because that’s what you have to do in life.”

**Additional vocabulary.** Throughout the interviews the teachers and principal would sometimes not use a specific habit name but said the “7 Habits” or shortened it to just “habits”, which occurred 180 times. As another point of notation, the researcher tallied the number of times participants mentioned leadership in general as decided through the use of the words leadership, leader, or any truncated form. The idea of leadership was referenced 205 times. Taken as a totality, there were 509 specific word choice instances pertaining to leadership as a whole, whether it was through the 7 Habits or leadership in general. This showed a large focus on the usage of leadership specific vocabulary.

**Parents’ Usage of Leadership Vocabulary**

As a comparison to the teacher data from above, Table 4 below shows the number of times the parent participants referenced one of the 7 Habits during their interviews. In addition it illustrates the amount of times they said the phrase 7 Habits, and the abbreviation habits. Lastly, the table shows the frequency that the parent participants discussed leadership, leader, or any other truncated form of leadership.

Table 4

*Habit or Leadership Term Mentioned by Parents*

	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	#15	Totals
Habit 1: Be Proactive	0	1	0	0	3	1	2	7
Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	5
Habit 3: Put First Things First	2	0	1	0	0	2	2	7
Habit 4: Think Win-Win	0	6	1	2	2	0	1	12

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Habit 6: Synergize	0	1	1	0	3	0	1	6
Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw	0	0	0	1	1	3	1	6
“7 Habits” or “Habit”	6	3	18	7	11	5	6	56
Totals	10	11	25	11	21	11	13	102
“Leader” or “Leadership”	3	10	16	2	12	10	9	62

*Note.* Number of times each habit or leadership term was mentioned by the parent interview participants; Listed by interview number.

**Think Win-Win.** Parent participants mentioned Habit 4, Think Win-Win the most frequently with 12 times, almost double the amount of references that the other habits received. Parents spoke highly about Win-Win because it allowed for both parties to find happiness within compromise, something that they felt like their children used a lot when arguing with siblings or peers. When their children were using Think Win-Win the examples included trying to empathize, understand others, and make everyone happy.

**Synergize.** Parents mentioned Habits 1-3 and 6 and 7 about the same amount during the interviews with a range of 5 to 7 times each. Synergizing, Habit 6, appeared to be enjoyed by children because they got to work together with others and focus on fun. They used the motto “together is better.” A parent told an example about when she helped her child clean up toys and her daughter said, “We were synergizing. It’s better when we work together cause it gets done faster.”

**Be Proactive.** Habit 1, Be Proactive, had seven specific mentions by the parents, but it was discussed much more frequently when they used vocabulary such as follow the rules, work hard, be responsible, have initiative, and make good choices. The phrase

“make good choices” was used numerous times during the interviews to describe children showing proactive leadership behavior. A parent who explained that her child used to be “reactive” gave an example of “proactive” behavior. Now that child “...instead of acting negatively to a situation, she will try to find a way to act proactively.”

**Begin with the End in Mind and Put First Things First.** Begin with the End in Mind, Habit 2, was only named five times but parents gave more general examples that their children showed great skills in planning ahead or thinking about the steps needed to meet a goal. Also included in Habit 2 were examples of children being good citizens, helping around the house with chores, and trying to find ways in which they could be of service to others. The habit Put First Things First had seven specific mentions and the most common example given was when their children would complete their homework before going outside or doing something fun. That example was also one that teachers referenced in their interviews.

**Sharpen the Saw.** Habit 7, Sharpen the Saw, was a habit that the children focused on at home but parents were more likely to use the general descriptions of nutrition, play, fun, and being with friends. A parent told a story about her child being mindful about eating healthy foods, portion control, and exercising because Habit 7 had made her “more conscious of how things impact herself, and how that can impact others around her.” Children appeared to love to sharpen the saw because they could increase their well being through play, outside time, and rest. “My son can’t wait to play games and do the fun things in sharpening the saw,” said a parent.

**Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood.** Like the teachers, parents also remarked that Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, Habit 5, was difficult for children to practice but also hard for adults to incorporate into their own lives as well. A parent told the example that she was in a situation with her son arguing over when to do homework and she realized that she needed to listen to what her son was trying to say. She said, “[Child’s Name], you know...I need to Seek First to Understand and what I’m getting from you with your body language and your behavior is that you’re upset...so let’s just talk about this right now.” Other parents said that they valued the lesson behind the habit and they wanted their children to gain mastery of seeing things through other perspectives and learn to have disagreements without getting upset. “The biggest thing to me that they’re being taught about leadership is to ensure that they are looking at situations....hearing what others have to say instead of just interjecting points,” explained a parent.

**The 7 Habits.** In order to encourage a focus on the habits and to gain an understanding of parents’ knowledge of the program, the researcher specifically asked about their child’s favorite habit or the habit that they talked about the most at home. All of the parents were able to name a specific habit for an answer. Sharpen the Saw had the most votes at three, since the children enjoyed the focus on “taking care of their body” and spending time with friends and family. All of the other habits were also mentioned with the exclusion of Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood.

## Comparison of Parent and Teacher Data

The table below compared the parent and teacher usage of the specific 7 Habits and leadership vocabulary during their interviews.

Table 5

### *Comparison Between School Staff and Parents*

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	“7 Habits”	Total	Leadership
Staff	26	18	23	12	8	24	13	180	304	205
Parents	7	5	7	12	3	6	6	56	102	62

*Note.* Comparison of the number of times school staff and parents mentioned the 7 Habits and leadership during their interviews; Listed by habit number and vocabulary name.

As the data from the table shows, parents were more likely to not use specific 7 Habits language but they talked about their children and their leadership skills with general vocabulary words. The parents said a specific habit or used 7 Habits phrasing 102 times, in comparison to 304 times by the teachers. In general terms, teachers discussed leadership or leaders 205 times and the parents only had 62 references. The teachers referenced the precise language more than three times the amount of the parents. An additional point of notice was that the parents utilized Habit 4 (Think Win-Win) with the same frequency as the teachers.

### **Understanding the Discrepancies in the Language Usage**

The largest noticeable discrepancy in the comparison of the teacher and parental 7 Habits table was that the parents discussed the specific habits, 7 Habits, and leadership far less than the educators. A parent explained that in her house they supported the habits

but “don’t necessarily use the terminology of the habit.” This theme emerged throughout the parent interviews because they spoke generally about their children and had difficulty giving specific examples of their children’s habit knowledge or instances in which they were leaders. In the researcher’s opinion, the lack of program verbiage did not point to a parent deficit in their expertise on their children, but more to a lack of confidence about the 7 Habits. The parents often knew the habits but would seem tentative to state the phrases or would ask the researcher if they were saying the name correctly. One parent knew all about the habits but had to clarify with the researcher that they were indeed called “habits” and not something else. Another parent used a notebook and list of the habits during her interview so she could have a point of reference. Therefore, it was the researcher’s perception that the teachers had a higher mention rate of the habits because they said them all day to their students. Combined with an apparent lack of confidence about the habits, the parent data showed that parents may need to receive additional education to increase their knowledge of the habits.

A parent explained that her son had been in the school for four years but she had just started reading the *The Leader in Me* book this year. Prior to reading the book she had read pamphlets the school sent home but did not really understand the program well. After reading the first four habits in the book she stated, “I really liked it...felt like that was something that I could do for my family that was really life changing, and um had the core of what I wanted for my family....that I felt could change them.” After reading the book the parent said she noticed more of the behaviors in her third grade and kindergarten aged children. She reported that the book gave her “examples in my head”

made it “fresh in my mind,” and that she was “looking at it through a different view.” That parent also said that she felt the need to become a “better leader myself” and to “have better influence” on her children. The book also encouraged parents to learn the habits themselves and use them at home. A parent explained that her child said, “Mommy we’re thinking Win-Win and so we’re learning it together (even though the 9-year-old has known about it longer).”

### **Developmental Appropriateness of Teaching Leadership to Children**

When the data were examined pertaining to the interview question that asked what age leadership instruction should begin, they conclusively illustrated that participants felt that young children could be taught leadership skills. Every answer given was age 5 or younger. The most common response was from about 6 months on or whenever a child learned to talk and understand. Other responses included “as soon as possible,” “the younger the better,” and some gave evidence that the preschool teachers at ABC School taught the program. Younger children or toddlers may need more redirection, practice, and opportunities for internalization but they would have the cognitive ability to understand basic leadership. A parent said, “I think that kids are a lot more capable of things than we sometimes give them credit for.”

Another consensus was that there does not necessarily need to be an age defining point as long as instruction was age appropriate. Participants pointed out that full understanding and use of the habits was based upon the children’s developmental abilities. Both parents and teachers discussed that young children, aged 5-7, needed time to gain the ability to explain the 7 Habits in their own words. “There are certain things



that children can and can not do until they hit a certain age, but we want them to be the best they can be at their developmental level,” said a parent. When they are young the basic instruction would be about making the child aware of the choices that he or she can make. A parent expounded on that topic, “It’s really hard then but...just kind of saying the words, giving them the other choice they could have made, acting all those things out, can start really young. Then hopefully when they’re older they make better choices.”

A first grade teacher said that she read a book to her class and the students said they should not act like that main character. She said, “maybe they’re not necessarily saying a habit but they’re relating to what they should be doing” and the habits also gave young children the “ability to problem solve for themselves and not rely on an adult.” The developmental goal for all of the children was to have them understand the habits at their level, and not memorize the words but be able to learn the bigger picture and the “why behind” each one.

Unique to this school, because they are teaching a leadership program, teachers noticed that students who came in after kindergarten and did not have exposure to the program struggled more with their behavior and acclimating to the school and the leadership curriculum. One teacher said, “...there’s a glaring difference between the kids who have been here for a few years and seen the program and then the new kids coming in.” Another teacher echoed that sentiment by stating that the students at the school that had been there since kindergarten had much stronger leadership qualities than new students. Eighty-eight percent of the teacher and staff participants (7 out of 8) mentioned that children coming to the school in the latter grades did not have the same level of

leadership skills as those that had received instruction in kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher was the exception, since all of her students, minus those in the school's preschool program, had yet to be exposed to the leadership program. The school's preschool program was limited, with an enrollment of three students in the 2014-2015 school year, so those students would not have affected the data in any significant manner and therefore the teachers were not included in the study.

### **Perceptions of Accountability for Teaching Leadership**

Data showed that parents should be the responsible party for initially teaching leadership skills to children, but that would be the answer in an ideal situation. The reality is that very few parents in the world are teaching their young children leadership skills. Therefore, the teachers in a leadership school would be the first person to teach the skills. Although they may not teach the skills first, both the teachers and the *The Leader in Me* book (2008) stated that it was integral to have parental support at home practicing the 7 Habits and leadership skills.

During the parent interviews they agreed that it was their duty to teach their own children leadership skills, but most stated that they do not teach leadership skills but rather "how to be a good person" or other behavior creeds such as the "Golden Rule." Parents were not considering basic parenting and encouraging good behavior as "teaching leadership skills," but they said that they did their best to impart nice manners. They believed that their children were entering ABC School with the foundation and knowledge required in "being a good person."

