

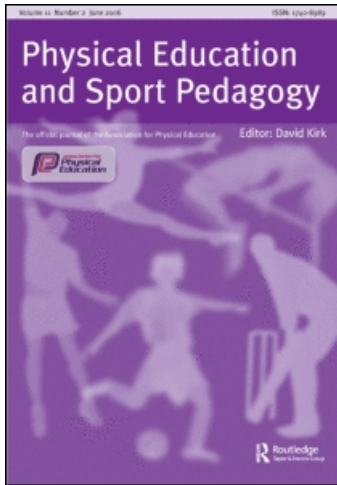
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Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 906872609]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t113674664>

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Online Publication Date: 01 June 2006

To cite this Article Martinek, Tom, Schilling, Tammy and Hellison, Don(2006)'The development of compassionate and caring leadership among adolescents',Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy,11:2,141 — 157

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/17408980600708346

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17408980600708346>

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The development of compassionate and caring leadership among adolescents

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Background: Fostering the innate need to lead, teach and care for others is fundamental to creating a just and moral society. The nurturing begins early in life and becomes especially vital during the adolescent years, when peer pressure and the need to belong are heightened. Unfortunately, many youths believe leadership is associated with being good-looking, athletic, wealthy or smart. Leadership development is viewed differently, as an inclusive process where everyone can be a leader.

Purpose: To describe how youth leadership evolved in two education programs serving low-income minority youth. Both programs are designed to foster leadership qualities in adolescent youth. They provide opportunities for ‘veteran’ program participants to develop leadership skills by teaching sport and life skills to younger kids from various community agencies and programs. Many youth leaders attend one of the local schools, while some are either in alternative schools or pursuing a General Education Development Certificate (GED).

Participants and settings: One of the programs operates at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and the other at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The program at UNCG is called the Youth Leader Corps program. The one at UIC is called the Apprentice Teacher Program.

Research design: A description of program participants’ previous involvement in values-based sport clubs during their elementary and middle school years is provided. The clubs provided the initial leadership experiences that prepared them to take on larger leadership roles. Four developmental stages of youth leadership are proposed. These stages are: (1) needs-based leadership; (2) focusing on planning and teaching; (3) reflective leadership; and (4) compassionate leadership.

Data collection: Numerous data sources were used—one was interviews (focus and individual) with youth leaders, their assistants, campers and program leaders, another was the leaders’ written reflections of their teaching. A leader’s assistant provided written (and oral) feedback to the leaders after each lesson. A final source of data came from the program leaders’ field notes and informal interactions between the leaders and staff.

Data analysis: Case studies were presented showing each stage of leadership development. The extent that certain issues impact adolescent growth across these stages is also described.

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Findings: Four case studies illustrating each of the four stages are presented. The four cases illustrate the transformation of adolescents from being self-serving participants to being caring and compassionate leaders. The ability to progress through these stages is related to the youth leaders' personal needs and their levels of moral development.

Conclusions: The youth leaders sometimes regressed to a lower stage of leadership, but they also sometimes moved beyond their current stage to an advanced stage. It was also evident that their personal lives greatly influenced their comfort in extending their leadership and compassion to younger participants.

We are all born with the capability to lead and care for others. Even toddlers can be sensitive to the needs of their peers. Robert Coles (1998) contends that a three-year-old can respond with deep concern about another's misery; they can feel the pangs of injustice to others, even empathy. Studies by Eckerman and colleagues show true friendships taking shape between the ages of one and three years (Eckerman & Didow, 1988; Eckerman *et al.*, 1989). Companionship develops by helping each other coordinate play, acting out fantasies and, sometimes, protecting one another from isolation.

It is also true that children are capable of being selfish, unfeeling and cruel. They can be harmful to others as much as they can be helpful (Damon, 1997). But the crux of the matter is that caring and compassion for others is a natural and important part of children's lives from the time of their first relationships. For many, the drive to help others comes from a need to be accepted. Noted child psychologist Judith Harris (1998) proposes that young children are very connected to their peers, much more than they are to their parents. They place great value on being able to imitate, lead and follow others so they can be connected to 'the group'.

We believe that fostering the innate need to lead, teach and care for others is fundamental to creating a just and moral society. The nurturing begins early in life and becomes especially vital during the adolescent years, when peer pressure and the need to belong are heightened. Unfortunately, many youths believe leadership is associated with being good-looking, athletic, wealthy or smart. Their perceptions of leadership are formed by myths and fallacies about how a person becomes a leader. For example, some believe in the 'great person' theory of leadership. That is, leaders are born and not made. Being a leader is someone's destiny and only relegated to those with the right upbringing such as presidents and CEOs. Another common notion is the 'big bang' theory (Fertman & Long, 1990). Ordinary people become great leaders because of extraordinary events. For example, Martin Luther King was propelled into 'great leader' status at a time when the civil rights movement was at its peak. Likewise, Lech Walesa became the leader of his labor party when business and labor union differences threatened the economic landscape of Poland.

