
THE EFFECT OF A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME ON A GROUP OF ADOLESCENTS FROM A RESOURCE-RESTRICTED COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The Student Rag Community Service (SRCS) of the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus is a student-driven, registered, non-profit organisation which plans and manages more than 75 student community engagement projects. One of these projects involves a leadership development programme, Pick-A-Leader (PAL), among the grade 11 learners of three schools in resource-restricted communities in the Potchefstroom district. This article focuses on the experiences of the grade 11 learners who took part in this programme.

Key words: leadership, development programme, adolescents, resource-restricted Community, volunteers, evaluation

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the effect of the Student Rag Community Service's (SRCS) Pick-A-Leader (PAL) programme for leadership development among grade 11 learners in resource-restricted communities. The SRCS has been in existence for 30 years and the Student Representative Council (SRC) of the North-West University: Potchefstroom Campus (NWU: PC), has authorised them to promote voluntary activities for charity in Potchefstroom and its surrounding areas. The SRCS annually implement various programmes to communities in Potchefstroom; however, these programmes have not thus far been formally evaluated. One of these projects is the Pick-A-Leader (PAL) programme, which focuses on leadership and skills development for adolescents from resource-restricted communities. The formal evaluation of this programme took place in 2010. This article focuses on the evaluation of the PAL participant's experience of the programme.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE TO THE STUDY

The developmental approach to social welfare has played a significant role in the implementation of the service-delivery model for social development. Community development is a specific focus area within the Integrated Service Delivery Model of the Department of Social Development (South Africa, 2006; Patel, 2005). Welfare organisations are becoming increasingly involved with community development programmes, of which the Student Rag Community Service (SRCS) is a prime example.

The SRCS is a registered Non-profit Organisation (NPO) managed by students of the NWU: Potchefstroom Campus. The SRCS undertake social and economic development projects in Potchefstroom and surrounding areas. Projects are planned, implemented and evaluated by students on a voluntary basis. All project leaders have to complete a credit-bearing short course in Socio-Economic Development, presented by lecturers from the subject group Social Work at the same institution. Projects are planned from a developmental perspective and for this purpose the following definition by Weyers (2011:39) is used as basic point of departure:

“Community development is the method, process, programme and strategy by means of which change agents, with or without the help of external systems, speed up the tempo at which a community develops; provide direction to the development process in order to purposefully realise objectives within the economic, psychosocial, bio-physiological, technological, spiritual-cultural, political, environmental, educational and other spheres of life; make the goal attainment process as cost-effective,

streamlined and sustainable as possible so that both human and environmental resources are used optimally; and contribute to human growth and the unlocking of human potential by empowering community members to take responsibility for their own, as well as the whole system's development."

Members of the SRCS focus on empowering community members by means of volunteer work done by students for the community. A volunteer is someone who offers or is recruited to provide a service to a welfare institution, usually without remuneration (Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF), 1997). The White Paper for Social Welfare (South Africa, 1997) considers volunteers to be an important resource for the expansion of welfare services. The SRCS has undertaken a number of programmes on a voluntary basis, and many lives in the Potchefstroom area have been touched by their efforts. However, to date, none of these programmes has been formally evaluated.

The PAL is one of the projects run by SRCS with the aim of developing human potential through a leadership and skills development programme for grade 11 learners from three schools in resource-restricted communities in the greater Potchefstroom area. Adolescents in these communities often engage in risky behaviour (Prinsloo, 2005; Dahlberg and Krug, 2002). The PAL includes aspects like emotional intelligence, life skills and leadership development and has the primary aim of preparing adolescents to become leaders in their adult lives. Potgieter (1998:248-249) emphasises that "...the social work profession needs to recognise that investment in the youth could act as an important preventative measure. Communities should make a greater investment in their youth by moving beyond programmes and policies that merely respond to youth problems. The focus should be on programmes that support and build competence to prepare young people for adulthood". Benson (2006) and Davis (2003) support this statement by mentioning that positive influences during adolescence may greatly contribute towards the adult character of the individual.