A little less than half of the parent participants, (3 out of 7) admitted to not using the 7 Habits very much at home, if at all, and the remaining half used the habits frequently. Three parents said that they had the habits hanging on the wall at home. An additional parent said that her behavior reward system at home also incorporated rewards when her children showed leadership behavior or used the habits. Those parents not using the habits at home expressed regret that they did not support what was learned at school, and spoke of an interest in using them more frequently with their children in the future. The data showed some parent-school disconnect because only those parents who reported using the habits at home also said that their students discussed and used the habits on a regular basis. The teachers said that almost all of their students used the habits, therefore some of the students were showing more 7 Habit knowledge and usage at school and did not have the transfer to their home lives to such a large extent.

### **Parental Involvement and Leadership Instruction**

Parental involvement was an area of school improvement that was cited for the 2014-2015 school year at ABC School. The improvement included parents being involved in the regular school day and academics, and also reinforcing the 7 Habits at home. One teacher said hearing the phrase “the 7 Habits” could be intimidating because the parents may think it was something they must do “because when you think of a habit, that’s something that starts becoming ingrained and it can scare parents away.” There was an immense need to have parental accountability in place because if the student is learning something at school and those involved in their home life ignore that knowledge then it may show the child that perhaps leadership is not necessary. It would be

necessary to have the parent-teacher partnership for consistency. To address this issue, some of the grade levels added the Habit of the Week to their weekly newsletter and sent suggestions to parents for ways they could discuss or reinforce that particular habit. This allowed for students to teach their parents or share the habits with them. "...What's neat is they're taking all of these things that are being taught and they're bringing them home and so now the parents are learning as well," said a teacher.

One teacher pointed out the virtues of having siblings that taught each other the habits and expressed how being a role model for other students could enrich the program. The principal agreed when she said "peers can help reinforce good leadership." Along with getting parental, sibling, and peer support, was the need to make sure that the community was involved in the program. It would be imperative to get the neighborhood and community leaders involved because they could "help mold our leaders for the future as well" explained one teacher. Although the teachers were doing the majority of the work in leadership instruction, an ideal goal for the program was summarized as "anyone that comes in contact with the kid" should be involved in teaching leadership.

### **Time Spent on Leadership Instruction**

Although the teachers reported that *The Leader in Me* was integrated into their entire day, the researcher asked them to try and quantify how many minutes a day they spent on leadership instruction alone, if it were to be extracted and calculated. Teachers expressed difficulty with this line of thinking, and said responses like "that's hard," "I mean it's from the minute they come in till the minute they leave". Another teacher pointed out that discussions come up that are unplanned and she did not want to

discourage any students from discussing leadership, so the days could vary. The school principal originally replied 10 minutes a day, but recanted that statement after she thought some more. She said: “The habits are so woven into every single lesson that it’s hard to quantify how many minutes a day that is because it’s all enmeshed...you can apply the habits to almost anything you’re doing during the day....” Other answers varied from 15 minutes a day on direct instruction, to an hour or two hours a day, to half of the day. It appeared that each teacher was quantifying their leadership teaching in different ways, because even those that chose a small amount of time gave examples of their leadership instruction that would take longer than 10 minutes to happen. The disparity originated from the question saying “leadership instruction” and the teachers using the habits so frequently throughout the day in informal situations. A teacher remarked, “It’s a constant, it’s endless...hours of teaching and showing them and modeling.” Another teacher who said leadership takes up half of the school day clarified with “I don’t want to say it takes most of the day because...I don’t want it to sound like it’s overpowering our standards that we have to teach because that’s not the case.” Nevertheless, the leadership instruction held a prominent place in the school day.

**Question 3: Do the Children Show Characteristics of Transformational Leadership? If so, What Is the Behavioral Evidence?**

Transformational leadership is defined as a person who works with others to create a shared vision to reach mutual goals. Transformational leaders build relationships with others and also act as role models, with everyone sharing the roles needed to find success. There is a focus on envisioning a future goal, then motivating and working

towards that common purpose. In summary, a transformational leader works with other people to create a shared vision in order to build organizations and groups that have directional goals and a cohesive purpose. Transformational leadership served as the working definition for this paper, and the research examined *The Leader in Me* for signs of transformational leadership.

### **The 4 I's of Transformational Leadership in *The Leader in Me***

Research studies showed that transformational leadership consisted of four main behaviors that leaders used to achieve their goals. Transformational leaders used the four methods of: (1) idealized influence; (2) inspirational motivation; (3) intellectual stimulation; and (4) individualized consideration. Idealized influence is defined as when a person gains trust and respect by behaving in a manner that serves as a role model for others. The second I, inspirational motivation, involves being inspirational through adding meaning and challenge to work. Intellectual stimulation is a method that uses innovation and creativity to examine ideas or problems from a new angle or insight, which includes problem solving. The last I, individualized consideration, encourages leaders to act in a coaching or mentoring manner. These I's were behavioral evidence of transformational leadership.

Teachers and parents used all of the above vocabulary to describe leadership, which fell under the categories of the 4 I's of leadership. The 7 Habits and *The Leader in Me* were teaching behaviors of the 4 I's and striving for the outcome that those children in the program would become transformational leaders. Throughout the interviews the teachers and staff told many examples of students who showed signs of transformational

leadership. However, when asked to briefly look at the definitions for the 4 I's and to give a student example of that behavior, the ones that were named the most frequently were idealized influence and individualized consideration, with intellectual stimulation being mentioned about half of the time.

Idealized influence seemed to resonate the best with the teachers because of the role model aspect. One teacher told a story about a student she had this year that sometimes misbehaved but that another student in the class tried to be a positive role model. The other student “shows him this is the way we act, without joining in on the negative behavior. Another example that was given described a student using the 4 I's that had a “higher level of thinking...more initiative, concern for others, wants everybody to have a chance to learn...great for a 6-year-old to have that quality.”

Parent interviews were conducted over the phone so they were not asked to look at the definitions of the 4 I's, so the researcher examined interview transcripts for evidence of transformational leadership behavior. The behaviors mentioned the most were under the categories of idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation. There were numerous examples given of children who served as a role model for other young kids, parents, and in social situations. A parent told the story that her son's baseball coach asked the team to help clean up after practice and that her son was out on the field helping for the longest amount of time and also brought back the most equipment to put away. Intellectual stimulation involved critical thinking, problem solving and goal planning, which were habits that parents saw their children practicing quite frequently. Individualized consideration was mentioned briefly by some parents that their children

had seen improvements in consideration for others and putting others first. Lastly, Inspirational motivation and working towards a shared vision was difficult to assess. It was particularly difficult to evaluate if children of elementary school age were working towards a bigger picture and being inspirational. Some parents mentioned that the children's behavior was the inspiration to start using the 7 Habits with themselves. One parent said that part of her behavior reinforcement system included both gaining a marble if the child showed leadership, and also getting one if the parent was caught showing non-leadership behavior. That family added meaning and challenge while working towards their family vision of having all members behaving as leaders.

### **Children's Knowledge About Leadership**

Transformational leadership can further be understood by examining the data to see what the children were specifically learning about leadership. The study participants said that students were expected to be able to say all of the habits, give an example, and understand why such behavior would be helpful. Once they learned the habits, the teachers reported that students started to make connections and see parallels on their own. A teacher gave an example that she taught her third graders about famous people and they gave examples of how the person, for example Ben Franklin, thought Win-Win, was Proactive, and Put First Things First. "...It seems a little regurgitated, you know, because they're like oh this is what I've been told, but what they don't realize is that we see changes in the students because of the program," said a teacher. Students knew they were learning skills that helped increase their effectiveness and may be what some potential employers would be looking for in the future.



Teachers also expected students to recognize the 7 Habits and behaviors outside of school. They said the students told them stories about how they used it at home or recognized the habits in their own lives. Some examples given during the interview showed that students could point out leadership habits from people in the world around them, famous celebrities, or those in the news. Parents agreed that their children learned the habits and applied the habits at home with their families and friends. A parent said that her son “used an experience that we had at home and compared it to a habit that he was learning at school.” Children were aware that the leadership skills were a “positive” influence in their lives.

However, one of the interview questions asked about the children’s knowledge of leadership, trying to garner information about their leadership knowledge in general, and both teachers and parents failed to answer this question correctly. Follow-up questions aimed at getting the information sometimes showed the same outcome. Study participants often cited examples from *The Leader in Me* or discussed 7 Habits behavior. When they were specifically asked about knowledge outside of the program the answers were incomplete, vague, or the participant would still discuss behaviors relevant to the 7 Habits. It appeared that students were mostly learning leadership skills that were tightly aligned with what was dictated by *The Leader in Me* and the 7 Habits.

### **Examples of Children Being Leaders**

The examples below illustrated specific instances when participants told a story about a child being a leader in a manner that stood out in their memories. The children

were not given names in order to maintain anonymity and to protect their identities. The examples were stories told by the teachers, principal, and parents, using their own words.

**Student example #1.** It's that whole mentality of her taking ownership...she's the one that had to talk twice because her family speaks Spanish, but she comes here and she's, you know, speaking English. She didn't need to be asked to help explain to the Spanish-speaking student what we were doing. She was just really good at knowing ok, I need to help this person right now....She just took responsibility for things and she would do them and she took ownership of her academics. I mean she made mistakes from time to time would...get in small amounts of trouble but then she would take responsibility for her actions....The 7 Habits has probably changed her life because she would talk about it all the time, and she would come tell me stories about how she was using them at home and about her little brother and how she was teaching him the 7 Habits too.

**Student example #2.** He came to us and said he had done something that was wrong at school...and he pulled out a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket. He said this is a list that I wrote laying down on my bed at my house of all the people that I need to go back and apologize to for things that I did wrong. And I'm crossing out the names as I go down the list and I keep it in my pocket...and I bring it to school every day...I need to make amends for some of the things I've done in the past because I don't act like that anymore. We explained that to our *Leader in Me* coach and she brought him to a public speaking opportunity...with 200 to 300 people in the room and that young man stood up and explained about

his tattered piece of paper with the names on it as he made amends, which he attributes to the leadership that he has learned at this school...That young man got a standing ovation. His father had recently gotten out of jail...and was present...and his father weeped [sic].

**Example #3.** Every year we do a fifth grade kind of party for the kids that are moving on to middle school next year....Last year we actually had, um, a group of students who came...to the PTA board and said, you know, we would like to plan our own party. This group of students...met during lunch at a separate table where they could talk...and they actually put together multiple themes, multiple options for what they wanted for lunch...and took a poll of all the fifth grade classes and said what do you want. I think it's really cool that, you know, they took the initiative and said hey, we want to do this for ourselves.

### **Understanding Children as Leaders**

During the interviews, participants answered questions designed to gain an understanding of exactly what a student leader looked like and what behavior qualities they possessed. Their answers about student leaders showed two categories: internal factors, and external actions. The following table lists the codes of behavior taken from the interviews after data analyses and grouped by the internal and external categories. The codes are listed as the participants' own words and ideas.