We see leadership development differently, as an inclusive process where everyone can be a leader. This is no less true for young people than for adults. Although today's youths have more diverse needs and face numerous challenges in our unstable world, they continue to have great potential for being leaders and helping others transform themselves from followers to leaders. Ultimately, we believe that youth leaders can teach others to be compassionate (Schilling, 2001; Martinek & Schilling, 2003). They communicate

their thoughts and feelings, help others understand and act on their beliefs, and can influence others in an ethical and socially responsible way (van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

The question is, then, how can adolescents be helped to become aware of their leadership skills? Kouzes and Pozner (1987) claim that opportunities to lead can be categorized in three ways: trial and error, people, and education. *Trial and error* means learning by doing. Being a school club officer, captain of a team, or an active participant in a community service program are examples of positions in which youngsters can learn by doing. *People* can also be instrumental in forming leadership skills. Coaches, teachers, counselors and parents provide feedback and guidance in the learning process. They also become role models. Structured *leadership education* represents the third way to learn about being a leader. While trial and error and adults can help kids become leaders, structured leadership education is perhaps the most important in helping those who have not perceived themselves as leaders or who have not been involved with community and school activities.

In this article we describe how youth leadership evolved in two education programs serving low-income minority youth—one that operates at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and the other at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The program at UNCG is called the Youth Leader Corps program and has been operating for seven years. The one at UIC is called the Apprentice Teacher Program and has been running for eight years. Both programs are designed to foster leadership qualities in adolescent youth. They provide opportunities for ‘veteran’ program participants to develop leadership skills by teaching sport and life skills to younger kids from various community agencies and programs (e.g., Boys and Girls’ Club, Head Start, National Youth Sport Program). Many youth leaders attend one of the local schools, while some are either in alternative schools or pursuing a General Education Development Certificate (GED). There are also a few who have dropped out of school because of pregnancy or incarceration, but still attend the leadership programs.

First, we describe the program participants’ previous involvement in values-based sport clubs during their elementary and middle school years. The clubs provided the initial leadership experiences that prepared them to take on larger leadership roles in the Youth Leader Corps and Apprentice Teacher Programs. Second, an explanation of data sources for evaluating leadership development in both programs is given. Third, the theoretical frameworks from which youth leadership evolves are presented. We conclude by proposing four developmental stages of youth leadership. Each stage is then illustrated by presenting a profile of a youth leader whose needs, behaviors and leadership are reflective of that stage. These profiles help to show how adolescents function within each of these stages as they acquire leadership qualities. They also represent important reference points for finding ways of advancing their leadership skills.

Preparing to lead others

The Greensboro and Chicago programs have several common features between them.¹ Both leadership programs grew from extended-day sport programs operating

in the Greensboro and Chicago public elementary and middle schools.² The clubs were created for youngsters who struggle in mainstream education (and society). Poor grades, school suspension and indifference toward their teachers and school plague these children. All were referred to the club directors by teachers, counselors and administrative staff. The directors of the clubs wanted to ‘stay with’ the club members who were going on to high school, where dropping out of school often became a viable option. Thus, the leadership programs were initially created to maintain the club members’ connection to programs and a set of values-based goals.

There are two important dimensions involved in the development and implementation of the sport clubs. One is to empower kids. Although we use sport (broadly defined) as the vehicle for teaching life skills to the club members, empowerment becomes the ‘heart and soul’ of these clubs. It plants the necessary seeds of confidence for future leadership roles. Empowering kids requires that certain things happen. It requires an open forum for discussion and input. Club sessions offer opportunities for participants to share their thoughts about their behavior as well as the behavior of other club members. Teamwork is often scrutinized through this process. Gaining confidence in communicating thoughts and feelings ultimately leads to more self-initiated contributions to the club.

Empowerment also means allowing kids to make ‘authentic’ choices (Schilling *et al.*, 2001). By authentic, we mean that the choices provided are valued by the participants (and not just the club leader). They are choices that will benefit and advance them and the club in some way. They are *not* choices that just keep them busy. Choosing the sport, intensity level of an activity, a partner with whom to work, specific role for the day, or the color and design of the club’s t-shirts, all lead to responsible decision-making. The consequences of the choices are also realized by the club members. This provides the backdrop for reflecting on their choices in terms of consequences to self and others, thus insuring a sense of control in future decision-making.

Peer teaching is the second dimension of the early sport club experience. Teaching each other becomes an important precursor to more advanced leadership. With peer teaching the youth participants’ decisions and actions have a direct bearing on the experiences of their fellow club members. Quite often, we ask experienced club members to help the less skilled or less experienced ones. Stations are often used where a club member instructs others in various activities. Sometimes these lessons are planned for those club members who are teaching for the first time. Later, they have choices on what to teach. Running mini reflection sessions also becomes a part of the peer teacher’s responsibility. Peer teachers advance by having opportunities to coach. Running a practice, setting up team guidelines that foster fair play and inclusion, calling timeouts or conducting team discussions are some of the responsibilities the coach assumes.

