

# Learning Leadership

An unusual class at Lakeland High School in Shrub Oak, New York, benefits students, their school, and their community.

Once upon a time, American high schools were represented in the public imagination by certain images. "Teenager" and "high school" sparked recollections of Andy Hardy taking time from chem lab and term papers to produce a play for a local charity; "Archie" and friends laboring long hours to decorate the gym for the prom; athletes fighting for victory while parent volunteers took time out from the hot dog stand to root the team on. Of course these were unrealistic images; they overlooked many less healthy facets of the typical high school of those days. Still, for most of us, these images were what American high schools were about. Schools were places where such things did go on, not always and not for everyone, but enough to make support for education something that was taken for granted. We were proud of our schools.

Then, in the 1960s and '70s, something soured. Andy Hardy was replaced in the taxpayers' minds by anti-social, drug-dealing delinquents who cut more classes than they attended in a graffiti-smeared school. While this image was as much a caricature as the earlier idealized version of the American high school student, there was enough truth in it to cause concern. Things *were* happening in schools that would never have been tolerated in earlier decades. Teachers complained as loudly as taxpayers. The current



*Lakeland High School students, working with a Marris Nursing Home resident, find they "uncover their genuine commitment, perseverance, and determination to serve"*  
 Photographs by Alice Leighner/Waterfall Group

**“The leadership teacher must be supportive, a dependable resource, a guide and counselor, one who encourages students to ‘make it happen.’ ”**

demand for a return to discipline, rigid standards, and a back-to-basics curriculum is just one result.

It is an old cliché in administration circles, but true nonetheless: 90 percent of the rules in a school are made for 10 percent of the students. And every time a student from that disruptive 10 percent acts irresponsibly, another rule is likely to be implemented. Someone vandalizes a restroom, so it is locked—for everyone. A handful of students fight at an athletic event, so it is cancelled—for everyone. A fire alarm is pulled—and the entire student body and staff stands for ten minutes in the mid-winter cold.

Vandalism and general apathy were the catalysts for the Leadership Program I instituted in 1980 at Lakeland High School in northern Westchester County, New York. Some students, for instance, were no longer using the restrooms, refusing to wade through the trash, graffiti, and cigarette smoke in bathrooms with cracked mirrors and broken doors. Then a group of 35 students gathered for a meeting. Like the famed Peter Finch character in the movie *Network*, they looked at what was happening and said, “I’m mad as

hell, and I’m not going to take it anymore!” These were not the “best” or “most gifted” students; they represented a cross-section of the student population. They talked for hours. They argued. They came up with ideas. They decided to make a change, and they did.

It was here that Leadership began almost five years ago. Today, over 100 students apply for the course each year by writing several essays and going through a series of interviews. No one is eliminated—no one is “cut.” They begin their Leadership experience by completing individual, school, and community projects over the late spring and early summer months. The long hours uncover their genuine commitment, perseverance, and determination to serve. By the time the summer workshops are completed, the original number of applicants is vastly reduced to a more workable figure. The students who have endured the preliminary stages are the new leaders. The students who decide that the time commitment is just too much withdraw; however, it must be noted that they have helped the program greatly while they were involved





Because Lakeland teenagers know that you have to know yourself before you can lead others, they participate in "values clarification/self-actualization exercises to make [them] aware of their potential and limitations."

and always seem to be there when we need "extra hands" to help out. The common denominator for students who remain seems to be the desire to "count" and to "make a difference."

### What Is Leadership?

Leadership means different things to different people—power, prestige, honor, or personal advantage. I believe that real leadership begins with service to others. The program is a full-year course. It is not a frill, nor is it an easy grade. It was designed as a course and *not* as a co-curricular activity—because of its fundamental academic nature. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, and reasoning are at the forefront of all leadership endeavors. A grade is given to each student based on class performance, daily assignments, mini-problem-solving activities, semester-long projects, and many other factors. The tenets of the program are threefold—to serve the needs of self, school, and community.