Table 6

*Internal Factors and External Actions*

Internal Factors	External Actions
Confidence	Consideration for Others
OK With Failure	Empower
Positive	Helpful
Understand Leadership	Try New Things
Higher Level Thinking	Accountable
Drive/Motivation	Follow-Through
Self-Esteem	See Leadership in Others
Believe in Yourself and Others	Model/Good Example
Be Best You Can Be	Problem Solve
Honest	Seek Answers
Emotional Wellness	Take Initiative
Understand Strengths/Weaknesses	Volunteer
Independent	Good Communicator
Inspiring	Self-Control
Open-Minded	Responsible
Maturity	Meet Expectations
Perspective	Do Right Thing
Curious	Respectful
Lifelong Learner	Complete Work
	Positive Interactions
	Teamwork
	Goal Setting
	Good Listener
	Plans/Organized
	Mentor
	Physical Fitness

*Note.* Internal factors and external actions present in student leaders.

A teacher gave her version when she described:

Leaders can be at any level, they can work together, they can set a goal and reach it, they are confident with speaking...they are happy...when someone has grasped

the leadership...and just kind of their daily routine is a habit of who they are...how they conduct themselves, then in my eyes they are a leader.

An example of a child leader that showed both internal and external changes was illustrated as a student who came into his third grade year having very challenging behavior, little familial support and presence at home, and difficulty with life in general. The teacher said that by the end of the year the student “was confident” and “knew that he was in charge of his choices, that if he wanted to do well, he was going to do it and it didn’t matter if he had other things that were chaotic in his life.” Teachers remarked that “they’re all leaders” but some students had a stronger tendency to show these traits than others.

### **Observational Evidence of Transformational Leadership**

To further answer the research question and discover if *The Leader in Me* showed behavioral evidence of transformational leadership, the researcher conducted observations on two separate days, specifically looking for transformational behavior.

**Observation one.** The first observation was conducted during an afternoon in September when ABC School put on a *The Leader in Me* program in conjunction with FranklinCovey as a promotion for the release of the second edition of *The Leader in Me* book. The event had a keynote speaker of the principal from A.B. Combs (the Covey prototype), and used a panel format with students and a teacher. The five students on the panel in grades 1 through 5, showed all four traits of transformational leadership throughout the event. During the keynote speaker portion the students sat quietly, and respectfully listened to a talk that lasted over an hour. Their idealized influence behavior

may have been the reason that they were chosen to participate in the event. Prior to the event beginning these same children greeted guests, maintained eye contact and, overall, acted like role models.

During their speaking time, the students shared their own stories and opinions on leadership, in addition to answering questions from the audience. Their answers about why they wanted to learn leadership showed inspirational motivation because they spoke to a bigger picture. They felt that the program made them “better people” a “great leader” and enriched their lives. One child said that in kindergarten she “wasn’t the best” and “didn’t know what to do” but that over her years at the school she “got more mature all because of the 7 Habits.” Additional answers spoke to their intellectual stimulation as the students were forced to examine leadership from new angles and answer questions from audience members without being able to prepare an answer. When asked about how the 7 Habits have changed their lives, a student replied, “It teaches you how to succeed in life. If it wasn’t for the 7 Habits I wouldn’t be who I am today and it’s really great. They give you the opportunity to be yourself.”

During the panel, some students would get flustered and forget what they wanted to say and you could see the other ones encouraging them or giving pats on the back for a job well done. The students not only showed individualized consideration towards each other but they were very encouraging to teachers who were asking questions about implementing the program in their own schools. Some of their answers also illustrated examples of fellow classmates showing individualized consideration. A student talked about using her peers as leadership mentors and inspiration for her own actions when she

said, “I saw older kids walking around the hallway and saw that they were following the habits. They were making good choices so I decided it’s time for a change.”

**Observation two.** The second observation was conducted during a normal school day near the end of October. The researcher observed lessons being taught in fourth and second grade classes. During each observation, the researcher took field notes and also used the observational checklist (Appendix G) as a guide for locating transformational leadership behavior. The school hallways were named after the 7 Habits and every hallway had at least one leadership quote painted on the wall. Much of the displayed student work referenced leadership or the 7 Habits. Each of the classrooms had the habits, their mission statement, and a 7 Habits poster on the wall. One classroom had a mirror with the phrase “I see a leader” written on the wall.

The first observational time took place in a fourth grade classroom. After knocking on the door, the student who had the job of classroom greeter opened the door, shook hands, and welcomed the researcher to the room. The teacher was finishing up the morning meeting and discussing the class mission statement with her students. Then the class transitioned back to their seats to prepare to switch classrooms so they could be taught a different subject. Their teacher reminded them that she was looking for kids who were “being proactive and ready to line up” and “remember what your end in mind is: to pass the test.” Once they left the room, the other teacher’s students came inside and prepared their items for reading class. Both classes lined up quietly and efficiently and the arriving class sat down and waited patiently for the teacher to begin her instruction. There were 22 students in the reading and language arts class. The teacher did a whole

class review lesson about what they had read in a story yesterday, and the students sat and paid attention. Most of them raised their hands but a few called out answers, and when they talked out of turn the teacher advised them to “raise your hand and Think Win-Win.” After the whole group lesson the children transitioned to their desks and two students held their class quiet sign to encourage classmates to settle down.

The teacher described the students’ assignments for the next part of reading and then the class began individual work while the teacher conducted a reading group lesson. When she explained the choices in activities that the students would have the teacher told them “it’s your choice and you need to finish your quiz but if you already finished it yesterday then you Put First Things First.” The researcher observed students using their organizational skills and planning while they were working on writing rough drafts. Other students went next door, without being reminded, to borrow some classroom computers. Additional students went quietly to the library, while others left the room for ELL services or worked with a reading specialist at a table in the room. Many students helped each other with computer issues instead of interrupting the teacher’s reading group. The researcher did three on task/off task observations of the students to assess if they were showing leadership behavior in following through, listening to directions, and showing self-initiative in assignments. The on-task behavior scans of the class yielded results of 82%, 91%, and 100% with a class average of 91%.

During this time, two students were chosen to share their leadership notebooks with the researcher. One girl was very proud of her book and used many of the 7 Habits while she explained each page in depth. Her Begin with the End in Mind page tracked



the class goal of reading a certain amount of books for their Reading Olympics. She explained that the program had just started but that she had already finished a book that was “very difficult” and “a high reading level, and it was about a queen.” The notebook also tracked the student’s “class dojo points,” a system they used to earn points when showing leadership behavior, and she had already met her first nine-week goal ahead of time and was on track to meet her overall points goal. The second student who shared his notebook was shy about the contents but he was proud of his papers from last year that showed how his reading level had improved, and that he had met his personal goal of getting better at basketball. His binder also contained papers from last year that held positive notes, academic achievements on multiplication, a good citizenship award, and an honor roll certificate. At the end of the observation time two students escorted the teacher to the next classroom and discussed why they liked being at a leadership school. One female student said she liked the hallway signs that said the 7 Habits and the leadership quotes on the walls, while the male student said his favorite thing was to synergize. They both discussed how we were synergizing by finding the second grade classroom together. When they went to return to their classroom, the students thanked the researcher for coming to their school.

The second observational time was conducted in a second grade class with 21 students who were doing rotations during reading time. The teacher was teaching reading groups while the other students were assigned to: (a) read to self, (b) word work, (c) listen to reading (on computers); or (d) work on writing. The assignments were listed on the Promethean Board and a timer counted down the remaining minutes until the board

switched the groups. The switch was entirely student self-sufficient without any prompting from the teacher other than reminders to keep the noise level down. The students were also finishing up their snacks and they were responsible for eating respectfully, cleaning up after themselves, and washing their hands. The students assigned the word study were working together on spelling words and doing group worksheets. Those at the computers listening to reading helped each other log on and find the correct websites. Others repeatedly helped one student, as he appeared to have difficulty understanding where to go on the computer due to a language barrier. The class kept their reading supplies in individual magazine holders and each student could be observed taking care of his or her supplies, organizing the items, and returning it to the storage location.

During their reading activities, students also used the classroom restroom as needed and they seemed responsible about following a routine of putting hand sanitizer on their desk beforehand to signal they were in the restroom, and then using the sanitizer upon their return before placing it back where it belonged. One student accidentally knocked over a chart that tumbled some teaching supplies and he first walked away but then came back and cleaned up the mess without being asked by his teacher. The ELL teacher knocked on the door and the student who had the responsibility to answer the door did his job and retrieved the student that was needed, while another student carried out his job by turning off the lights.

The researcher conducted four on-task/off-task observations of student behavior, which resulted in 81%, 76%, 81%, and 76% of the class on-task. The similarity in

numbers was caused by most of the same students being off-task during multiple observations. Overall, the class had an average of 79% on-task and the most prevalent off-task behaviors were talking instead of working, doing activities other than work, and finding ways to waste time. There were three male students and one female who were not really engaged in their assignments during the reading activities. The teacher spoke to two of the students and said that she was disappointed in their behavior choices. All of the students working with the teacher at the reading group table were on-task and following directions during their direct instruction time. During reading time, the researcher observed three 20-minute rotation periods.

When reading was over the students cleaned up their areas and some helped out more by cleaning up the computer cords and putting away some beanbag chairs. All of the students sat down at their desks, got out their math journals, and waited for the teacher's directions. Before starting math, the class followed a "brain break" dance that was projected onto the board from the computer. The break consisted of an animated robot that led the class in some robot dance moves and exercises and the children listened to the directions carefully and did each dance move calmly while watching out for others' safety. They laughed and had fun but it was in an organized and respectful manner. The class then sat down and began to listen to a whole group math instruction.

Overall, the students as a whole showed many of the leadership behaviors on the observational checklist. The observation did not allow for many opportunities for students to share their leadership knowledge, so the researcher was mostly looking for behavior clues in their actions. Table 7, shown below, illustrates the leadership

behavioral traits as explained by *The Leader in Me* and the literature on transformational leadership. In addition, the last column lists the behavior traits that the researcher was looking for, and those behavior traits in bold were the ones that were observed in the students during observation number two.

