Case study: Sports Leadership

# What was the focus?

The focus of the case study was three-fold:

1. To develop student’s understanding of the five key attributes to successful learning known as the 5 Rs (Responsibility, Resourcefulness, Reasoning, Reflectiveness and Resilience)
2. To identify ways to “teach” useful and appropriate attitudes for learning, as this is more subjective and less measurable than teaching skills and/or knowledge.
3. To evaluate students’ perceptions on the importance of developing their attitude to learning.

We were interested in finding out whether there is a link between student’s who demonstrate a wider range of characteristics of successful leaders e.g. self-motivation, ability to control and manage emotions and a positive approach, and their progress and attainment.

We used this case study as a way of trying to change student’s attitudes and their approach to learning. As a consequence, we hoped to see improved progress with regards to attainment.

The cohort of students we used for the case study was a Year 10 Physical Education group working towards the Sports Leaders Award at Level 1. In particular, we focused on the feedback given and received by students following periods of leadership within a lesson.

# What could other schools learn and adapt for their own setting?

# Who was involved?

The details of the people involved in the case study are as follows:

**Teacher**: 1 x teacher; Head of Physical Education Department

**Group**: 26 x Year 10 Sports Leaders (mixed gender and mixed ability)

**School**: Droitwich Spa High School and Sixth Form Centre, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire; a mixed comprehensive catering for students aged 12 – 18 years. There are approximately 1200 students on role.

**Partners**: N/A. The next step is to share with both our local and international partners.

# What were the challenges and how were they tackled?

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| **Focus** | **Challenge** | **Solutions to tackle the challenge** |
| Student understanding | * Focus on delivering the skills and knowledge required to complete the Award Vs focus on soft skills such as emotional intelligence.
* Ensuring the lesson remained as practical as possible.
 | * The two areas go hand in hand. Learning objectives were written to incorporate both areas.
* Students participated in a rotation: leader, participant and reviewer.
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| Teaching methods | * Measuring success of changing attitudes of students.
 | * A variety of methods were used including teacher observation and peer and self-reflection.
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| Students’ perceptions | * Monitoring the extent to which students recognised the emphasis on developing attitudes.
* Monitoring the extent to which students valued the emphasis on developing attitudes.
 | * Learning objectives written appropriately and reflected on in lesson plenaries.
* Student interviews to gauge perceptions.
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A result of the solutions listed above, the changes that occurred were:

1. Schemes of Work for teaching the Sports Leaders Award at Level 1 include learning objectives linked to developing attitudes.
2. Schemes of Work for teaching the Sports Leaders Award at Level 1 include plenaries to reflect on learning objectives.
3. Student interviews held to help evaluate student perceptions.
4. Overall, student awareness of developing appropriate attitudes increased.

# What was the outcome / impact?

Before this case study, students in previous cohorts who followed the course learnt the practical skills and knowledge to become a successful ‘Sports Leaders’, e.g. how to structure a session, effective communication skills and how to keep participants safe. Feedback was received by the ‘leader’ from both the teacher and their peers, however this was basic and prescriptive. On the whole, the tendency is for students to give very simple and overly positive feedback in order not to offend the ‘leader’. Although there are positive aspects to this with regards to confidence, it is not always the most useful.

As a result of the case study, alongside the skills and knowledge, the focus (and therefore the learning objectives) became more in line with the characteristics of a leader discussed on the ‘Student Leadership’ course e.g. self-awareness, self-motivation, social interactions and managing emotions. Class rules and expectations were set with regards to how feedback should be constructed. In addition to receiving feedback, learners were asked to reflect on this feedback. This developed their confidence and emotional intelligence. Instead of students giving feedback which was overly positive and very simple, they were more willing to be fair and more descriptive.

This made a difference to leadership ability because the students receiving the feedback had more information to process and use to improve their skills and knowledge. Students began to develop the ability to receive a range of feedback ore successfully. On the whole, if receiving feedback about a session which didn’t go according to plan (therefore being more critical), students were better able to process and respond to the information.

The key to success with regards to feedback was creating an environment where fair, accurate and detailed feedback was respected and useful in comparison to receiving overly positive and non-descript feedback (given to ensure the leader was not ‘upset’).

# What could have been done better?

If the case study were to be repeated, it would have been useful to have an introductory lesson about feedback i.e. its importance, how to give and receive it, how to respond and reflect on it.

With more time, it would be useful to roll the idea out to other Sports Leaders groups following the same Award. This would mean more evidence could be gathered from additional staff and students to increase the validity of the outcomes. The time frame is also quite short and spending longer with the students would allow further evaluation of its effectiveness. Cross-curricular projects would also be useful to triangulate the evidence.

With less time, the focus would need to be reduced. The students still need to get through the content of the Sports Leaders Award Level 1 course with regards to skills and knowledge, therefore the amount of feedback students receive post-session would need to be reduced. Time for students to reflect on the feedback would also need to reduce.

# What might you go next?

The next step in this research would be to carry out additional case studies in other departments. In order to do this research would need to be done into willing and capable staff i.e. early adopters. Many of the skills of a sports leader are transferable to leadership on a wider scale, therefore the cohort could remain the same. Alternatively, a new cohort could be introduced to the study.

Having a house system and school council within the school presents opportunities to involve the students in the planning stages of any further studies. In this way, further study would be rolled out across the whole school rather than remain subject specific. This could be our next step to maintain momentum.

With unlimited money and resources, it would useful to take both other staff and students themselves on external training opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills further. A higher number of people receiving training would mean an increasing number of people adopting strategies and techniques (as well as attitudes) to develop this area of our work.

# Where could others find out more?