The Youth Leader Corps (Greensboro) and Apprentice Teacher Program (Chicago) represent the ‘capstone’ experiences for the sport club members. During their sport club experiences in the elementary and middle school grades, all the leaders were taught life skills using the Personal and Social Responsibility Model (Hellison, 1983, 2003). These skills reflect five basic goals: (a) self-control and

respect for the rights and feelings of others; (b) trying one's best and teamwork; (c) self-direction; (d) caring for and helping others; and (e) applying these goals outside the gym (i.e. school, neighborhood, home).

At this juncture, program participants become youth leaders and are responsible for creating, implementing and evaluating their own physical activity lessons that also reinforce the responsibility goals. They typically teach children from other community agencies such as the Boys and Girls' Clubs, Head Start, and National Youth Sport Association. Running reflection sessions, teaching sport skills, and doing one-on-one counseling become part of their teaching agenda. Ideally, we want the leadership role interpreted in a way that has meaning to the leaders and is consistent with the values of the Youth Leader Corps and Apprentice Teacher programs. This experience engenders a spirit of personal and social responsibility that peels away accretion of autocratic, top-down notions of leadership. It also places the responsibility values in front of the leaders—a reminder of sorts. The values can be ignored by the leader, acknowledged but not practiced, applied for a short amount of time, redefined or totally embraced and practiced throughout. Our aim has been to present and 'model' these values in a way that is immediately attractive to the youth leaders, thus enabling them to accept and use them. The most challenging part for them (and us), then, is to make sense of what the responsibility values mean in their own lives as well as others.

Evaluating the leadership programs

Evaluations of UNCG's and UIC's programs have generated a variety of data from numerous sources. One source has been formal interviews (focus and individual) with youth leaders, their assistants, campers and program leaders. These interviews have typically been scheduled at the conclusion of each camp and centered on: (1) perceptions of leadership and camp experience; (2) growth of the leaders; and (3) perceptions of the leaders' qualities and shortcomings.

Another valuable source comes from the leaders' written reflections of their teaching. At the end of every program session, the leaders discussed their experiences, identified issues and planned for the next session. They were asked to consider their performance in terms of assertive leadership, active teaching, being positive and keeping kids active, all of which were defined so the leaders understood the concepts. Then they filled out a questionnaire which included a self-evaluation of their leadership skills, rating themselves as excellent, good, fair, not so good or 'really needs work'. They were also asked to address what went well and what they needed to work on to become a better leader. In addition, the assistant provided written (and oral) feedback to the leaders after each lesson. Both leaders and assistants shared this information and examine ways of improving subsequent lessons.

A final source of data has come from the program leaders' field notes and informal interactions between the leaders and staff. Program leaders often jot down critical events or things that have been said between camp sessions. These entries help to

augment the above data and serve as discussion points during pre- and post-camp meetings.

All these data show how leadership develops through various stages and suggest that adolescents do not all of a sudden become leaders. Jerome Burns (1978) calls it a *transformational process* requiring a delicate interplay between the needs and values of adolescents and their sensitivity to the needs and values of others. These stages are: (1) needs-based leadership; (2) focusing on planning and teaching; (3) reflective leadership; and (4) compassionate leadership.

Foundations of stage development

We have gained perspective about these stages from more than just observation and data. In particular, the works of Abraham Maslow (1968) and Carol Gilligan (1982) have given clarity as to why youth participants move from being self-serving individuals to caring and compassionate leaders. Maslow's theory on self-actualization has been instrumental in the understanding of the personal factors (i.e. needs) that directly impact youth leaders' development in our programs. Some of our leaders, especially new ones, experience lower-level needs (survival, safety, belonging and love) (Maslow, 1968). Maslow (1968) refers to these needs as *deficiency needs*; the attention and energy required to address survival, safety and social needs can leave little room for leadership exploration and achievement. Once lower-level needs are satisfied, higher-level needs become more salient. For youth leaders, this is seen in a desire to be a confident leader, fully know oneself, meet one's potential and find a setting or activity that is a fit for one's talents. His theory proposes that higher-level needs are much different than lower-level needs in that partial or complete fulfillment of them increases motivation for further fulfillment.

Gilligan's (1982) work relates to how our youth leaders acquire a moral commitment to self and others. Her theory is rooted in a critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) model of moral reasoning. Kohlberg believed that an individual's conception of right and wrong dictated moral reasoning and thinking. He felt that adolescents shift away from decisions based on existing laws to rules based on principles of justice and mercy. Gilligan proposed, however, that moral reasoning is based on an 'ethic of care' and progresses along three developmental levels. At the first level the individual focuses on self interests where concern is for oneself and survival. A shift is seen in the second level of reasoning, where the concern is for one's responsibilities; self-sacrificing and caring for others begin to emerge. At the final level, concern for the responsibilities to others and oneself become the prime motive; self and others are interdependent (Gilligan, 1982).