Table 7

*Leadership Behavioral Traits, Transformational Leadership, and Behavior Check List*

7 Habits and <i>The Leader in Me</i>	Characteristics of Transformational Leadership	Possible Student Behaviors Shown in School
Independence Habits 1, 2, & 3	Idealized Influence Inspirational Motivation	Act as Role Models Be Hard Workers
Initiative, Self-motivation Self-confidence Planning skills Goal setting skills Organization Have dreams and plans Meaningful contributions Focus on being your best Do the right thing	Active leadership Optimistic, Empowerment Plan Goal congruence Develop organizational goals Innovate, Shared vision Meaningful contributions Inspire, Set good example Act in a way to build respect	<b>Show leadership</b> <b>Optimistic, Confident</b> <b>Planning, Use best effort</b> <b>Set and achieve goals</b> <b>Organizational skills</b> <b>Plan for the future</b> Meaningful interactions <b>Positive, Set good example</b> <b>Responsible, Respectful</b>
Interdependence Habits 4, 5, & 6	Inspirational Motivation Intellectual Stimulation Individualized Consideration	Make Good Choices Get Along with Others Show Helpful Behaviors
Conflict management Communication skills Honesty and Courage Fairness, Respect others Openness to suggestions Teamwork Problem solving Decision making Creativity Empathy, Listen to others Optimize others' talents Value strengths	New way of looking at things Effective communicator Honesty and Courage Moral purpose, Respect Seek differing perspectives Build relationships, Coaching Build consensus, Insightful Input from others, Question Creativity Good listening skills Motivate, Know individuals Shared power	Conflict management skills <b>Effective communicator</b> Honesty and Courage <b>Fair, Morals, and Values</b> Seek different perspectives <b>Show people skills</b> Good problem solver <b>Thoughtful decisions</b> <b>Creativity</b> <b>Good listening skills</b> Empower others, Motivate Understand people

Renewal Habit 7	Idealized Influence Individualized Consideration	Make a Difference Be Best You Can Be
Balance Emotional stability Analytical skills Do meaningful work Serve others	Energize, Grow own strengths Share values, Core beliefs Challenge, Examine problems Facilitate change, Future focus Mentor, Growth, Coach	<b>Focus on whole self</b> <b>Control emotions</b> <b>Analyze and Challenge</b> <b>Working towards change</b> <b>Care for others</b>

*Note.* Leadership behavioral traits explained by *The Leader in Me* and literature on transformational leadership, and a column with the researcher's behavior checklist.

The students in the two observations, analyzed as a whole, exhibited 19 out of the 26 characteristics from the list of transformational leadership behaviors. Some of the traits that the students showed while doing their assignments were behaviors such as: set a good example, responsible, respectful, creativity, good listening skills, control of emotions, analyzing, and use best effort. When they were working with other students, the groups used effective communication, caring for others, and people skills to achieve their common goal to complete the work. The documents in the leadership binders utilized traits such as showing leadership, plan for the future, working towards change, and focus on the whole self. Some of the transformational leadership characteristics that were not observed were ones that were not involved in the lessons. The researcher did not see any incidents that involved conflict management, seeking different perspectives, empowering others, or motivating. Other traits would happen internally and so it may take a different observational scenario to have seen courage, honesty, valuing other's strengths, or making meaningful contributions. The parent and teacher interviews indicated that they had seen the children showing some of those leadership traits.

There were two instances during the observations that the students were showing lack of leadership. In the fourth grade room, one male student threw a paper airplane twice when the teacher was not looking. Another male student in the second grade classroom spent an entire rotation, 20 minutes, wasting time and did not attempt any of his assigned work. These may be examples of two children that are still learning, or perhaps were choosing in those moments not to apply any of the leadership expectations or to use the knowledge. The teachers reported in their interviews that the students would have times where they needed to be reminded to bring their focus back to being proactive and making good behavior choices.

Overall, the researcher's perceptions were that the students were well behaved, meeting teacher expectations, and utilizing the leadership behaviors. The environment at the school was calm, quiet and every room appeared engaged in learning activities. The leadership culture was pervasive in the environment and seemed to be integrated into the students' day. While they did not specifically mention the 7 Habits or leadership amongst each other during the observations, the "leadership school" culture was evident in their actions. Students showed a high level of adult engagement, and commitment to reaching class and individual goals. In summary, the students exhibited traits of transformational leadership but the short span of this study did not allow enough time to see if students would become transformational leaders for the long term.

### **Student Achievement Data**

The school's academic achievements and standardized testing scores were rarely mentioned throughout the interviews. Parents were specifically asked about the

correlation between learning leadership and their children's grades and most respondents did not think that *The Leader in Me* affected their child's grades as much as natural intelligence. Some teachers alluded to the fact that some of their students struggled academically, regardless of their ability to grasp the English language, but it was not a topic that was discussed with any kind of frequency. A teacher explained that leadership might not always correlate to passing SOL scores but sometimes "that can be considered a lofty goal...there are going to be some students that because of language barriers or extenuating circumstances won't pass their SOLs, but they increased their reading level from first to third."

### **Standardized Testing**

Although participants rarely mentioned academics in relation to leadership, it was a claim of *The Leader in Me* that academic scores were positively affected. The researcher wanted to examine standardized testing scores to see if any correlations between leadership and academic results could be found. Standardized testing scores were utilized, over the school's report card grades, since the standardization negated and controlled for other variables and provided a solid basis for comparison.

The following figures show the school's performance on their state standardized testing in the subjects of mathematics and reading for the years 2009 through 2014, the past six years of student pass percentages. The leadership instruction began informally in the school year 2011-2012, and the scores reported from 2013-2014 were the second full year of using the leadership program.

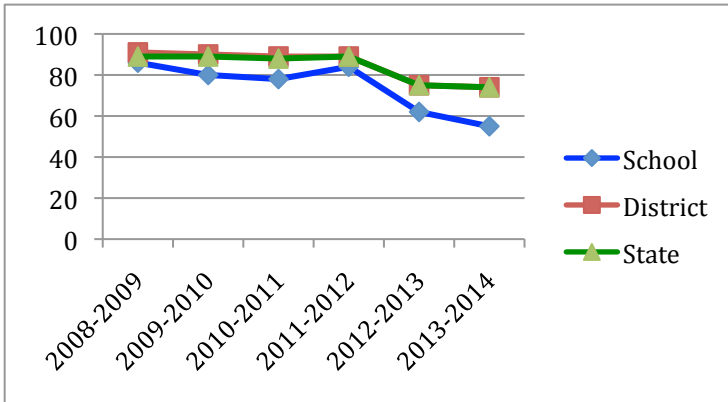


Figure 1. A Comparison of Standardized Testing Scores in Reading. Students' pass rates on the test at ABC School, in the district, and the state.

ABC School's reading pass rates for the past six years came to an average of 74%, which meant that 74% of their students taking the reading SOL standardized test achieved a passing score. The district's average over the 6-year span was 85%, and the state scored an 84% average pass rate. On the reading standardized test, ABC School scored 10-11 percentage points lower than the district and state results.

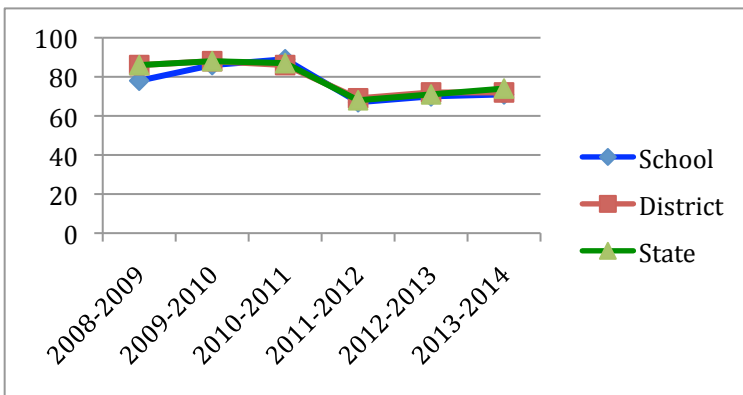


Figure 2. A Comparison of Standardized Testing Scores in Math. Students' pass rates on the tests at ABC School, in the district, and the state.



When the percentage of students passing the math standardized test was examined, it showed ABC School had an average passing rate of 77%, over the past six years. That percentage was similar to the averages of the district at 78% and the state's score of 79%.

As illustrated by Figures 1 and 2, ABC School had often performed lower than the average of both their school district and the state of Virginia. Their math scores have stayed within a few percentage points of the district and state, but the school's reading passing rate was usually significantly lower. Specifically examining assessment scores since the leadership program officially began in 2012 showed a decrease in passing rates. In the four years prior to *The Leader in Me's* implementation their average passing rate on the reading SOLs was 82%, and the average math rate was 80%. Looking at the two years of scores with the leadership instruction, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 respectively, their passing rates fell to 62% and 55% for reading, and 70% and 71% for math. The passing rate for reading decreased to an average of 59% after the program implementation, which was a 23-point difference from the data prior to the program. Math passing rates also declined to a 71% average for the two years, which was a 9-point decrease. The data showed that in the last school year, 2013-2014, 45% of their testing students did not pass the reading standardized test and 29% failed math. These figures strictly examined passing rates, and did not include any further examinations of what specific scores the students may have earned. Data analysis illustrated a trend that the school's scores on math and reading standardized testing had decreased since beginning *The Leader in Me*. Notably, their reading passing rates were below district and state

comparisons by a 13-point difference (2013) and 19 points (2014), however, their math passing rates aligned with district and state averages. Although it had been a short duration of *The Leader in Me*, the data did not show a positive correlation between the leadership program and standardized testing achievement.

Since the school had only been teaching the program for two full years it would be too early to associate any impacts, nor draw any solid conclusions from standardized achievement data. Any trends at this point were just coincidental until further research could be done to exclude other extenuating variables, and also allow for the school to have a longer time span to implement the program and gather achievement scores. At this time, the leadership program at ABC School had no discernable impact on student achievement.

### **Additional Perceptions on the Effectiveness of *The Leader in Me***

#### **Expectations and Outcomes**

Both teachers and the principal said that their expectations for the outcomes of the program were to get students that were “all around better children.” They hoped that students understood they had a support system and people believing in them so that hopefully they could permanently implement the 7 Habits into their lives and “improve their lot in life.” Additionally, the teachers cited the need to fix discipline problems so that the school experience would be “great” for all and a more peaceful family-like environment would come from the improvements. Parents also said that the program helped the school become calm, peaceful, and lent a more family-like feeling to the atmosphere. “The school has become a much better environment overall and it seems

like the school is cohesive...like a welcoming environment and I think it's just apparently improved the school," said one parent.

Measuring the effectiveness of the program proved to be more difficult and something that the school staff continued to struggle with and think about. One teacher said that the effectiveness of the program was:

more obvious in some kids than in others...we've only been doing it for a few years so it's kind of hard to say that it's definitely working or it's not. But I think that in my opinion it's been successful for the years that we've been doing it.

Children were showing signs of learning the leadership skills and incorporating the tenets into their own lives. The majority of the goals being set by the teachers and students were being met, with the exception that the school continued to struggle with academics. Most respondents focused more on the leadership big picture, than how leadership affected measures such as standardized testing. Teachers' knowledge of effectiveness included examples such as students preparing for their futures in college or the working world, achieving goals, serving as a role model for others, having positive interactions, and integrating leadership knowledge into their lives. One outcome that was often discussed was ensuring that the children were "taking ownership" of their choices and achievement and not being apathetic or relying on others. The school principal discussed the program's outcomes and said that there was a little bit of peer pressure to do the habits, and that overall the program has brought fewer "classroom management problems," "less bullying," and a "more loving school."