Adolescence is a very special phase of human development. It represents the transition from childhood to adulthood. Most adolescents experience this transition as a very complex period during which they struggle with problems like discovering their own identity, self-acceptance, effective decision-making, relationships, choosing a career, dealing with conflict, and the assumption of responsibilities (Behr, Cilliers and Meyer, 1996). Adolescents from resource-restricted communities often find this transition even more challenging, inclining them to engage in high-risk behaviour like violence, dishonesty, sexual misconduct, and materialism. This misconduct stems from prevalent disharmony in their communities (Prinsloo, 2005; Le Roux, 1993).

Communities characterised by social challenges like substance abuse, unemployment, and poverty suffer under higher levels of violence and risky behaviour, especially among the youth (Dahlberg and Krug, 2002). Adolescents in communities like these often lack the basic life skills necessary to function in society. Leadership potential remains untapped due to the absence of good and strong role models. Adolescence is a very important phase during which the development of acceptable emotional, moral, and social behaviour is paramount (Louw, Louw and Ferns, 2007; Goleman, 1995).

The PAL is presented as a series of group sessions engaging 40-50 learners annually. Group sessions are facilitated by 3-6 student volunteers who are specifically trained by the SRCS. Such a facilitator acts as "...a leader or catalyst for some group experience, usually to improve the working relationship between members of the group" (Barker, 2003:153) and to stimulate participation between group members (Biech, 2005). Group facilitators are trained to structure group sessions; to work towards the rationale and goals of the PAL; to present activities related to the PAL; to establish a relationship of trust among group members; and to facilitate mutual respect in the group. The following themes were included in the PAL (Japhta, 2011):

- Self-image, self-knowledge, self-confidence and assertiveness
- Choices and decision-making
- Stress management
- Values
- Interpersonal relationships
- Communication and conflict management
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Entrepreneurship
- Public speaking
- Computer skills
- Community engagement
- Compiling a Curriculum Vitae

The PAL is presented over a period of six months and is concluded with a camp for all attendees and facilitators. During the camp, the programme content is revised, skills are practiced and the programme is evaluated. The PAL-programme was formally evaluated in 2010 by means of a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2009); however, this article will only focus on

the experiences of the adolescents from resource-restricted communities who took part in the PAL-programme of 2010.

METHODOLOGY

Aim and objectives

The general aim of this study was to determine the influence that participation in the PAL programme had on the adolescents from resource-restricted communities.

The specific objectives were:

- To investigate and describe the subjective assessment participants made of the content and presentation of the PAL programme.
- To determine the extent of personal growth the adolescents experienced according to lessons learnt.
- To give an indication of the adolescents' perception of leadership and leadership positions after their completion of the programme.
- To determine the future plans of adolescents after their completion of the PAL programme.
- To determine the quality of facilitation of the PAL programme.
- To make recommendations towards the improvement of the programme.

This study attempted to answer the following research question: *What is the effect of the PAL programme on adolescents from resource-restricted communities?*

This question was included in the overall aim of this study to measure the effect of the PAL, and to prove the hypothesis that the PAL has a positive effect on leadership and other skills of a group of adolescents in a resource-restricted community. Since this article reports on mainly the qualitative part of the study, the hypothesis will not be further discussed.

A mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2009) was followed and the study was both descriptive and exploratory in nature (Fouché and De Vos, 2011). However, this article focuses primarily on the qualitative part of the study, since the data yielded by the quantitative measuring instruments was not significant. This could be attributed to the choice of measuring instrument. Nevertheless, the quantitative data acquired from the FAS (Facilitation Assessment Scale) will also receive attention.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the North-West University and written informed consent was obtained from all participants, their parents and the SRCS. Ethical aspects – as described by Strydom (2011), Louw, Louw and Ferns, (2007) and Babbie (2001) – were considered, and the guidelines that are found in the ethical codes of doing research with children (Society for Research in Child Development, 2008; Bukato and Daehler, 2004) were applied in this study. Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured at all times. The researcher did not use any procedure that could cause physical or psychological damage to the child. Participants could withdraw at any point during the course of the research. Participants were fully informed regarding the processing of information and the release of data (Strydom, 2011).

