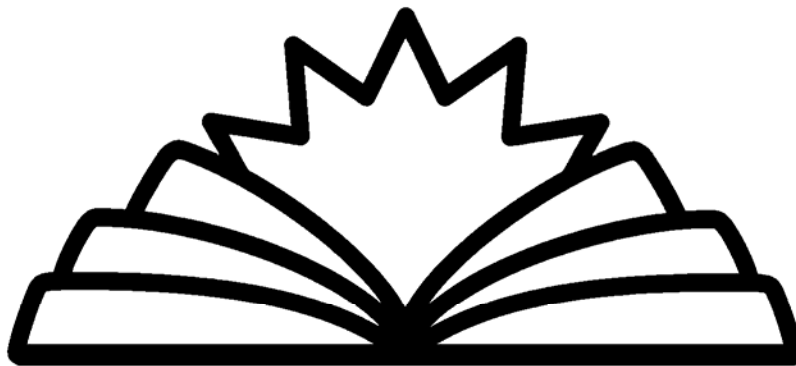


STUDENT LEADERSHIP MATERIALS

collected by

SABES

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S A B E S

System for Adult Basic Education Support

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Student Leadership: How to Start and Support a Student Council at Your Program

By Michele V. Sacerdote & Ernest Best (July 2003)

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Introduction

What is student leadership development?

Student leadership development is the process of involving students in meaningful ways both in and beyond the classroom. It is providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their talents, skills, and interests while continuing to develop new skills. It is also about giving students more ownership of the programs they attend.

Why is it important for your program to develop student leadership?

First and foremost, student input can improve and strengthen programs in ways that the Director could not do alone. Students bring new energy and ideas to the program. Second, student leadership provides opportunities for students to get involved and to learn skills that can be transferable to the workplace or community. Finally, student leadership deepens each student's commitment to adult literacy and increases the chances that the student will continue to learn.

What is your role as Director to promote Student Leadership at your program?

Directors have the power to set a tone for the program. The best atmosphere for fostering student leadership is one that is accessible and values student input. It is

the job of the Director to encourage teachers and staff to support student activities and recommendations. Students need to see that their suggestions are taken seriously. So, if teachers and staff refuse to implement these suggestions, then students may lose motivation to get involved.

Directors/coordinators need to make a conscious decision to include students in meaningful ways. This is easier said than done. It takes time and energy to find ways to include students. It can mean letting go of controlling how and what happens and being open to new ways of doing things.

One way that directors can encourage student involvement is to support and cultivate the development of Student Councils. Student councils are a great way to find and develop potential student leaders. Depending on the purpose of the student council, it can even be an active tool to improve the program or do tasks that Directors need or want to accomplish. For instance, student councils can organize activities, plan student events, conduct a student orientation, help solve problems at the program, advocate for funds, and advertise the program.

Student Council

Needs Assessment

One way to get started organizing or even reorganizing a student council is to have a group of interested students from each class, all levels, etc. meet and do a needs assessment. If possible, try to encourage one or more student leaders to run the needs assessment. Below are some steps to guide the process.

What is a Needs Assessment?

A need assessment is a way to identify and prioritize the concerns, needs, interests or ideas of a particular group of people. When a group is newly formed it is a good idea to do some kind of needs assessment. You can also do a needs assessment by asking individuals questions using an interview format and collecting all the responses.

How to Do a Needs Assessment

Step 1: Think of some general questions that will lead to a discussion about the needs of the individuals participating in the group.

Examples:

(You may want to focus on only one question at a time)

- What would you like to see happen at our program?
- What would you like to learn about?
- What are your interests?
- What do you see as the role/purpose of a student council?

Step 2: Brainstorm a list of issues, concerns, ideas, or interests.

There are many ways to gather the needs of individuals in a group. One way is to go around the room asking each person to state one idea or issue and keep going around the room until there are no more responses. Another way is to ask people to jot down their thoughts and then share them aloud. (But please note some students may be uncomfortable writing). During a brainstorm you do not discuss, agree or disagree about what a person says; instead you just list *all* the ideas. There are no right or wrong responses.

Step 3: Categorize or cluster

Look over your list of issues or needs and try to organize or group the ones that are similar and then label the category. Then use these categories for prioritizing in the next step.

Step 4: Prioritize

One way to prioritize is by using dot voting. Dot voting gives each person several votes and allows them to distribute their votes evenly or unevenly across the choices. For example, if you get 3 dots you can put 1 dot on three separate items or you can put all 3 dots on one item if you feel strongly about it. Then you see which items have the most votes and this may be what your group should focus on first.

The 5 W'S: How to Organize a Student Council

The information below is a guide for setting up a student council. The order of the "W" questions isn't as important as thinking about the answers to all the questions.

The 5 W's are the questions: Why? Who? What? When? Where? These questions need to be discussed and thought about with a variety of people at your program. It may be interesting to see how or if the responses/ideas differ among director, teachers, staff, current students, and former students.

Why?

Why does our program need a student council? How will it serve our goals? What are the goals of the students, program director, teachers, and community? What do we want to accomplish in the short-term and the long-term?

What do we mean by "student council"? What is the purpose of a student council? What is the purpose of student council meetings?

Who?

Ideally, it would be great to find a student or group of students who want to organize a student council. You may want to personally ask/invite students that have shown some initiative or you may ask the teachers to recommend and ask the students who would be interested in forming a student council. Remember

many students belong to other organizations and may have more experience than you realize with organizing groups or planning events. Try to get a variety of students to attend the meetings such as current students, former students, new students, ESOL, ABE, or GED students. If at first there are no interested students, then maybe a teacher or the director could organize the first few meetings while encouraging or mentoring a student to help lead the group in the future.