As a group, parents expressed that they were pleased with the leadership program, the principal, and the teachers. A parent said, “people are super, super nice, everybody tries to be really helpful; they seem really good with the kids.” Every participant reported a high level of satisfaction with the leadership instruction through *The Leader in Me*. “I’m thankful that [school name] is one of the schools that’s doing this program,” said a parent. Another parent agreed with the apparent success, “When your child comes home from school and they are beaming and they tell you this cool thing happened, they just love school and can’t wait to go in the morning because it’s so great.”

### **Teachers’ Opinions of *The Leader in Me***

Overall, the principal and teachers implementing *The Leader in Me* at ABC School reported a high level of satisfaction with the program. All of the teachers responded that they liked teaching leadership and the 7 Habits. They expressed that it was more enjoyable than teaching for standardized testing results and that it did not really add any additional responsibilities to their job, with the exception of the 7 Habits trainings each year. “I love it because I think that it’s really good stuff” said one teacher and another supplemented with “it motivates me to do better in my own personal life to set the example for them.” *The Leader in Me* also gave “students a sense of empowerment.” Teachers appeared attached to the program and spoke of having pride in the fact that they worked at a leadership school. One teacher said:

If I had to give up something out of my schedule, it would not be the *Leader in Me* program. I would rather give up something else....I would say, you know what, I can teach what I need to teach in science during reading time.

### **Examples of Poor Leadership**

Although the teachers and the principal rarely gave examples of students failing to show leadership skills, it is important to mention the rare examples as outliers in the interview data. One teacher who had the most consistent answers pointing to the fact that she viewed the program as partially a behavior management program said if she were to decide if children in public were acting like leaders, she would compare them to her students. Incidents such as “running around,” “talking back to their parents,” or “crying” were viewed as lacking leadership skills. It should be noted, that those examples given were attributed to leadership and not to parenting, child personality, or some other variable. Another teacher described a student she had that was not being a leader and said that he “doesn’t follow directions,” “doesn’t care,” and would often be negative or demoralize others. Parents gave zero examples of negative leadership during their interviews.

### **Negatives of *The Leader in Me***

The biggest negative of the program that was mentioned by more than one interview participant was lack of support. Teachers said they felt a lack of support from the community and parents, while parents said they could use more support from the school about understanding the program. One of the goals for the school was to increase parental support in general at the school, and particularly in regards to *The Leader in Me*. One hundred percent of school staff interviewed for the project mentioned at least once, the need for more parental support. A teacher explained, “to help these children be leaders...you have to have those parents who are really fostering it and encouraging it as

much as we are during the day.” The issue that some homes were not reinforcing the leadership skills could factor in as the child moved from the leadership elementary school and encountered a non-leadership middle and high school and had to practice it on their own.

Another negative was that adults found it challenging to use the habits in their own lives, and the program counted on adults serving as an example to be successful. Staff that were not on board with the program were reported to have left the school and found jobs elsewhere. “The people who didn’t like it left....sometimes it’s hard for people to be reflective about themselves...but it makes you think. How am I going to teach this...if it’s something that I’m not using myself.”

Teachers also mentioned that *The Leader in Me* involved a lot of teacher training and commitment, but overall there were not many negatives mentioned. When asked specifically about how they would improve the program, teachers and administrators had few suggestions. “Don’t fix what isn’t broken,” remarked the principal. Two of the teachers said they would like to see more readily available resources and grade specific lesson plans. A few expressed that the program may want to re-phrase the habit Sharpen the Saw, and another teacher wanted to be able to have her students meet other students who were doing the program too.

### **Good Practices for Teaching Leadership**

The data analysis also included gathering opinions as to the best practices for teaching a leadership program. Participants said you would need to have a staff and administration that was positive and supportive about the leadership program. If a school

did not use the 7 Habits, and *The Leader in Me* they would still need to have a common language, make the program fun, and have kid-friendly curriculum and visuals. The people doing the instructing should serve as role models and teach students about what they look for in a leader, as well as using leadership examples from the world or world leaders. Another piece of advice was to let the children have input into the program and have ways to practice their leadership skills. “If you let the children think, they’ll come up with the most amazing ideas that the adults would never come up with,” explained a teacher. Another necessity would be to give the children opportunities to fail and learn from their mistakes.

A school desiring to implement leadership instruction would also need four forms of support in community, parental, staff, and financial. “You have to have something to weave your community and your families and your school together cause...I feel like there’s no limit to what you can develop when all three of those are working together,” said one teacher. *The Leader in Me* agreed and pointed out that their program needed a foundation of school, parental, and community support in order to be successful.

### **The Future for *The Leader in Me***

Data from the interviews conducted found the following suggestions of ways that *The Leader in Me* could improve at ABC School. Most of the suggestions were particular ways that ABC School could improve the program, while a few detailed improvements for *The Leader in Me* in general. Both teachers and parents contributed to the suggestion list.

- Refresher trainings for teachers

- Success stories or videos of others doing the leadership program
- Travel to other schools to see first hand what they are doing
- More successful male mentors
- Increase in money and resources
- Parent, community, and staff support
- Supplemental ways for students to practice leadership
- Increase in school activities that involve parents, students, and leadership
- Training in the 7 Habits for parents and additional training for teachers
- School district should implement the program county-wide
- Show parents leadership binders or leadership data gathered on their child
- Gather more concrete and empirical data on the program's effectiveness

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the data about *The Leader in Me* showed perceptions of positive outcomes in all areas except student achievement. The data also evidenced conclusive answers to each of the three guiding questions for this research study.

#### **Question 1: What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experiences with teaching leadership to children?**

The parents, teachers, and school principal all agreed that the program was a positive element in their school. They utilized tools such as instruction, modeling, practice, and repetition to teach the leadership. Parents saw a change in their children for the better and were thankful that they could send them to a leadership school. Teachers expressed dismay at the fact that education has such a focus on testing and that their



students would be examined as a score, instead of the whole-person mentality. One teacher summarized when she said:

That score is going to mean nothing...it travels with them, might get them into a university but...leadership will travel with them through a lifetime. People are going to forget that score...but they will not forget what kind of leader that they've been and continue to be.

**Question 2: How are adult leadership skills applied to children?**

The data showed that the leadership skills are very applicable when taught at a child's developmental level. The program itself was presented in a fashion that would be conducive for children, but it also retained the adult language and outcomes associated with the 7 Habits in general. A teacher said that leadership was the "heartbeat of our school," which summarized how the school took an adult concept and embraced the initiative of educating children as leaders.

**Question 3: Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?**

The study found evidence that *The Leader in Me* goals were aligned with the variables needed to see transformational leadership. In addition, parents and teachers reported evidence of transformational leadership, although they did not use the same vocabulary words but instead focused on the 7 Habits language. The researcher further observed children showing behaviors associated with the 4 I's of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Behaviors included acting as role models, being a hard

worker, making good choices, getting along with others, being helpful, making a difference, and a focus on being the best of your ability. A teacher summarized the behavior traits when she said, “When they transform into leaders that they become, um, calm and sincere and have a better sense of where they are in this world, you know, and a better sense of where they are today, but more importantly where they are going.”

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the data showed a majority of favorable results when examining the outcomes of the student leadership program *The Leader in Me* as implemented at ABC School. The teachers used a variety of instructional strategies to teach the children the 7 Habits and leadership skills. The children had leadership traits that fell into the two categories of internal factors and external actions. Parents reported that their children knew the habits and used them at home, although the children appeared to discuss the habits more frequently at school. The study showed that the children had behaviors of transformational leadership, but there was not enough longitude in the data to ascertain if they were transformational leaders overall.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Overview**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to acquire an understanding of how young students developed leadership skills and to learn about leadership perceptions and opinions of parents, teachers, and the principal. Research was conducted, at an elementary school that taught the leadership curriculum *The Leader in Me*, to determine if students displayed transformational leadership skills as a result of their exposure to the program. The study examined how students exhibited emerging leadership tendencies within the school environment, and looked for a correlation that suggested students integrated leadership within their personal lives as well. Covey, who founded *The Leader in Me* said that his program involved "educating to reach one's primary greatness" (2008, p. 9). All children have the potential to reach their primary greatness, and this study reflected upon that level of change as an outcome of the program.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the gathering and analysis of data, while serving as the scope and foundation for the literature review.

1. What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experiences with teaching leadership to children?

2. How are adult leadership skills applied to children?
3. Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?

Before beginning to discuss the research conclusions, it is important to remark upon some variables that influenced the interpretation of the results. ABC School was only beginning their third consecutive year of using *The Leader in Me*, so this research was conducted in the early phases of implementation. Additionally, most of the participants who volunteered for the study all came from a group that was categorized as being information-rich sources. All but one of the teacher participants seemed to be big proponents of the program, and the one that differed also gave positive statements in her interview. The parent participants were those who had time to speak with the researcher and volunteered to share their opinions. The principal originated a list of possible parent volunteers from those active on the PTA board, and from her inside knowledge of parents that would be willing to participate. For these reasons, the data may have been different if conducted at another *The Leader in Me* school or with a wider variety of participants so the reader must understand these considerations when examining the interpretation of results.

### **Comparison of Program Outcomes and Study Perceptions**

In the *The Leader in Me* book, schools teaching the leadership principles reported the following outcomes: (1) improved student achievement; (2) significantly enhanced self-confidence and esteem in students; (3) dramatic decreases in discipline problems; (4) impressive increases in teachers' and administrators' job satisfaction and commitment;

(5) greatly improved school cultures; (6) parents who are delighted and engaged in the process; and (7) businesses and community leaders who want to lend support (Covey, 2008, p. 4). Out of the seven stated results, this qualitative research study found four of *The Leader in Me*'s outcomes to be supported by the data gathered. Results indicated enhanced self-confidence in students, decreased discipline problems, increased job satisfaction, and an improved school culture. Data also found some parents who were engaged in the process, and a few businesses and community members that lent their support, but those two outcomes needed further enhancement. The study data did not confirm any quantitative proof of increased student achievement as measured by the school's performance on standardized testing. If the two incomplete outcomes are counted as being halfway achieved, the data from this study showed a 71% rate of success as defined by Covey's *The Leader in Me* perceived outcomes.

### **Examination of the Participants' Major Perceptions**

After the examination of the data, it was determined that participants had four major perceptions about *The Leader in Me* and the outcomes that learning leadership had on the children. Their experiences and opinions as a group showed the same perceptions emerging throughout the interviews. The central perceptions of the participants were as follows:

- (1) The school culture positively changed and the school had assumed the identity of a "leadership school."
- (2) *The Leader in Me* was viewed as an all-encompassing immersion program affecting every aspect of the school.

- (3) The program developed leaders through teaching leadership skills and utilizing the 7 Habits.
- (4) *The Leader in Me* provided foundational skills towards a greater impact of life-changing results.

These perceptions are discussed in detail below.

### **Changed School Culture**

The pervasive identity of the school focused on the mentality of being a leadership school. The literature review stated that student leadership programs should be examined in the context of meaningful involvement in the educational process, engaging all students as stakeholders and recognizing their unique knowledge, experiences, and perspectives, as they contribute to the development of learning for themselves and for the group (Chapman et al., 2006). Feldhusen and Kennedy (1988) said that leadership skills and theory should be taught explicitly in order to allow students to explore leadership tendencies along with understanding changes in society, thinking skills, and current world issues. Most importantly, they asserted that children needed to be given the opportunity to lead and practice in order to develop towards their potential.