Participants were selected by means of purposive sampling (Strydom, 2011). A total of 46 learners participated in this study. The participants were selected according to the following criteria for inclusion in the study:

- Grade 11 learners from schools participating in the SRCS PAL programme
- Boys and girls in the age group 16-19 years willing to participate in this study

Data was collected by means of four focus-group discussions and the completion of the FAS. Focus-group discussions were facilitated by the primary researcher according to the following interview schedule:

- The overall experience of the PAL programme.
- Lessons learned from the PAL programme.
- Suggestions towards improvement of the PAL programme.
- Leadership and other skills.
- Leadership position(s).
- Future plans.

The FAS is a self-developed scale measuring the quality of facilitation. It was adapted to evaluate the facilitation of the PAL programme. The FAS consist of a number of statements that have to be rated according to a 4-point likert scale. The FAS is a highly reliable and easy to administer measurement instrument (Weyers and Rankin, 2007).

Two sets of data were analysed: qualitative data from the focus-group discussions and data collected by means of the FAS. Qualitative data was thematically analysed following Tesch's approach to thematic analysis (Poggenpoel, 1998). The following steps were followed:

- All data collected was thoroughly read to get a sense of the whole.
- One respondent's data was selected based on the particular interest towards the following question: *What is this all about?* The researcher then wrote down her own thoughts about the underlying meaning of the information.
- The same procedure was followed for several respondents. Similar themes were combined. These topics were then clustered into columns and arranged into major topics, unique topics and leftovers.
- Identified topics were coded and reverted to the text.
- Descriptive wording was selected for the different topics and lines were drawn between the categories to show interrelationships.
- A final decision was made on the abbreviation of each category and codes were arranged in alphabetical order.
- Similar data material was assembled and a preliminary analysis was performed.

RESULTS

A discussion of the findings of the FAS and focus groups follows below.

Results from the FAS

After completion of the PAL programme, the FAS was applied to evaluate the facilitation of the programme. The FAS was adapted to evaluate the following aspects of the PAL:

- The influence of the facilitator in terms of knowledge, enthusiasm and general interest in the topic(s)
- The influence of the facilitator's presentation skills
- The influence of the learning process
- The influence of the context of presentation
- Other influences, like the duration of the programme

The facilitator's knowledge about the topic(s)

Statement: The facilitator has good knowledge about the topic(s) presented.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Agree	4. Strongly agree
.1%	3.3%	33.3%	63.3%

Only a small percentage of the participants (1% and 3.3%) indicated that the facilitators did not have proper knowledge of the presented topic(s) while the

majority (96.6%) indicated that the facilitators had thorough knowledge of the presented topic(s).

The facilitator's enthusiasm and general interest in the topic(s)

Statement: The facilitator was enthusiastic and succeeded in keeping me interested in the topic(s).

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Agree	4. Strongly agree
0%	10%	50%	40%

The majority (90%) of the participants agreed that the facilitators were enthusiastic and managed to keep them interested in the topic(s).

Presentation skills of the facilitator

Statement: The facilitator's presentation skills are...

1. Poor	2. Fair	3. Average	4. Good	5. Very good and excellent
0%	6.7%	3.3%	36.7%	53.3%

More than half of the participants (53.3%) rated the presentation skills of the facilitators as very good and excellent or good (36.7%), while none rated it as poor.

Preparation of the facilitator

Statement: The facilitator was well prepared for every session.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Agree	4. Strongly agree
0%	10%	46.7%	43.3%

Most of the participants (90%) were content that the facilitators were well prepared for each session of the PAL programme.

Programme contents and material

Statement: The programme contents and material were useful.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Agree	4. Strongly agree
0%	0%	50%	50%

All the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the programme contents and material were useful.