While Maslow's and Gilligan's theories address different aspects of adolescent development (i.e. needs, moral reasoning), they are not independent from one another. We have always found that the power of personal needs is often reflected in the way it influences adolescent youth to give of themselves. The various needs of our leaders are created by many life stressors beyond the social ones that *all* adolescents experience: dysfunctional family life; sudden immersion into parenthood;

personal incarceration or incarceration of a parent; being a primary caretaker of a sibling; or alienation from the school culture. If these needs are not satisfied their sense of personal control diminishes significantly (Jarrett, 1998). This not only impacts the leaders' motivation to 'reach out' to others, but blurs their sense of what is right and wrong.

Stages of development

We now describe the four stages of leadership development. Each section begins with a general description of the stage that shows the link between each stage and the theoretical frameworks (i.e. Maslow, Gilligan) explained earlier. This is followed by a detailed case showing how the stage is reflected through the needs, program connection and leadership perceptions, and behaviors of a specific youth leader. These portrayals only show where a leader appears to be 'most of the time', reinforcing that leadership development is a dynamic and tenuous process.

Stage one: needs-based leadership

General description. In this first stage, youth leaders are mainly focused on *fulfilling their own needs* rather than fulfilling their leadership role. They neither see themselves as leaders nor recognize the importance of being a leader. The lower-level needs (Maslow, 1968) of these adolescents vary in character and are often *physical* ones (i.e. stability, safety). They can also be *social*, including the need to be with friends, gain attention and belong or be loved. Many of these needs are results of the constant instability in their lives (Jackson & Ward, 2000).

Quite often, the immediate and acute needs of youth leaders negatively impact their program connection. Thus, our first stage of development parallels Gilligan's (1982) lowest level of moral reasoning; that is, adolescent leaders come to the program with a 'what can it do for me' mentality. Their attendance is primarily driven by privileges (e.g., opportunities to socialize with other youth leaders and college students, dinner in the college cafeteria). This significantly limits what they can get out of the program and their understanding of the program's values. Subsequently, their growth and development as leaders is stunted. Their behaviors are inconsistent and usually focus on taking care of themselves first; thus, they put minimal effort into their planning, teaching and interaction with the kids.

The case of Nakeisha. When she became a youth leader, Nakeisha was a 15-year-old African American student at a local high school in Greensboro. Nakeisha joined UNCG's middle school sport club when she was a seventh-grader. Once a good student, Nakeisha's academic performance was beginning to falter. As with many of the club members, Nakeisha often struggled with the demands of school, trying to balance them with an active social life. She resented the expectations placed on her by the school administration and staff. The pressure to be accountable to so

many adults weighed heavily on Nakeisha, causing her to act out or sometimes disengage by falling asleep in class.

Nakeisha lived in an impoverished section of Greensboro noted for its high crime rate and low-income housing settlements. A small three-room apartment accommodated Nakeisha, her mom and two younger brothers. Nakeisha's mom worked days as a clerical worker at an insurance office. She struggled to keep close tabs on Nakeisha along with the younger sibling. Her dad left the family early in her life so the only male adults in her home were the occasional boyfriends of her mother. Nakeisha was greatly influenced by others and frequently followed the crowd—sometimes in the wrong direction. For Nakeisha, instability at home and the need for social contact, belonging and recognition from older peers seriously impacted her program connection and potential as a youth leader.

Social connections within the program and on campus were Nakeisha's number one priority. While her attendance at the Youth Leader Corps was strong, her commitment to the goals of the program was weak. At the beginning of each session, Nakeisha was usually found talking on her cell phone or to male university students. Little time was spent getting prepared for her lesson. If she was working with someone, she would let that person get the equipment ready and assume the responsibility of teaching. During post-camp group discussions, Nakeisha rarely contributed.

It should also be mentioned that at times she did demonstrate teaching aptitude, but as a second thought or because she did not have anything else to occupy her time and attention. Unfortunately, moments of teaching prowess were infrequent for Nakeisha and only took place when she felt compelled to do so. One of the university assistants who worked with Nakeisha lamented that:

Nakeisha loves the activities we have done but it seems like she is playing, not teaching as much as she should. It is hard because Kim (her partner) is a much stronger leader. Nakeisha sits back and lets Kim do the teaching. I think she likes getting her needs met, but I also think she enjoyed working with the kids.

Her constant yearning for the social elements of the Youth Leader Corps also created concern for the staff. After each club session the leaders and staff would trek across campus to the university dining hall. There, they would eat, recollect and have healthy dialogue with each other. For Nakeisha, this was a chance to do other things. 'Where's Nakeisha?' was a cry often resonating from the program director and other youth leaders. There were several times that she would stray from the group and go into one of the men's dorms to see what was happening. At dinner, she would not eat with the group, usually persuading one of the other female leaders to join her. She would try to 'hook up' with some of the male students to see what parties were going on that weekend. Her reluctance to be 'part of the group' affected the cohesiveness of the group.