*The Leader in Me*'s first three habits involved learning basic leadership skills within the foundation of self-leadership. The fourth, fifth, and sixth habits returned the focus to transformational leadership within the framework of collaboration, or shared leadership. In summary, the first three habits helped the leader learn the basics as the prerequisite for the transformational leadership process that happened when using the following four habits. Taken together as a theory, the 7 Habits and *The Leader in Me*

developed the self-leadership behaviors necessary to engage in the shared-leadership process that causes transformational leaders to work towards making a change.

The *The Leader in Me* program at ABC School showed results that the school culture changed and that a new identity was established around the leadership beliefs. These changes were caused by the program building a foundation around shared attitudes, beliefs, goals, and rules for behavior. *The Leader in Me* nurtured a culture filled with a shared vocabulary and an internalization of the habits. This internalizing of the habits caused the school's teachers and students to alter how they interacted with each other in order to grow a mutual respect of everyone at the school. Both teacher and parent participants vocalized the occurrence of positive changes taking place within the people that were utilizing the habits, so that the intrinsic rewards were affecting their outward behavior. Therefore, the entire community located within the school saw a positive change as everyone involved adapted the mentality of the leadership school. Parents and the greater community were beginning to support the culture change, but lagged behind in the improvements seen in the teachers and students.

### ***The Leader in Me* as an Immersion Program**

*The Leader in Me* was viewed as an all-encompassing program affecting all aspects of the school. Quite like an immersion program, the tenets of *The Leader in Me* were integrated throughout the entire school day and prevalent in the actions of those who participated. Both the students and the teachers used the 7 Habits, and were changed in some manner by the leadership, whether in a small or large way. Teacher participants explained that the program became part of who they were and that the 7 Habits were part

of their lives as well. When the researcher visited the school, it was evident that the habits were part of the everyday moments throughout the school day. Even when they were not being referenced, the habits were displayed on the walls or being shown through behaviors. The program affected the school in many ways and evidenced positive changes in areas such as: school climate, student motivation and confidence, personal skills, getting along with others, and fostering positive attitudes (Ross et al., 2012). The diverse categories of the perceived changes illustrated that the leadership program was pervasive in its presence.

### **Developing Leaders**

All of the program participants had the perception that the children were learning and using the knowledge to show their leadership abilities. The end goal of the program was to develop leaders, not just have them memorize the 7 Habits. Although participants discussed the 7 Habits frequently, they also pointed out that the program used specific vocabulary in order to keep everything consistent and have everyone on the same page while working towards the goal of helping students discover their strengths and show an all-around improvement. *The Leader in Me* cited the leadership goals of independence, interdependence, and renewal. The lens of this paper used the vocabulary of transformational leaders, and although the semantics differ, *The Leader and Me* and transformational leadership have the same results.

According to Owen (2007), transformational leadership included a focus on sharing leadership and power in order to get everyone involved working towards a shared vision. This emphasis on building a shared outlook showed how leadership theory



emerged from the traditional into a new hybrid definition of transforming the organization, elevating the vision, and working toward a new future. Owen (2007) stated, “transformational leaders identify their own values and those of people in the organization to guide their actions, thus developing a shared conscious way of behaving and acting” (p. 14). A transformational leader worked with other people to create a shared vision in order to build organizations that have a cohesive purpose and directional goals. Studies showed that transformational leadership consisted of four methods that leaders used to achieve their goals and motivate people towards a collective vision: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Humphrey, 2014).

Overall, the 4 I’s of leadership proved that they correspond with the *The Leader in Me* vocabulary and desired traits. Some of the 7 Habits are similar to the definitions of the 4 I’s of leadership, and other habits utilized characteristics from across more than one of the areas of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. For the purpose of this paper, the basics of each of the 4 I’s were matched with the 7 Habits to show the leadership cohesiveness within the foundation of *The Leader in Me*. Conger and Benjamin (1999) stated that a transformational leadership program should show positive increases in the skills of: (a) problem solving and critical thinking; (b) communication skills; (c) planning for the future; (d) empowering others; and (e) managing impressions. The study data revealed that through using the 4 I’s students were showing emerging tendencies in the above five areas of leadership behaviors.

## **Perception of Changing Lives**

When conceived by Covey, *The Leader in Me* was based on three fundamental beliefs, with the first being that all individuals have the capacity to lead and become leaders (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). Covey believed that leadership was a choice that everyone could make regardless of his or her life constraints. The second fundamental belief of the program was that it would be applicable to any child regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, disability, etc. (Covey, 2008; Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The last belief focused on supporting a new paradigm of leadership that would travel from the school out into the community (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The program would cause a student to recognize his or her potential and self-worth, which in turn would positively impact the school culture and community (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011, p. 4). In summary, the program was applied to each child and the children chose to use leadership in their lives, while making a difference in the larger aspect of the school, their personal world, and the community.

The study data showed that through the perceptions of the principal, teachers, and parents, *The Leader in Me* had positive impacts on the school population. Every child was viewed as a leader, taught the skills, and was given the opportunity to practice. The program itself promoted a focus on strengths and working towards improving perceived weaknesses without causing any sense of embarrassment over those areas. The program's larger picture included an emphasis on trying to improve the children as a whole, and put them on a path to a successful direction in life while enhancing the outlook of their futures. The children answered to an accountability piece by showing

ownership and meeting goals and expectations set by themselves, teachers, and their parents.

Researchers from the Center for Research and Reform in Education at John Hopkins University conducted a qualitative case study of two elementary schools that were teaching *The Leader In Me* to their students (Ross et al., 2012). The study reported findings of positive gains for students, teachers, and the school culture in security and order, self-confidence, motivation, getting along with others, conflict resolution, and making teaching more enjoyable and easier (p. 5). The results of that study are similar to those reported by this qualitative study.

### **Other Areas of Importance**

#### **Applicability of Adult Skills to Children**

Leadership has been a complicated concept to define and understand because it has varying connotations to a wide variety of people. The difficulty arose because leadership is an elusive idea, often involving the way a person philosophizes about life, or rationalizes events from his or her experience. In the absence of studies tracking a person from infancy through adulthood and measuring his or her leadership abilities, the literature has shown that a progression would be possible when applying the same standards of understanding adult leadership to those of children. This study agreed with previous research in the finding that leadership could be applied to children (Owen, 2007; Landau & Weissler, 2001). The adult concepts innate within the 7 Habits were successfully being taught, and students showed that they learned the leadership knowledge. Data indicated that the preschoolers at the school, or possibly even younger

children, could show the aptitude for transformational learning. The literature sustained the association between the emergence of leadership possibilities and a growth in complexity of children's cognitive processes. The application of adult skills in *The Leader in Me* to the children was viewed as a success, as children of all ages were reported to have shown cognitive growth across the developmental age span.

In the literature review, Van Linden and Fertman (1998) discussed the three stages involved in developing children's leadership abilities. The children at ABC School showed evidence of the progression through the three stages. Students in the first stage had an awareness of leadership skills and a basic understanding of their leadership potential. The second stage involved turning the leadership theory into behavioral actions and practicing the skills with adult guidance. Finally, those students in the last stage began to show their emergent leadership tendencies and started working towards permanent changes in their behavior.

### ***The Leader and Me* and Student Achievement**

Although Covey stated that his program would bring about improved student achievement, the data from this study showed a weak correlation between *The Leader in Me* and standardized achievement scores. There was no improvement shown and even a downwards trend was found in total passing rates. However, the scores that were examined were only associated with the second year of the school's *The Leader in Me* implementation.

Teachers reported an increase in their abilities to teach, and that the lessons were more effective. All of the participants mentioned that it was their perceptions that the

students had shown increases in learning and listening skills, but that trend did not affect testing outcomes. There are numerous variables that ABC School contended with in regards to their standardized testing that would alter their pass rates. Such variables as the ELL population, lack of parental involvement, and socioeconomic disadvantages could have a greater impact than that of the leadership program. Although, *The Leader in Me* did show other social results, researchers pointed out that it should not even be considered an “academically-oriented intervention program” (Ross, et al., 2012, p. 66).

### **Parental Involvement**

Both ABC School and *The Leader in Me* were in agreement that an integral piece of the leadership program was parental involvement, and without that factor there was a greater chance for failure. The school recognized that they needed to improve parental involvement in the program as they made it their goal for the school year. It would be essential to get the majority of households embracing and using the habits at home in order to provide additional practice for the students. Covey elaborated:

If students are taught effective habits but are then placed into a “defective” habitat (culture), one that is unfriendly, unsafe, or where they do not feel valued, they cannot be expected to fully develop their newly learned habits, or improve their academics. (Covey, Covey, Summers & Hatch, 2014, p. 66)

The home-school connection remained an area for improvement as evidenced by the data from this study. The lack of parental involvement may have stemmed from the socioeconomic status of some families at the school. Teachers and parents explained that many heads of households were working two or three jobs and used all of their time and

energy on the basic needs of their families. Additionally, there was a large population of people considered English Language Learners at the school, which provided for a sizeable language gap. The teachers spoke of a highly transient population in terms of school enrollment and attendance, and guardians instead of parents were raising some children. Lastly, the parents may have been less inclined to focus on the leadership skills at home if they were dealing with larger negative behavior issues such as truancy, incarceration, or other detrimental lifestyle choices within their families.

### **Study Limitations**

There were some limitations to the study, or variables that could not be controlled by the researcher. The study was conducted by one researcher and limited within the confines of qualitative research. The researcher was a former elementary-school teacher, but had no prior experience teaching leadership or with *The Leader in Me*.

The study had inherent time constraints imposed by the school and district participating in the study, the timeline of the researcher's doctoral requirements, and the need to conduct the research during the school year. The district and the school limited the researcher's access to possible participants, and the research had to be conducted outside of the school day. This limited the participants and possibly narrowed down the field of volunteers. The researcher had to wait for a new school year to begin to have access to the school and participants, and the principal requested that the research not take place in August or the first few weeks in September to allow time for the school routine to begin without having any interruptions. The study was further limited by the

lack of longevity and the time restrictions imposed by the need to conclude the research prior to the end of the university's semester.

In addition to time constraints, there were limitations within the research participants. The participant recruitment became an unintentional limitation when the researcher experienced difficulty getting participant volunteers. Those study participants that were interviewed may not have represented the majority's viewpoint since there were few volunteers and the inability to have a random selection. The participant sample was lacking in representing the population that was ethnically diverse and at-risk. Although the sample was purposeful out of compulsion, the participants did share both positives and negatives about their perceptions and experiences with *The Leader in Me*. There were 15 participants in the study, which allowed only for correlations to be examined, and the number was not high enough to provide wide generalizability. The study was an understanding of the participants' perceptions of leadership during this specific time period.