General contribution (value) of the programme

Statement: The programme was valuable to me.

It had little or no value	It had below average value	It had above average value	It had a lot of value
0%	6.3%	23.7%	70%

Most of the respondents (70%) indicated that the programme was of personal value to them.

Qualitative results from focus groups

The qualitative results are presented in Tables 1-6. The qualitative data is reported on in a table format, organised according to the following headings:

- Theme
- Aim of the discussion theme
- Some verbatim responses
- Subthemes identified
- Correlations with the literature
- Conclusions

This format was chosen for ease of reading and to structure the data in a logical and uniform way.

Table1: Experience of the PAL programme

Theme 1	Describe how you experienced the PAL programme
Aim of the discussion theme	The aim of this theme was to explore participants' experiences of the PAL programme by giving them the opportunity to freely reflect on their personal experiences.
Some verbatim responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "PAL was great, fun and a good learning experience." • "For me PAL was a self-discovering journey." • "PAL was an amazing life skill journey."
Subthemes identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation • Fun and enjoyable

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A learning opportunity • A process of self-discovery • Life skills were demonstrated and practiced
Correlations with the literature	Interactive learning and active participation contributes towards experiential learning and greatly contributes towards a positive learning experience (Mertens, 2005; Mercy, Butchart, Farrington and Cerda, 2002).
Conclusions	Active involvement and participation are required to present programmes like PAL where the emphasis is on acquiring skills. Programmes like PAL should include principles of experiential learning.

Table 2: Lessons learned from the PAL programme

Theme 2	Lessons learned from the PAL programme
Aim of the discussion theme	This discussion was aimed at exploring what participants had learned from the PAL programme.
Some verbatim responses	<p>“I learnt that trust is very important in any relationship”</p> <p>“PAL taught me to believe in myself, how to deal with my problems and also to stand up for my rights”.</p> <p>“I learnt more about myself and how to handle my emotions”.</p> <p>“The importance of values and accepting others and things that I cannot change is what I’ve learnt”.</p>
Subthemes identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of trust in leadership • Coping • Managing one’s emotions • Self-knowledge • The development of interpersonal relationships
Correlation with literature	Teaching life skills to adolescents is valued as important in preparing them for adult life. Self-knowledge and coping with emotions are particularly important in assisting them with life challenges (Taute, 2007; Du Plessis, 2006).
Conclusion	The PAL programme equipped participants with knowledge and skills that they might find useful in adult life.

Table 3: Suggestions towards the improvement of the PAL programme

Theme 3	Suggestions towards the improvement of the PAL programme
Aim of the discussion theme	This theme explored the ideas participants had for improving the PAL programme. Participants had the opportunity to informally evaluate the PAL programme and to make suggestions on what should be changed, included or excluded.
Some verbatim responses	<p>“More physical activities outside would be really nice.”</p> <p>“It will be good if we can have more interaction amongst the different schools.”</p> <p>“PAL must start earlier in the year.”</p>
Subthemes identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need for recreational activities. • Improved interaction between members of PAL in the three different schools. • More time is needed to practice newly acquired skills
Correlation with the literature	Robertson (2005) endorses the idea of recreational activities in nature since it offers “... a sense of place, of belonging, of emotional healing, that which the complexities of societal living often fails to provide”.
Conclusions	The existing PAL programme could be enhanced by the inclusion of some recreational activities and projects where PAL members of the different schools can interact with each other.