Nakeisha did little to explore her leadership capabilities within and outside of the Youth Leader Corps program. Consequently, her ideas of leadership were quite narrow and underdeveloped. Bill Osher and Joanne Ward (2000) point out that understanding leadership comes from community, school and family activities that inform adolescents about ways to lead. Lack of involvement in school activities and

her disengagement in club reflection made it hard to visualize her leadership role. Patience among those trying to help Nakeisha embrace her leadership potential became strained, especially for her assistant, who wrote in his evaluation of Nakeisha:

Nakeisha has a hard time seeing the big picture here. At times she shows great promise. But she is too often distracted by other things around her. Maybe she doesn't feel a part of the camp. She pretty much ignores my suggestions . . . it's been hard to connect with her. This may not be the best program for her.

Unfortunately, several 'heart-to-heart' talks with the program director failed to rekindle Nakeisha's commitment to the Youth Leader Corps. Eventually, she was given two choices. One was to work with everyone in the program and commit to its philosophy. The other was to take time off and reevaluate her role in the Youth Leader Corps and decide whether it was the right place for her. Nakeisha chose the latter . . . she never returned to the program.

Case summary. Nakeisha's lower-level needs (Maslow, 1968) outweighed her ability to grasp the essence of being a youth leader. Personal issues, instability at home and the constant struggle for social attention and love (loosely defined) prevented her from truly understanding and experiencing the program goals. Thus, her program connection was weak and she was never able to envision her leadership potential. Nakeisha's moral growth became stagnant as she remained focused on her own self interests as a youth leader. Her eventual separation from the program was inevitable.

Stage two: focusing on planning and teaching—Terrence

General description. The second stage finds the youth leaders focused on *becoming an effective teacher*. Their connection to the program becomes mutually beneficial. The leaders' self-interests and personal needs begin to take a back seat to a commitment to help their campers and foster a positive relationship with them (Gilligan, 1982). Since the program offers a safe and supportive setting for exploring and practicing leadership, their lower-level needs (Maslow, 1968) are beginning to be satisfied. Youth leaders consider how to effectively plan and organize a class, communicate clearly, demonstrate, give feedback to the children and change the learning task to maximize learning. Although the leaders' needs are still present, they move beyond weighty survival and attention needs and become more driven by self-esteem and belonging needs. They want to fit in as a youth leader and show that they are competent teachers. As they begin to experience success, their confidence in teaching grows, thus reinforcing their belief that positive teaching behaviors and effort will lead to success and enjoyment for themselves and the younger kids.

A case of Terrence. Terrence is a 14-year-old eighth-grade special education student at Cermak School, which serves pre-school through eighth-grade students in one of the most violent neighborhoods in Chicago. Many stores are boarded up, banks and national chain grocery stores are nowhere to be found, and storefront churches abound. Handwritten signs posted here and there plead to 'Stop the killing'.

His grandmother was sole guardian of Terrence and two of his brothers, as well as one cousin. Needless to say, she had her hands full. Although Terrence aspired to go to college, his academic preparation as a special education student, in addition to the often inadequate academic preparation in inner city schools in general, severely limited his opportunities.

Terrence was a handsome and very personable boy and his behavior in the club, unlike most of the club members, did not reflect much of the street influence (e.g., intimidation to earn respect). His interest in teaching and coaching basketball had been consistent over the years. While occasional temper tantrums and verbal abuse were reported by his teachers in school, such outbursts during club meetings were absent.

All coaching club members experienced two special connections with the club. The most powerful connection was the club's sport, basketball, which was highly valued by males in the community and for which Terrence, along with most club members, possesses unrealistic NBA aspirations. Another connection was the club's presence in the school for the past 13 years, making it part of the school culture. In addition to these more generic factors, two of Terrence's brothers as well as two cousins were members of the coaching club, although all but one brother had graduated by the time Terrence entered school. While in school Terrence's brother had responsibility for supervising him during club meetings. So Terrence sitting on the sidelines and begging to play became commonplace (the bench is known as our daycare area!). In his brother's last year at Cermak, Terrence, then ten years of age, joined his older brother as a club member. So in a sense, Terrence grew up in the club, suggesting that he might have a head start in developing advanced leadership responsibilities.

In the Apprentice Teacher Program, Terrence had to overcome his need both to rely on and show off his basketball skills. For example, when reminded that he was doing fancy dribbling in a scrimmage rather than leading, he said 'Okay, I'll only dribble between my legs a few times!' He was in transition from preoccupation with his *personal needs*, that of being a basketball player, to being a leader of younger boys responsible for teaching them not only how to play team basketball but life skills as well.