The choice to use a qualitative study and interviews was an additional limitation for these research questions. There is a lack of clarity and some conceptual confusion in the field of leadership studies. Although the interview process allowed for follow-up questions to be asked by the researcher, there was not time for participants to concentrate on processing their thoughts or addressing the conceptual confusion associated with leadership. The dilemma in defining leadership arises because the conceptualization of leadership also involves the purpose for which it is being considered, and this study was examining *The Leader in Me*. During the interviews, participants answered the question

and probably felt as if they needed to move on to the next topic. Thus, their answers may have illustrated the conceptual confusion inherent in leadership theoretical ideas. None of the interview participants gave the researcher follow-up thoughts on any subsequent days.

Lastly, the leadership program, *The Leader in Me* affected the study and participants. This qualitative study had to be completed within the program and the leadership parameters set forth by Covey. The researcher found the program provided almost a scripted way of defining leadership and the associated behaviors. It was further confined by a strict focus on Covey's 7 Habits. Although the program was not scripted, the adherence to the 7 Habits created an emphasis and culture around those tenets that rarely allowed for any data to emerge that was not specifically tied to the program. In addition, leadership development manifests across a wide variety of interfering variables such as cognitive development, age appropriateness, and the home life of the child. ABC School was in their third year of the program implementation and leadership development needs to take place over time and include a large amount of exposure. Numerous leadership behaviors are combined with internal thought processes or ingrained in behavior, making it difficult to assess and quantify. Also inherent in the development of children, was the assumption that they were growing and changing and may not act the same way from day-to-day. Transformational leadership, in particular, provided a challenge in ascertaining if the student leaders were working towards a change and achieving a shared vision. The study had to find if the students were showing



transformational leadership behaviors during that time and did not address if the students would take that further and become transformational leaders overall.

### **Implications From the Study**

#### **Fidelity of Implementation**

One area that was not addressed in the leadership research was examining a program to assess the fidelity of implementation. An observer could examine the program results, but when looking at a school-based initiative it would be difficult to measure if all of the teachers and students were approaching the initiative with the same effort. Logic dictates that they would not all use identical effort, so there would be a variable of implementation that has not been addressed. This research study attempted to address the fidelity variable by examining interview participants' specific use of certain leadership vocabulary words, but usage of words does not fully translate into an amount of program implementation effort. Still, the usage of leadership vocabulary words differed greatly between each of the interview participants, and the teachers and parents. Future studies may want to use rubrics or other measures to assess teacher or student integration of the leadership principles to account for that variable.

#### **Sustainability for Future**

The sustainability of the future of *The Leader in Me* was unsure, specifically at ABC School. FranklinCovey has not publicly released data or published studies about schools that have started the program and then quit or failed at their implementation. They are not tracking specific school goals to measure failures, and all of their quantitative documents thus far have shown and discussed success rates. They have

alluded to some schools failing but have not given any details. There were over 2,000 reported schools using the *The Leader in Me* program, so therefore there must be some who had declined to continue in the initiative and were not included in that statistic (Covey et al., 2014, p. 35). As Hargreaves (2003) argued: “The promise of sustainable success in education lies in creating cultures of distributed leadership throughout the school community, not in training and developing a tiny leadership elite” (p. 17). ABC School was working on the total support of their entire school community, but it should be noted that they were practicing this program in isolation without the greater support of all of the schools in their district. Once children leave ABC School they would not, at this time, go to a middle or high school that has the same leadership culture. Developmentally, the program has not yet tracked how the leadership would manifest in adolescents and middle school after they participated in the program during their elementary years.

### **General Leadership Knowledge**

Originally, this study intended to use *The Leader in Me* as a resource for understanding students’ knowledge about leadership in general. But once the researcher gained access to the site and began understanding the program it became apparent that the students were learning the 7 Habits and their applicability to life. The students’ general knowledge of leadership was the 7 Habits and it proved difficult to extract any other leadership related perceptions from the participants. Even when the participants were asked what leadership knowledge that students possessed outside of the 7 Habits, they had difficulty thinking of any answers. *The Leader in Me* centered the leadership

instruction on the 7 Habits and the teachers at ABC School focused mainly on the habits and were not emphasizing outside leadership knowledge or sources. If other researchers wanted to learn more about students' general leadership knowledge, they would want to consider completing their study at a school that was not teaching the 7 Habits.

### **Causing a Small Shift in Leadership Thinking**

Leadership scholars have struggled to define leadership and explain its attributes in a manner that summarized the theory. Leadership has evolved from the early great-man theory (Bass, 1990) to the current emphasis on transformational leadership (Humphrey, 2014). However, understanding leadership is not linear and the average person would probably define leadership as having a leader and followers. The parent participants in the study mostly spoke of a leader as someone who motivated others to work together and reach a goal, in a more traditional leader and follower definition. In contrast, the teachers' definition of leadership and examples that they gave showed an understanding more in line with the current thought that leadership involves a shared goal and working towards permanent change. Daft defined leadership as, "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real change and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes" (2005, p. 5). The teachers in study had received 7 Habits leadership training from FranklinCovey, which could explain the difference in perceptions of the definition of leadership. *The Leader in Me* could be the responsible factor for the change in paradigm thinking about leadership, as the teachers are members of society with only one different variable, in that they teach at a leadership school. So the leadership instruction inherent in *The Leader in Me* may be supporting a change in

thinking about leaders and the genre of leadership when compared to the general public's perceptions.

## **Conclusion**

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research would need to enlarge the focus of the study and increase the amount of schools studied. It would be recommended to include a large number of schools that are at different stages in their leadership implementation. If a study were to specifically examine *The Leader in Me*, there may be merit in looking at schools after they have received the "Lighthouse School" designation from FranklinCovey. This would mean that the schools had used the program for at least three years, finished the data gathering requirements, and earned the recognition of having completed the initial phase of the program with a high level of commitment. Additionally, studies are needed to focus solely on students and what the children actually learn from their leadership instruction. It would require multiple years of study in order to track students' progress through the program and to gain a better understanding of their change in knowledge. Studies tracking students throughout elementary school and beyond could see if their definitions of leadership or leadership behaviors would change when the children advance both cognitively and socially.

The study data also found recommendations for the future of *The Leader in Me*. Overall participants need more support both from the school, families, and the community. The teachers expressed the necessity of more program support from their FranklinCovey program administrators, and from the parents encouraging the use of the 7

Habits at home. The parents felt that they could have received more training about the leadership habits and also wanted to have more opportunities to practice the habits with their children at school sponsored events. The staff at ABC School recommended that *The Leader in Me* continue an emphasis on having ways for students to practice their leadership skills. The study participants also expressed a wish that the school district implement the program in all of their schools so there would be continuity. Finally, they requested that more data be gathered on the program effectiveness and other outcomes, so that the findings could be applied to their own leadership initiative.

### **Study Rationales Revisited**

To fully assess if the study met the perceived goals, the six parts of the study rationale will be revisited below.

**Understanding leadership and its applicability to children.** The primary aim of this study was to offer researchers and educators further understanding about the applicability of leadership to children and how it could be nurtured in a developmentally appropriate manner. It showed that the phenomenon of leadership as it manifests in adults did exist among children, which was also proven by Landau and Weissler (2001). The study data found that the children in ABC School showed leadership qualities across the stages of physical and cognitive development.

**Educating leaders for life.** The act of teaching young children leadership skills at school would build a foundation that could serve them throughout their lives. The transformational leadership behaviors found in the children proved that ABC School was focused on educating students to their full potential. Additionally, it was a goal of the

program to increase potential through leadership skills and educate toward a higher purpose.

**Supportive public opinion.** Some researchers, for example McCaw (2007) and Pappas (2009), have supported a shift in paradigm to reinstate the integrated connection between academic achievement and social-emotional development. Parents with children at the school spoke to a supportive public opinion, in that prior to starting the program some parents chose to home school or send their children to other schools to avoid the culture at ABC School. Now, their community thought the focus on social-emotional leadership development had changed their school for the better and given the children positive gains.

**Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** Organizations like the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (2009) have suggested that schools focus on bridging the gap between factual memorization and the skills that children would need in order to be successful in their futures. Although there was no correlation to increased academic scores, the data on *The Leader in Me* showed gains in social and responsibility-based life skills.

**Updating education.** There is not just one single answer on how children should be educated. However, utilizing leadership education may address the state of public education in America. Leadership instruction was viewed as different and showed results outside of the typical standardized testing data. Although this study examined *The Leader in Me*, the results could be applied to other leadership programs or used to create a new module.

**Fill gaps in the literature.** The final element in the rationale for this study was that it would fill some gaps in the literature regarding teaching children leadership skills. There was a limited amount of literature available that pertained to teaching young children leadership skills. That lack in empirical studies provided a gap, and so the data could add to the small body of literature assessing outcomes. Much of the evidence of effectiveness data relating to leadership programs in schools was either anecdotal or did not disentangle the effects of the leadership program from the effects of other improvement efforts. This study used a qualitative lens and analyzed a leadership curriculum as it was being taught in an elementary school. The study contributed towards the clarification of what children learned about leadership skills and how they began to show actions that would portray ownership of the knowledge. In addition, the children's leadership behaviors were analyzed through the transformational leadership model to find the *The Leader in Me* program resulted in attempting to make transformational leaders. The study would have needed a greater longevity and scope to ascertain if the attempt at transformational leadership lasted after the children left the elementary school. Data showed the behaviors were present while they were at school and their homes.

### **Summary**

*The Leader in Me* educates the whole person, invests in strong character development, and finds "greatness in everyone" (Covey, 1999). Covey and the other supporters of the program liked to say that it should not be called a program but a process. It was viewed as an ongoing process that met the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual overall well being of a child. *The Leader in Me* was based on

timeless, universal principles that were successful at being learned through integrated instruction. The program was shown to support the characteristics needed to cultivate transformational leaders. These transformational leaders enter into a world where they have the ability to facilitate change and synergize with others towards a greater good.

Through gaining an understanding of how the program developed leaders, educators could create effective programs aimed at enhancing all young children's leadership tendencies and their abilities to lead in the future. If children were taught appropriate skills at an early stage, these could become habitual, hence the naming of the 7 Habits. The institution of education should be concerned with intentionally developing their young leaders. This qualitative study offered a basic understanding of how children develop leadership abilities, and this knowledge could be used to initiate or enhance leadership programs at other schools. *The Leader in Me* showed benefits to both the children and the organization as a whole. It gave children the ability to make choices and solve their own issues instead of being viewed as having problems that adults needed to fix. *The Leader in Me* also offered a common language for those involved, and it prepared the children to be productive members in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The data showed positive gains in the teachers, students, school culture, personal growth, and attainment of leadership skills.

A leadership curriculum would not only teach the necessary skills but it would present a context for the children to practice in authentic ways. *The Leader in Me* offered both positives and negatives, so educators would need to look at the program as a totality when making the decision about bringing it into a school. Regardless of the program



used, children could benefit from leadership instruction. They are the next logical source for the future and the best decision would be to develop our children to their full potential, which would be the ultimate form of self-actualization. A strategic leadership cultivation of our next generation is too imperative to be left to chance.