Table 4: Leadership and other skills

Theme 4	Skills included in the PAL programme
Aim of the discussion theme	This discussion was aimed at exploring participants’ views of skills that they may have acquired or learned about during the presentation of the PAL programme.
Some verbatim responses	<p>“I have learnt how to communicate with my friends and also how to express my feelings.”</p> <p>“PAL taught me to be respectful towards others and to handle conflict constructive.”</p> <p>“I have learnt that trust and values is very important in life.”</p> <p>“In the PAL programme I have learnt how to handle difficult situations and also to believe in</p>

	<p>myself and also to be assertive.”</p> <p>“A leader is somebody that others can trust and is a person whom believes in himself.”</p> <p>“Leadership mean that you must practice what you preach and to set a good example to your followers.”</p> <p>“For me leadership means that you can influence others positively.”</p>
Subthemes identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Conflict management skills • Skills in terms of interpersonal relationships • Coping skills • Self-confidence and assertiveness • Being a role model • The importance of trust and other values like respect and responsibility
Correlations with the literature	<p>The skills mentioned by participants are viewed as important life and leadership skills which could enable individuals to cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Van der Westhuizen, 2006; Visser, 2005). Leadership is a co-constructed process which entails more than the individual leader and should not be viewed as a static process for which the leader is responsible (Toseland and Rivas, 2009).</p>
Conclusions	<p>The inclusion of life skills in a programme like PAL is of the utmost importance.</p>

Table 5: Leadership positions

Theme 5	Exploring the leadership positions of PAL participants
Aim of the discussion theme	This discussion was aimed at exploring past or present leadership positions of PAL participants.
Some verbatim responses	<p>“I was chosen as school president after I joined the PAL programme”</p> <p>“Three of us became prefects after we joint PAL.”</p>
Subthemes identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership skills can be acquired • Leadership development may result in being elected for leadership positions.

Correlations with the literature	Toseland and Rivas (2009) and Immelman (2005) confirm that leadership skills can be learned.
Conclusions	A number of participants in the PAL programme filled leadership positions in their schools after completion of the PAL programme. Leadership development programmes like PAL contribute towards obtaining leadership positions.

Table 6: Future plans

Theme 6	Exploring future plans
Aim of the discussion theme	This discussion theme was focused on exploring the future dreams and plans of PAL participants.
Some verbatim responses	“I want to become a teacher”. “After matric I’m going to a university to study law”. “I want to be independent and have a nice life, so I want to study further after matric”.
Sub-themes identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary education • Independence and realistic future plans • Career orientation • Dreams
Correlations with the literature	Hargie (2006) and Van Heerden (2006) point out that future plans should always carry a balance between realistic objectives and dreams.
Conclusions	During the presentation of the PAL programme, participants were motivated to become more career orientated and to set realistic goals and really strive to put their dreams into reality.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Discussion of the FAS results

The adapted FAS was completed by all participants after completion of the PAL programme. The overall feedback on and evaluation of the facilitation of the programme were very positive. Participants were satisfied with the manner in which the programme was presented and rated the knowledge and enthusiasm of facilitators as very good and their presentation skills as excellent. Most of the respondents indicated that the programme contents

greatly contributed towards their positive experience of the PAL programme. Most participants agreed on the following aspects evaluated by the FAS:

- The facilitators were knowledgeable about topics included in the PAL programme and prepared well for each session
- The facilitators managed to explain difficult and abstract concepts
- The facilitators kept PAL participants interested in the programme through their own enthusiasm
- Facilitators communicated in a clear way and facilitated active participation during the presentation of the PAL programme
- The PAL programme was well organised and the contents and material were meaningful and useful for participants.

Discussion of focus-group results

The focus-group discussions explored the experiences of participants in terms of the overall participation in the PAL programme, the lessons learned from the programme, recommendations regarding the improvement of the PAL programme, their perceptions about leadership and the application of their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Participants were particularly positive about their active involvement and participation throughout the programme. Mercy et al. (2002) emphasise that active participation is a prerequisite for programmes like PAL.

From the results, it was clear that participants experienced the PAL programme as a personal growth and development opportunity in which they improved their leadership knowledge and skills. A total of six of the participants were appointed in leadership positions after the PAL programme. Participants expressed realistic dreams and goals for the future, as can be seen from their verbatim responses in table 6.

