

Does teaching leadership directly to youth impact their leadership development?

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Abstract

The 4-H and Youth Development Program has long been recognized for leadership development. A retrospective post, two-group study was used to determine if teaching leadership directly through a program like Leaders 4 Life (L4L) reveals accelerated perceived leadership skills when compared to youth learning leadership in other 4-H projects or programs. The summed mean differences did yield higher perceived leadership skill development for L4L participants compared to the other 4-H group (0.53 vs. 0.36). The skills revealing the highest percent change for L4L included: I feel comfortable teaching others (19.47%), I listen carefully to opinions of group members (19.17%), I believe in dividing the work among group members (18.70%), and I can run meetings (18.64%). Results clearly reveal that the L4L program does yield perceived increases in leadership development skills when compared to other 4-H groups.

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching leadership directly through a program like Leaders 4 Life reveals accelerated perceived leadership skills when compared to youth learning leadership in other 4-H projects or programs.

Methods. The study used an ex post facto approach and a correlational design. It was a retrospective post survey that asked youth to ascertain their leadership development based on participating in the Leaders 4 Life (L4L) Program or through another program offered by the Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program. Respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of the magnitude for leadership development as a result of participating in L4L or another leadership program offered by the Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program. The scale was defined as 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 2 = *Disagree*; 3 = *Undecided*; 4 = *Agree*; 5 = *Strongly Agree*. The instrument was adapted from a study conducted by Stone (2009) in Montana. It was administered to youth participating in L4L and other 4-H Programs offered by the Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program during Texas 4-H Roundup. This program is conducted in June and is the last major competitive event youth participate in to close out their 4-H year.

Results. The Leaders 4 Life youth participants ($n = 31$) completed a survey immediately after their competitive event. The other group was comprised of participants in the theatre arts 4-H Program. They were selected because they are one of the most diverse youth groups that participate in Texas 4-H Roundup. This group ($n = 62$) was also administered the instrument immediately following their participation.

Table 1 reveals the perceived leadership differences gained as a result of participating in either L4L or other 4-H programs. These descriptive statistics clearly reveal that both programs yield perceived increases in leadership skills. For the L4L group, the most noteworthy increases were for the following statements: I feel comfortable teaching others (19.47%), I listen carefully to opinions of group members (19.17%), I believe in dividing the work among group members (18.70%), and I can run meetings (18.64%).

Table 1. Results from a retrospective post survey ascertaining leadership skills and traits from youth participating in the Leaders 4 Life (L4L) program and youth participating in other 4-H programs (not Leaders 4 Life).

Questions	Non-L4L Group (n = 62)			L4L Group (n = 31)		
	Before	After	% Change	Before	After	% Change
1. I can cooperate and work in a group.	4.40	4.71	6.96	4.16	4.68	12.40
2. I get along with people around me.	4.44	4.68	5.45	4.19	4.55	8.46
3. I feel responsible for my actions.	4.60	4.84	5.26	4.23	4.87	15.27
4. I believe in dividing the work among group members.	4.39	4.65	5.88	3.97	4.71	18.70
5. I understand myself.	4.34	4.61	6.32	4.03	4.55	12.80
6. I feel comfortable teaching others.	4.016	4.48	11.65	3.65	4.36	19.47
7. I consider all choices before making a decision.	3.92	4.40	12.35	3.81	4.39	15.25
8. I listen carefully to opinions of group members.	4.08	4.53	11.07	3.87	4.61	19.17
9. I am respected by others my age.	4.05	4.44	9.56	4.07	4.65	14.29
10. I can lead a discussion.	4.00	4.37	9.27	4.03	4.61	14.40
11. I use past experiences in making decisions.	4.40	4.61	4.76	4.16	4.71	13.18
12. I believe that group members are responsible persons.	4.15	4.55	9.73	4.00	4.56	12.90
13. I am sure of my abilities.	4.23	4.66	10.34	4.07	4.52	11.11
14. I am a good listener.	4.08	4.45	9.09	4.13	4.68	13.28
15. I use information in making decisions.	4.26	4.53	6.44	4.29	4.742	10.53
16. I feel comfortable being a group leader.	4.10	4.61	12.60	4.23	4.68	10.69
17. I accept who I am.	4.44	4.73	6.54	4.42	4.71	6.57
18. I feel responsible for my decisions.	4.36	4.69	7.78	4.36	4.74	8.89
19. I can give clear directions.	3.77	4.24	12.39	4.13	4.58	10.94
20. I can follow directions.	4.23	4.63	9.54	4.23	4.77	12.98
21. I can run a meeting.	3.95	4.37	10.61	3.81	4.52	18.64

Table 1 also reveals that the non-L4L group perceived their leadership skills to be positively impacted as well. The most noteworthy items include: I feel comfortable being a group leader (12.60%), I can give clear directions (12.39%), I consider all choices before making a decision (12.35%), and I feel comfortable teaching others (11.65%).