The stage transition from *personal needs* to *planning and teaching* was facilitated by the disparity between Terrence's daily ratings of his leadership skills and those of the Apprentice Teacher Program staff who also rated his skills. At first, he checked 'excellent' for all four leader qualities and wrote 'nothing' for what he needed to work on. It took some extended conversation to help him understand what it took to become a skilled leader, and to share with him specific examples the staff had observed of the extent to which his demonstrated leadership fell short of displaying these qualities. By the end of the summer program his self-evaluations were much more in line with the perceptions of the adult program leaders, and his open-ended comments reflected more thoughtful plans for improvement. Moreover, the adult program leader evaluations of Terrence improved as time went on, although back-sliding continued as well, including the need for one of the adult program leaders to remind Terrence on the last day of the program that he was supposed to be a leader, not a basketball player!

To more formally evaluate the apprentice teachers' developmental stages of leadership, adult staff checked one of the four stages after each session that in their judgment most closely represented Terrence's leadership performance. Program staff also added some comments to clarify their check marks. To a large extent, Terrence's evaluations moved beyond the *personal needs* stage and toward *planning and teaching*, although the progression was by no means linear. For example, he showed definite growth in commitment to forming positive relationships with campers and giving appropriate demonstrations, but struggled with other skills such as changing the task to maximize the campers' learning. Some days Terrence was obviously more focused on being a leader than others. As the program continued, however, his attention to working with his kids became progressively stronger.

Case summary. Terrence's profile demonstrates how the transition from stage one to stage two can be difficult, especially for a special education student from a low-income school struggling to cope with all of its educational responsibilities. Although he still experienced lower-level needs to some extent, he began to demonstrate commitment to his role as a youth leader. In addition, his growth in developing positive relationships with the kids he taught indicated a shift away from self-interests toward consideration of his responsibilities to others.

Certainly in this case, structured leadership education played a pivotal role in Terrence's bumpy transition from *personal needs* toward *planning and teaching*. His formal self-evaluations along with those of the program staff proved helpful in nudging him toward the next stage. This underscores the important role that structured leadership experiences which include assessment, formal or informal, can play in the educational experiences of young leaders. Terrence was also much more comfortable teaching basketball skills than anything else. His commitment to planning and teaching was bolstered by giving him the opportunity to choose something to teach with which he was most comfortable.

Stage three: reflective leadership—Nelly

General description. Once youth leaders become proficient and confident in their teaching, they move to the third stage of development, where they become *reflective about their leadership role*. Reciprocal learning takes place in this stage. That is, youth leaders begin to see what it truly means to be a leader, both in the club and outside. Formed by past successes and failures in teaching others, they begin to learn more about themselves and what they can do beyond just their teaching prowess. They continue to strive for self- and other-determined success as a leader but also begin their journey toward Maslow's stage of self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). This stage also serves as a precursor to understanding and valuing interdependence between the self and others—Gilligan's (1982) last stage of moral development.

The case of Nelly. Nelly was a 17-year-old female who was involved in some capacity in the program over an eight-year period, serving as a youth leader for three years.

She first participated in UNCG's after-school sport club as a fourth-grader and was initially referred to the program by her teacher because she was unable to control her temper. Nelly, her mother and younger brother and sister lived in a small apartment in one of the city's public housing communities called Morningside Homes. When Morningside Homes was torn down for renovation her family moved to a home close by. The transition was difficult for her since she felt that Morningside was her 'real home' and residents of Morningside were her 'true family'. Her younger brother had been in and out of juvenile detention and was rarely at home. Nelly was close to her extended family and was generous when it came to her family (e.g., giving part of her youth leader stipend to her mother, grandmother and younger sister). Although her basic needs were fulfilled and she had a generally stable home life, she did struggle to see beyond the poverty in which she had grown up. Her limited vision of the future was further hampered by the influence of her mother. Low-paying jobs and reliance on welfare checks had been the staples of her mother's efforts to support the family. This type of dependency was accepted as a 'way of life' and was embraced by Nelly. Her mother's view of the possibilities for Nelly to move forward beyond high school was narrow.

Nelly was very quiet and shy during her first years in the sport club, although she exhibited a relatively strong sense of self and higher level of maturity regarding program involvement. At one point during her middle school participation, she perceived that she did not fit in with the rest of the kids, who were more rambunctious. She decided to take some time off and then returned the following semester. An increasing sense of belonging, strong connections with program leaders and the ability to see the relationship between what she did in the program and her future characterized her program participation. In line with being a reflective youth leader, Nelly often spent more of her off-time talking about program issues with the program leaders rather than with other youth leaders.

Nelly exemplified a higher level of leadership in that she saw the bigger picture of her role as a youth leader. She became more involved with the younger participants and clearly understood that different youth leaders interact on different levels with the kids. For example, she believed that some youth leaders were more of a parent figure but recognized that her leadership style was different and could be just as effective. She also comprehended that one's style could change depending on the context (i.e. in the program versus with peers).