With reference to the lessons learned, participants indicated that they were particularly empowered in terms of self-knowledge, self-development, interpersonal relationships, communication skills, conflict management, coping, self-confidence and assertiveness. Various authors include these topics in similar life skills and leadership development programmes (Greenglass and Fiksenbaum, 2009; Van der Westhuizen, 2006; Visser, 2005; Rooth, 1997).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

This study was unique in the sense that it was the first study aimed at the formal evaluation of an SRCS project run by student volunteers. It was mainly the qualitative data that explored and described the value of the PAL programme. Participants in the PAL programme were empowered with specific knowledge and skills like general coping, assertiveness and interpersonal communication. From the evaluation of the facilitators and facilitation processes, it was clear that the PAL programme contents were relevant and accessible to participants. The programme was well-structured, and was presented by capable and enthusiastic facilitators. The following overall conclusions can be made:

- The SRCS programmes touch many lives, which is why it is so important that these initiatives be formally evaluated.
- Life-skills programmes are essential for adolescents, as it helps them successfully navigate the difficult road between childhood and adulthood.
- Adolescents from resource-restricted communities have an even greater need for life skills, as their communities suffer dire circumstances like poverty, crime, and a severe lack of opportunities.
- The potential of adolescents from resource-restricted communities should not be underestimated.
- Knowledge about the development of adolescents and the challenges they face is essential for service-delivery to this group, especially in the case of adolescents from resource-restricted communities.
- When presenting programmes like PAL, it is important that participants are consulted on the life skills and leadership topics they would like to see included in the programme.
- A needs analysis is fundamental before launching a leadership and skills development programme.
- The quality of the presentation can also influence participants' experience of such programmes.
- Programmes like PAL are essential to the empowerment of adolescents from resource-restricted communities; they acquire the skills to overcome challenges and achieve their full potential.
- Social work students should be recruited to become involved with the SRCS; their academic training could contribute to improving the therapeutic aspects of these programmes. Social work students are well-versed in the implementation of group work.

- The PAL programme has the inherent potential to support adolescents from resource-restricted communities in the development of leadership and life skills, as well as instilling in them a positive view of the future.
- The PAL programme also promises to prepare adolescents for life after school.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- South African literature was severely limited in terms of particular aspects of the study.
- There is generally very little literature that refers to the efforts of volunteers like those involved with the SRCS.
- A national strike by government officials interrupted the course of the PAL; participants could not be reached as there was no schooling for 6 weeks.
- There were frequent scheduling conflicts between school activities and the programme.
- Language could be considered a limitation, as neither learners nor facilitators could communicate in their mother-tongue.
- Participants did not attend school every day, which caused them to miss some sessions.
- The schedule could be considered a further limitation, as learners were in class all day and would have to attend PAL sessions after school. By that time they would often be very tired.
- Subjectivity could be a possible shortfall. Participants could not be compelled to respond honestly to questions.
- There was no control over the manner in which the facilitators presented the content of the programme.
- Facilitators came and went due to personal considerations and the ending of terms. This could have influenced the PAL programme, as each new facilitator meant rebuilding a relationship of trust from scratch.
- Sessions were presented in groups. Each group represented a school. Some groups consisted of 15-16 learners, which might have been too many for meaningful group interaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the results of this study, it is recommended that the PAL programme should be adapted to include more recreational activities outside. Other leadership-related topics to be included are time management, corporate citizenship and integrity.

- The needs and expectations of the target group should be included in the planning and implementation of programmes like this. Failure to do this will hamper the effectiveness of the programme. This is why a needs analysis is so important.
- The PAL programme will only be successful if the needs of the participants are analysed and met accordingly. The SRCS should put in greater effort to involve the community
- Initiatives like PAL require a structure according to which the programme can be developed or designed, and the content should ensure the outcomes of the programme are achieved.
- Underachieving learners or learners who display behavioural problems should also be involved, instead of focussing exclusively on those who have already been identified as leaders.
- Social work and psychology students can be recruited to the SRCS. Their academic training could add value to the psychosocial aspects of SRCS programmes, since they are well-trained in the implementation of group work.
- Other SRCS programmes should also be formally evaluated, as it could lead to the improvement of such programmes.

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