Figure 1 demonstrates an excellent visual of how each group rated each statement. This figure measures the difference in mean changes for each leadership question comparing Leaders 4 Life (L4L) Participants and non Leaders 4 Life Participants. Overwhelmingly, the evidence shows that youth who participated in a focused leadership development program gained more skills to equip them for the future than those who had not.

Figure 2 shows the difference based on overall mean changes between the two groups. The Leaders 4 Life group was 0.17 above the non-Leaders 4 Life group.

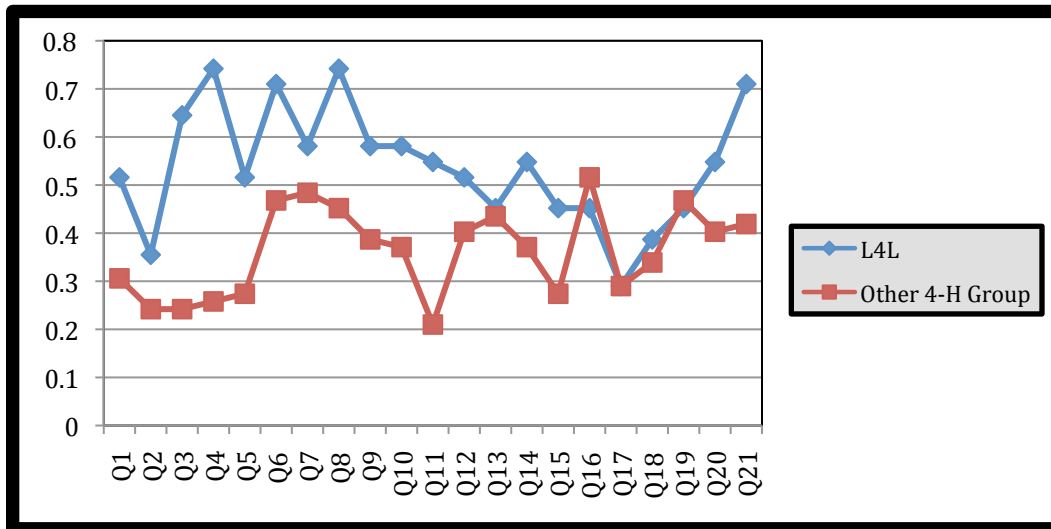


Figure 1. Difference in mean changes for each leadership question comparing Leaders 4 Life (L4L) Participants and non Leaders 4 Life Participants.

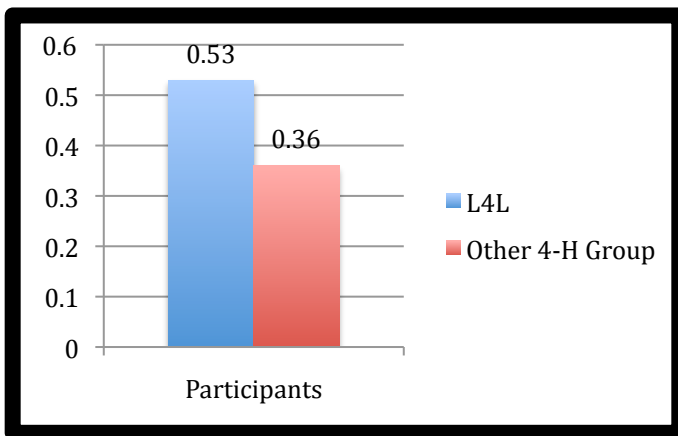


Figure 2. Difference in mean changes for combined leadership questions comparing Leaders 4 Life (L4L) Participants and non Leaders 4 Life Participants.

Conclusions. The skills that are being cultivated in a focused leadership project are certainly paying off in a positive way. There is no doubt that the 4-H program targets the development of life skills in every project we conduct. However, a concerted effort to train youth in higher level leadership skills and providing an opportunity for them to showcase those skills through competitive and non-competitive opportunities improves the impact that we can make on the lives of young people. There is more research to be done in this area as we continue to build Leaders 4 Life!

Reference.

Stone, C. (2009). Self perceived leadership skills of Montana 4-H ambassadors. Presented at the 2009 National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4HA) Annual Conference, Rochester, NY. Information available online at: <http://media.cce.cornell.edu/hosts/nae4ha2009/handouts.htm>