Over time, Nelly became more vocal in post-program reflections (e.g., what worked and what did not work). She was willing and able to articulate weaknesses of the session in the presence of her peer leaders. In addition, she sometimes talked with the program leaders about broader changes that could help the program. She even privately scolded the program director for being too easy on a leader that seemed to be shirking some responsibilities. Finally, she understood how social relationships and issues impacted leadership and the program itself. There were times when youth leaders had conflicts with each other. Because Nelly got along with all of the youth leaders, she was often caught in the middle. Individual youth leaders wanted to talk to her about their problems with other leaders so they could get her on their side.

Instead of getting involved in the situations, Nelly avoided confrontation and talking about other people, opting to spend more time with the program leaders or on her own. Her reactions prompted other youth leaders to resolve their differences more quickly and to focus more on their leadership within the program.

Case summary. In Nelly's case, we are again reminded that leadership development is a fluid and dynamic process. Nelly looked beyond the actual leadership and teaching responsibilities for each program session and embraced the broader notion of what it means to be a 'leader'. She experienced the need to learn more about herself and her potential, similar to Maslow's (1968) description of self-actualization. She was also able to see the interdependence between responsibility to herself and others. Consequently, she separated herself from situations and people that were detrimental to the program's success and her own leadership development. This is most certainly an advanced leadership skill.

Stage four: compassionate leadership—Demetrius

General description. The final stage of leadership development is *compassionate leading*, where leaders begin to internalize an ethical concern for relationships with others (Gilligan, 1982). Getting leaders to reach this stage is the ultimate goal of the Youth Leader Corps and Apprentice Teacher programs. In this most advanced stage are those youngsters who build on the previous stages of leadership and become genuinely compassionate toward others. They reclaim the need to become what Robert Coles (1997) calls a 'good person' and move further along the continuum of searching for a fit between their skills and talents and their aspirations.

Compassionate leading is manifested in three ways. One is in teaching compassion to others. The leaders create lessons that require each youngster to be sensitive to the needs of others. For example, inclusiveness is reinforced by organizing small-sided games with an 'all-touch' rule. Each team member must touch the ball before a shot can be taken. 'Soft defense' is another way the leader becomes aware of individual differences. The leader has a more skilled camper 'back off' from guarding less skilled campers.

A second way is teaching with compassion. Leaders respond to those campers who are struggling emotionally or physically. One-on-one guidance becomes a common approach to helping those in need. Being attentive, letting campers express their opinions and giving personal choices are signs of the compassionate leader.

A third way of compassionate leadership is acquiring a service orientation outside of the gym. In other words, there is a commitment to think carefully about the public good of others outside of the leadership program. Confronted with numerous social, political and economic barriers of society, this becomes a tough challenge. Those who take on this challenge are willing to venture out to serve others (Komives *et al.*, 1998). We have not seen this level of compassionate leading in our youth leaders. There are two possible reasons for this—they may not have advanced

to this level yet or there may be some evidence but we are unaware of it because we are not with them as much outside of the program.

The case of Demetrius. Demetrius was a veteran member of the Youth Leader Corps who was nineteen years old, tall and athletic looking. He started in UNCG's sport club when he was in fourth grade and has been in the Youth Leader Corps for the past five years. He was an attention seeker and would often play the role of the class clown in elementary school. Sometimes he would be suspended from school because of multiple offenses. Demetrius asked the program leader if he could be in the sport club. Initially, the principal did not want him to join the club. But after some persuasive urging by the program leader, the principal allowed him to be a member.

Demetrius is the youngest of four siblings. His father and stepmother appeared to have a pretty stable marriage. His real mother had little contact with Demetrius and lived in Virginia with his brother. Like Nelly, Demetrius' family lived in Morningside Homes for several years and then moved to a modest home located on the outskirts of the city. Demetrius' dad worked third shift at a large fabric mill and his stepmother went to a local community college at night trying to get a nursing assistant's degree. Therefore, there was little supervision of Demetrius activities during after-school hours.

In terms of program participation, Demetrius perceived a sense of belonging and feeling cared for by staff (Schilling *et al.*, forthcoming). In addition, he loved having fun with the kids and other youth leaders and enjoyed the feeling of achievement he got from working with the kids. His strengths as a youth leader were not overlooked by staff or his fellow youth leaders. During interviews regarding perceptions of leadership, the youth leaders were asked if anyone in the program stood out as an 'All-World' youth leader. Those who identified a specific person or people all chose Demetrius. Some of the comments that followed included:

He don't let the kids down, he'll help the kids, play games with them. Have fun with them.

You know he helped me a lot; I can say he really enjoys teaching the kids. And caring about what he teaches the kids. He really pays attention. He likes what he's doin' and you know, like maybe a kid might need extra help. He'll take that time out, and give the other people something and help that kids improve with it.

As soon as those kids come in . . . I don't know if you all notice it but sometimes I see them (Demetrius and Gloria) right at the door waiting for the kids to come in. So as soon as they come in, they can just get everything all together, take their kids on over to their little station, have them do their thing, you know, have their fun. As soon as they come in, I hear Demetrius all the time 'hey, how's everybody doin'?