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## Appendix A

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*  
(From *The Leader in Me* by Stephen R. Covey)

### Habit 1: Be Proactive

“I am a responsible person. I take initiative. I choose my actions, attitudes, and moods. I do not blame others for my wrong actions. I do the right thing without being asked, even when no one is looking.” (Covey, 2008, p. 21)

### Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

“I plan ahead and set goals. I do things that have meaning and make a difference. I am an important part of my classroom and contribute to my school’s mission and vision, and look for ways to be a good citizen.” (Covey, 2008, p. 21)

### Habit 3: Put First Things First

“I spend my time on things that are most important. This means I say no to things I know I should not do. I set priorities, make a schedule, and follow my plan. I am disciplined and organized.” (Covey, 2008, p. 21)

### Habit 4: Think Win-Win

“I balance courage for getting what I want with consideration for what others want. I make deposits in others’ Emotional Bank Accounts. When conflicts arise, I look for third alternatives.” (Covey, 2008, p. 21)

#### Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

“I listen to other people’s ideas and feelings. I try to see things from their viewpoints. I listen to others without interrupting. I am confident in voicing my ideas. I look people in the eyes when talking.” (Covey, 2008, p. 21)

#### Habit 6: Synergize

“I value other people’s strengths and learn from them. I get along well with others, even people who are different than me. I work well in groups. I seek out other people’s ideas to solve problems because I know that by teaming with others we can create better solutions than any one of us alone. I am humble.” (Covey, 2008, p. 22)

#### Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

“I take care of my body by eating right, exercising, and getting sleep. I spend time with family and friends. I learn in lots of ways and lots of places, not just at school. I take time to find meaningful ways to help others.” (Covey, 2008, p. 22)

## Appendix B

### *Interview Guide for Teachers*

Demographic Information (Position, Years Teaching/Years at the School, Gender)

Research Questions	Interview Guide Questions
How are adult leadership skills being applied to children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What is your personal definition of leadership?</li> <li>-Describe indicators that help you determine if someone is a leader.</li> <li>-How can you tell if a child is being a leader?</li> <li>-How can leadership skills, traditionally thought to be for adults, be applied to children?</li> <li>-At what age should leadership instruction begin?</li> <li>-Who should be responsible for teaching leadership skills to children?</li> </ul>
Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What skills should student leaders have?</li> <li>-What do your students know about leadership?</li> <li>-What do you see as the desired outcomes of the leadership program?</li> <li>-How will you know if it is effective? Can you give me an example?</li> <li>-Out of the following leadership behaviors, which ones have you seen exhibited by your students: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration? (will provide definitions)</li> <li>-Of the ones you just mentioned, please provide an example of a student demonstrating that behavior.</li> </ul>
What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experience with teaching leadership to children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How do you develop leadership skills in the students? What are you teaching?</li> <li>-How do they show understanding, or how do you know that they have learned leadership skills?</li> <li>-Tell me what it is like to teach the students leadership.</li> <li>-Explain some positives of the leadership curriculum. Negatives?</li> <li>-How would you improve the program?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-How have the students' knowledge changed over time?</li><li>-In your opinion, how should we be teaching leadership skills to students? Or if one wanted to develop a leadership curriculum, what would be some good practices?</li><li>-Approximately how much time each week is devoted to leadership instruction?</li><li>-What other kinds of support would teachers or schools need to develop leadership skills in students?</li></ul>
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## Appendix C

### *Interview Guide for Parents*

Demographic Information (# of Kids at the School/Grades, Gender, Ethnicity, Guardian)

Research Questions	Interview Guide Questions
How are adult leadership skills being applied to children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What is your personal definition of leadership?</li> <li>-How can leadership skills, traditionally thought to be for adults, be applied to children?</li> <li>-At what age should leadership instruction begin?</li> <li>-What is your child being taught at school about leadership?</li> </ul>
Do the children show characteristics of transformational leadership? If so, what is the behavioral evidence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What kind of leadership skills or traits does your child have?</li> <li>-Have you seen changes in your child's leadership abilities since they entered this school? How?</li> <li>-What does your child know about leadership/what do they understand about being a leader?</li> <li>-Give me an example of an instance of when you saw your child showing leadership ability.</li> </ul>
What are parents', teachers', and an administrator's perceptions of and experience with teaching leadership to children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How has the leadership program affected your child's school?</li> <li>-Using the scale of 1-10 (10 being a great leader) what number would you give your child? If you wanted him/her to be a better leader, what should be done?</li> <li>-In your opinion, how should we be teaching leadership skills to students?</li> <li>-How has leadership impacted your student's life?</li> <li>-If parents have a role in teaching their children leadership skills, how do you go about doing that?</li> </ul>



## Appendix D

### *Research Consent Form*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research study focusing on understanding students' knowledge of leadership and any emergent skills they may possess. This study is examining *The Leader in Me*, a leadership program being taught at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School. Your participation in this study will involve an interview in which you will be asked questions pertaining to your knowledge of leadership skills being taught at \_\_\_\_\_, and the student(s) receiving instruction. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and then transcribed for accuracy and analysis. For the purpose of maintaining privacy for the participants and children, no real names will be used in this study, or any publication thereof. Every effort will be made to keep the information provided strictly confidential. The results of this study will be shared with the principal of \_\_\_\_\_, and the school district planning and research department.

The study will be conducted by [Researcher's Name], a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. This research study is to be submitted for fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. The results will be published in a dissertation, and may be used for further educational purposes in professional presentation(s) and/or educational publication(s). The information may also be used to gain better understanding about leadership programs.

I look forward to meeting with you and receiving your assistance on this project.

Sincerely,  
[Researcher's Name]

## Participant's Rights

- My participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. It will involve an interview or observation to be conducted at an agreed upon location.
- If I choose to participate in this study, I may stop at any time without penalty. My participation may be stopped by contacting [Researcher's Name] at the contact information below.
- The researcher retains the discretion to withdraw me from this research.
- Any personal information that identifies me will be protected by the researcher, and I understand that names will be changed in publication of this research.
- This study has gotten ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Commonwealth University.
- If I have questions regarding the research or my participation I can contact the researcher who will answer my questions.

**[Researcher's Name]**

**Email:**

**Phone:**

- If you prefer to contact [Researcher's Advisor] she may be reached at [email] or [phone].
- Any general questions about my rights as a participant in this research, or other research, can be addressed through contacting:  
Office of Research, Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000  
PO Box 980568  
Richmond, VA 23298  
Phone: XXX.XXX.XXXX

- Audio taping will be part of this research. Please check one:

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to be audio taped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT consent to be audio taped.

My signature below means that I have agreed to participate in this study.

Name: (Please Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### *Phone Interview Consent Form*

Hi, this is [Researcher's Name] thanks for agreeing to speak with me. I'm a student at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) working on a doctoral dissertation for my Ph.D. in education.

Before we begin I need to get your verbal permission to be a participant in this project. You're being invited to participate in this study that is looking at the *The Leader In Me* leadership program being taught at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School. It will involve a phone interview that will ask questions about the leadership program, and your opinions on what your student(s) has learned about leadership and leadership skills. The interview should last for about 30-45 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may quit at any time without penalties, just let me know. Any information you share about your opinions or your child(ren) will be kept anonymous and I won't be using any real names. When my study is completed, the results will be shared with the principal of \_\_\_\_\_, [school district's] research department, and VCU or other educational people interested in my study.

I'd like to give you my contact information in case you have any questions later on:

**[Researcher's Name]**

**Email: [Email]**

**Phone: [Phone]**

Also, if you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this research you can contact the Office of Research at VCU. The phone number is XXX.XXX.XXXX.

Please state your name for me.

Please say yes or no that you are agreeing to participate in this study.

State yes or no that you understand your rights as a participant.

I will need to audio tape this interview so the information we discuss can be included in my paper. Please say yes or no that you agree to be audio taped while we are talking on the phone. Thank you for your time, we can now start the interview.

## Appendix F

### *Observation Letter to Guardians*

Dear Parents or Guardians,

Your student's class has been chosen to be part of a study being done by [Researcher's Name], a doctoral student at VCU. Her study is looking at the leadership program, *The Leader in Me*, that the students participate in at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary school. [Researcher's Name] will observe your student's class in their regular day and schedule and watch while the children do leadership related activities. She will then include her observations in her doctoral dissertation and perhaps other future publications, but no student names or identifiers will be used. All information that could identify a student will remain vague or anonymous.

Sincerely,

[Researcher's Name]

### **Opt-Out Form**

If you DO NOT want your child to be observed in class while participating in *The Leader in Me* activities and learning, please sign below and return the form to your child's teacher by \_\_\_\_\_. This will mean that your child will be given an alternative activity, instead of participating in the classroom lesson.

Parent or Guardian Signature

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### *Observational Protocol*

Grade Observed:

Subject:

Lesson Being Taught:

Applicable *7 Habits*:

Items to Look For	Observation Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Leadership language being used</li> <li>-Activities happening</li> <li>-Describe any visuals (posters, projects, signs, etc.) that are leadership related</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Active Leadership</li> <li>○ Initiative</li> <li>○ Optimism</li> <li>○ Self-Confidence</li> <li>○ Planning Skills</li> <li>○ Using Best Effort</li> <li>○ Setting/Achieving Goals</li> <li>○ Organizational Skills</li> <li>○ Innovative</li> <li>○ Shared Vision</li> <li>○ Meaningful Interactions</li> <li>○ Inspiring/Positive</li> <li>○ Set Good Example</li> <li>○ Respectful</li> <li>○ Responsible</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Conflict Management</li> <li>○ Outside-box Thinking</li> <li>○ Effective Communication</li> <li>○ Honesty</li> <li>○ Courage</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Moral Purpose</li> <li>○ Fairness</li> <li>○ Seek Other Perspectives</li> <li>○ Teamwork</li> <li>○ Coaching/People Skills</li> <li>○ Insightful</li> <li>○ Problem Solving</li> <li>○ Thoughtful Decisions</li> <li>○ Creativity</li> <li>○ Listening Skills</li> <li>○ Motivating</li> <li>○ Empower Others</li> <li>○ Shared Power</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Understands Self</li> <li>○ Shared Values</li> <li>○ Core Beliefs</li> <li>○ Analytical</li> <li>○ Focus on Future</li> <li>○ Facilitate Change</li> <li>○ Care for/Serve Others</li> </ul>	

## VITA

Sarah Elizabeth Evans was born on March 14, 1978 in Poquoson, Virginia, and is a citizen of the United States. She graduated from Poquoson High School in 1996, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from James Madison University in 2000. In 2001 she was sent to Uzbekistan as a Peace Corps volunteer responsible for teaching English, but her stay was cut short by the acts of terrorism that year. In 2003, a Master of Education in Elementary Education from Vanderbilt University was earned. She won the First Year Teacher of the Year award for her school, and taught seven years at an elementary school in the Henrico County Public School division in Virginia. Currently she is focused on her research interest of teaching leadership to young children.