



A Developmental Framework For Adolescent Leaders For Sustainability

Patricia Armstrong¹ and Annette Gough
RMIT University

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Adult leadership has been a research focus for some time and, more recently, some researchers have turned their attention to adult leadership as it relates to sustainability. However, there has been far less research in the field of child and adolescent leadership, with only a few researchers addressing adolescent leadership for sustainability. In addition, while there are a number of development frameworks for adult leaders, there are none in the field of adolescent leadership for sustainability. This paper helps to address the gap in the knowledge base in this field and, in particular, proposes a framework with five different levels of adolescent leadership for sustainability, as well as strategies to help motivate adolescents to progress through these different levels of leadership. This framework will have practical implications for educators and teachers who are developing and conducting education programs with adolescent leaders by providing a number of unique instruments and tools.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research reported here is part of a larger, 3-4 year longitudinal study, conducted in Melbourne, Australia. It investigated adolescents' understandings of leadership and leadership for sustainability, the qualities and skills of leaders and the factors that impacted on their motivation, emergence and development as young leaders. There were a total of 91 participants in the study. 20 adolescents (aged 15-16 years at the start of the study) and 10 principals and teachers from five schools were interviewed (using semi-structured interviews) three times as part of the longitudinal study, while we also conducted two focus groups and a number of additional interviews. The study used Grounded Theory methodology, following a social constructivist approach.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK

The developmental framework grew out of the analysis of the interviews and focus groups which found, in summary, that adolescent leadership in a school or the community does not occur in isolation, but within the context and structures of

¹ Correspondence Author: School of Education, RMIT University, PO Box 71 Bundoora Vic 3083, Australia, Phone: +61 419 381 790, Fax +61 3 9846 4928, Email: S2175088@student.rmit.edu.au



each student's home, school and community life and experiences. We propose a framework with several instruments: a developmental matrix; a capabilities map, (mapping leadership capabilities against the Australian curriculum); and examples of expanded descriptors for capabilities and attributes. We used a combination of analyses of interview questions and recursive processes (Birks & Mills, 2011) to develop descriptors for each of the five levels of leadership for seven elements – focus, description, examples of actions, practices, understandings, capabilities and attributes – in the developmental matrix. The framework also includes a number of other tools: principles of adolescent leadership for sustainability, leadership definition, leadership styles, strategies for motivating adolescent leaders for sustainability and assessment tools that could be used by teachers to assess students, and for students to assess themselves, at various stages in their development.

The strategies for motivating adolescent leaders arose from the key groups of factors that motivated leaders identified in the study. These were, in order of importance: influence of people; personal motivation and capitalising on opportunities; school/community influences; and self learning/experiences.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHORS

Patricia Armstrong is a Ph.D. student at RMIT University. She worked in several environmental education roles in Australia and overseas before joining the Gould League, a well known environmental education organisation, in 1989. There, she took up a number of positions, including Deputy CEO, while leading some key projects, such as establishing the world's first Recycling Education Centre, developing and managing Waste Wise Schools and co-developing and managing Sustainable Schools. Pat has also worked as a private consultant in education for sustainability and co-founded Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability Inc. She has served in a number of honorary positions for the Waste Management Association of Australia, including convener of the National Waste Educators Division and is a life fellow of Environment Education Victoria.

Annette Gough is Professor Emerita of Science and Environmental Education in the School of Education at RMIT University. She has held senior appointments at RMIT and Deakin University and has been a visiting professor at universities in Canada, South Africa and Hong Kong, as well being life fellow of the Australian Association for Environmental Education and Environment Education Victoria. Her research interests span environmental, sustainability and science education, research methodologies, posthuman and gender studies and she has completed research projects for national and state governments as well as working with UNESCO, UNEP and UNESCO-UNEVOC on several research and development projects.