As a youth leader of pre-school-aged children, Demetrius showed compassionate leadership on a consistent basis. Like other good teachers and leaders, he was 'in the zone' from the time the kids arrived until they departed. He met the kids at the door and focused on their needs throughout the session. He understood how to break down his lesson according to the kids' level and worked on improving his lesson before the next group of kids came to his station. He had great instincts for

when and how to change a lesson during the program. While other youth leaders sometimes focused on what *they* got out of the lesson or program, Demetrius' enjoyment rested on whether the kids liked the lesson, were learning and were having fun.

Demetrius' compassion did not end with the kids. He helped other youth leaders improve their own teaching. One youth leader noted that she was nervous when she first became a youth leader but Demetrius calmed her fears. He would discuss her lesson with her and give advice on what was most important as a leader (e.g., participating with the kids, being enthusiastic and caring). Eventually, Demetrius took on additional responsibilities within the program. He no longer taught a station but ran the entire session. This involved helping other youth leaders set up, dividing kids into groups, monitoring time and giving feedback on stations, and running the reflection circle at the end of the session. As the leader of the reflection circle, Demetrius was comfortable with talking about what went well and what did not go so well. It was clear that he had earned the respect of his fellow youth leaders and was able to tell them what needed to happen to make the program better for the kids.

Unfortunately, the linkage between Demetrius and extreme compassion was significantly weaker outside the gym walls. He continued to regress to the street values when he was around his 'home boys'. This proved detrimental to his ability to contribute to the surrounding community. Recently, Demetrius was arrested for breaking and entering. He was placed in the county jail for several months. Interestingly, he dutifully returned to the Youth Leader Corps program the day after his release. Demetrius' challenge, however, was and continues to be to envision and embrace his potential for compassionate leadership on a broader scale.

Case summary. Despite all the setbacks in his personal life, Demetrius had amazingly been able to 'step up' his leadership skills. He managed to leave all of his troubles outside the gym when working with kids; the stressors did not prevent him from greeting the young campers with a smile and making sure every kid had a positive experience with him. And they did not prevent him from slicing away the fears that kids have when they are challenged with new learning experiences. We don't know why he was able to do these things in spite of all that he had been through. Perhaps, it was his personal problems that created the dissonance needed to lead others in a sensitive and caring way. Or, was it simply the human attention he got from kids (and us) that reminded him that he was valued by others?

Final thoughts

The importance of understanding the dynamic and fluid nature of leadership development among adolescents cannot be stressed enough. This article describes a framework from which program developers can envision paths of leadership development for adolescent youth. We are reminded that moving them forward often requires gentle nudging, high expectations, authentic choices, opportunities for reflection and recognition. The way these strategies are used will depend mostly on knowing

the life circumstance, disposition, and motives at a given time. Not *all* leaders respond in the same way nor is the same way expected for *all* leaders.

In the individual cases presented, the youth leaders sometimes regressed to a lower stage of leadership, but they also sometimes moved beyond their current stage to an advanced stage. It was also evident that their personal lives greatly influenced their comfort in extending their leadership and compassion to younger participants. For Terrence, Nelly and Demetrius, personal needs will undoubtedly persist and alter their ambition to be the caretaker of others in our programs. In fact, many youth leaders may never be able to reach the final stage of development! Their anxiety, self-doubt and resistance continue to challenge us. And even the promise shown by Demetrius may wane due to the unrelenting lure of the street culture. We are also mindful of the burden of Nakeisha's personal needs. Its weight became too heavy to care about others and the program. These ups and downs make our work so engrossing as we are continually reminded that helping adolescents transform into caring and compassionate leaders is messy business.

Committing oneself to leading and caring for others is a courageous decision. On the back of the Greensboro Youth Leaders' t-shirt is a saying: 'We hand one another along.' It's a phrase that is the central theme of Robert Coles' book *Lives of Moral Leadership* (2000). It epitomizes the type of leadership we are trying to shape in our youth. When our leaders first saw the phrase, most of them scratched their heads. They weren't sure what it meant. The leaders were told that by leading and helping others they can inspire them to do the same. One of our youth leaders, Destiny, said it best: 'Being a good leader is just being all you can be ... a good role model is like you doing something, you want to give a good impression to others so that they can, you know, continue doing the same.' Her quote reaffirms our belief that adolescent youth have the potential to propel themselves to another level of leadership and discovery. It gives us the energy and impulse to help young people—even those who push us away—realize their leadership potential.

Notes

1. For more detailed descriptions of Greensboro's and Chicago's sport club programs read Martinek *et al.*'s (1999) article in the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance* and Hellison's (1999) article in *New Designs in Youth Development*.
2. Greensboro's program is called a Sports Club and Chicago's program is called a Coaching Club. Both serve similar purposes and program goals. The Sports Club was held on the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's campus and was directed by Tom with assistance from Tammy. The Coaching Club was held at three schools in some of Chicago's most underserved neighborhoods and was directed by Don.

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