### Self-Analysis

Self-improvement is the first phase of the Leadership Program and a neces-

sary component to its success. During the semester, students undertake an in-depth self-analysis and begin the study of inspirational and motivational readings, on the assumption that before leading others, individuals must be able to lead themselves. This phase consists of activities and values clarification/self-actualization exercises to make students aware of their potential and limitations. They learn how to deal with group dynamics and the pressures of assuming leadership roles. By this time, students should have learned (1) how others perceive them and why, (2) how to listen, (3) how to deal with others, (4) how to make decisions and live with the results, (5) how to persuade and influence others, and (6) how to stand up for their principles in the face of adversity.

### School Improvement

The second phase of the Leadership Program addresses the needs of the school. Students develop, coordinate, and participate in year-long school service committees, including the:

- *Announcement Committee.* This committee writes, edits, and delivers

**"The self-analysis component is based on the assumption that before leading others, individuals must be able to lead themselves."**

all in-school announcements; birth-days, club, and sport announcements; important events; building news; and other pertinent information.

● **Bulletin Board Committee.** In consultation with the administration, this committee manages all bulletin boards in the building, helping each class and organization maintain their boards. In addition, they run a "What's Happenin'" board that features a quote of the day.

● **Newspaper Committee.** Cooperating with local newspapers, this committee writes a weekly column highlighting school news. It provides good press for the school, and students enjoy the thrill of having their own by-line and being published.

● **Supervisory Committee.** This is an organized effort to improve the school atmosphere. Students learn to cooperate with staff members and each other to make the school a better place to be. Members are taught that it is better to report suspicious activity than remain quiet and risk letting a fellow

student or the school become a victim. They are reminded not to take action themselves. Members of the committee are responsible for informing the proper authorities of all suspicious activities on school grounds, such as unauthorized visitors, people in unsupervised areas, vandalism, and graffiti.

### Community Involvement

In addition to asserting their leadership roles within the school, students volunteer for community service, assisting worthwhile charitable, religious, or humanitarian groups. "Whenever There Is a Need" and "Service Above Self" are our mottos. Working in the community gives great satisfaction; by "giving something back" students discover the true joy that comes from helping others, especially those in need. They realize they truly can make a difference and can continue to do so throughout life.

Student leaders work as teachers' aides in schools for the handicapped,

or tutor students having trouble in our school. Local hospitals provide opportunities for work as candy strippers and nurses aides, and nursing homes enable students to bring a little happiness into the lives of their patients. They have also steered the kids toward homebound elderly who have been aided by students who take care of simple chores. The opportunities are limitless and allow students to experiment with possible career choices as well. They get the chance to sample the atmosphere in different environments and sometimes make valuable contacts.

The Leadership class, as a group, also organizes and sponsors various school-community projects, such as community health fairs, blood drives, and charitable fund raisers. In addition to the obvious personal rewards, better public relations is a welcome plus: there is little to fault in a school that cares so about the community.

### The Leadership Teacher

Clearly, any teacher who becomes involved in this type of Leadership Program is a special person. The job demands a considerable amount of extra time for summer workshops, after-school and evening functions, community contacts, and supervising students during activities after school hours. And, while all teachers are leaders, Leadership teachers must be constantly aware of their image as role models, not just for the students but for the other adults who become involved in the program.

### Does It Work?

Do Leadership students actually become leaders? Our program has been in existence for less than five years, so I cannot point to any U.S. Senators or corporation presidents from our ranks. I am confident, though, that many of our students will go on to experience success in life at least in part because of their Leadership involvement. The stakes are high, for it is this generation of Americans who will run the country when the present generation of educators are senior citizens. □

**Robert Maher** is assistant principal, Lakeland High School, Main St., Shrub Oak, NY 10588.

## Teaching Exceptional Children and Youth in the Regular Classroom

Terry Cicchelli and Claire Ashby-Davis

Foreword by Howard Gollub

An invaluable learning tool for both working teachers and teachers in training. A practical guide to such areas as identifying exceptionality, working within a least restrictive environment, and managing behavior, it generates awareness of the importance of devoting special attention to exceptional children in the classroom. Includes a discussion of teaching the bilingual exceptional child.

368 pages, figures, tables, charts, questionnaires, index Cloth \$29.95 Paper \$12.95

Syracuse University Press

1600 Jamesville Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210



Copyright © 1985 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.