What?

Find out the needs, concerns and interests of the students at your program by doing some type of needs assessment (see above), interview, or survey. Decide which issue would attract the most students and plan your meeting around that topic. Once you decide on a topic think about the best way to present the material. If you plan to hold another meeting in the future, assign simple tasks for everyone who attended this meeting. This will increase the likelihood of people coming to the next meeting.

When?

Once the purpose of the student council has been decided, that will help determine how often and when would be the best time to schedule the meetings.

Where?

Determine the location of the meeting. Will someone need to reserve a room or building? How many people do you suspect will attend? This will be important in selecting what size room is needed. You may also need to think about the transportation needs of the students when choosing a place to hold the meetings. Make sure there is food at all your meetings or events.

Logistics: How to Start a Student Council

Questions to discuss about student councils:

Remember there are no right or wrong answers to these questions and what works best for one student council may be different from what works for another student council because each program is different.

- = some possible responses to the question

What is the role or purpose of the student council?

There is no one right answer to this question but rather something that needs to be discussed and developed with the students because if it comes from the needs and/or interests of the students it will ultimately be more successful. Although there are many options it is important that there is a clearly defined purpose of the student council. Here is a list of some possible ideas:

- To give input about program policies

- To plan special events or projects
- To fundraise for student activities or the program in general . To support students
- To give the student body a "voice"
- To socialize with other students

What is the structure?

- 1-2 representatives from each class attend meetings. These student reps gather and share information with their classmates.
- Volunteers or elected representatives attend meetings.
- Roles: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, etc.
- Open to all students at the program- general meeting or assembly.
- Some type of commitment of one term or one year.

Who runs the meetings?

- 1-2 Student leader(s) - voted by other members
- Rotate each meeting- everyone take turns
- Teacher/student team
- Program director/student team

Who attends? (Make sure students are the majority.)

- current students
- former students/alumni
- new students
- teachers
- program director
- counselors

How often does group meet?

- once a week
- once a month
- every other month

- twice during a term/session/semester . four times a year

When does group meet?

- before or after scheduled classes
- morning/afternoon/evening depending on program schedule
- both morning/evening or rotate
- weekdays or weekends
- during class
- how long are meetings: 1/2 hour, 1 hour, 2 hours, 3 hours
- set certain time each month: say, first Wednesday of each month

Where does group meet?

- student lounge
- staff lounge
- classroom
- conference room
- public places like a restaurant, local library, etc.

Things To Do List

Below is a sample of "things to do list" for a first meeting. Perhaps this would be helpful to pass along to student leaders who are involved with running the meeting.

- Figure out best time to hold a meeting . Set a date, time, place
- Put up fliers in the classrooms, common areas, bulletin boards at the program . Ask teachers to announce the meeting during classes
- Personally invite or ask students to attend meeting
- Arrange for some kind of food at your meeting
- Make an agenda for the meeting
- Prepare any materials or handouts: sign-in sheet, etc.
- Evaluate each meeting

General Tips for Supporting Students

Once you have established a student council, the goal is to keep it going. It is important to realize that students may be reluctant to participate in a student council for a variety of reasons. Here is a brief list of some possible barriers and ways to help overcome these obstacles. (Note it may be helpful to have your students brainstorm their own list of barriers and solutions because this will give you insight on what specific things to focus on at your program.)

Barriers to student involvement

1. Lack of time
2. Fear that their English is not good enough
3. Lack of confidence
4. Not clear about their role in the group
5. Uncertain of the purpose of a student council
6. Feel cynical that program will not really listen to their ideas

Ways to Overcome Barriers

1. Everyone is over committed with work, family obligations, school, etc. so try to schedule student council meetings during times when students are planning to be at the program such as before or after class. You may want to have students commit to serving on the student council for a specified amount of time such as one term or one year.
2. Emphasize that this is an opportunity to continue learning English and that many their students are in the same situation.
3. Personally invite the student and tell him or her why their expertise is needed. For example, many students have the computer skills, artistic ability, language skills, program experience, organizational skills, or enthusiasm that are needed.
4. Assign specific tasks at each meeting. The tasks should support the short and long term goals of the group. Also, encourage everyone to participate in the discussions during the meetings by using participatory approaches such as brainstorming, small group discussions, dot voting, etc.
5. Spend time defining the purpose and goals of the student council. This may take more than one meeting to accomplish.
6. Be direct about which suggestions will be implemented and why. Discuss and develop ground rules regarding how differences will be resolved. Implement student suggestions whenever possible.

Tell students the benefits of being involved

Make sure you advertise the benefits of being part of a student council. Let the students know what they will gain from this experience such as having opportunities to practice English, read, speak in a group, learn new skills and gain experience that could be useful for a resume. In addition, they will learn more about how their program operates and even help influence decisions about policies that affect their program and/or community. The social aspect of a student council may motivate many students, so make sure to emphasize that this is an opportunity to meet new people. Lastly, pay students a stipend for particular roles or jobs where their expertise is needed.

Find out the particular interests and talents of each student

- Plan "social time" with students, and/or teachers and staff. This can be very informal such a coffee hour once a month, softball games, etc. This will enable students to feel more comfortable sharing ideas, thoughts, or opinions. It is also a good way to discover potential student leaders.
- Have individuals discuss what talents, skills and knowledge they bring to the group. Emphasize that students are the "experts" about what it is like to attend their local ABE program and/or to live in the community. Students may also have skills such as knowing many languages, computer skills, drawing, being organized, etc. that are useful.
- Ask students what they personally want to accomplish, change or learn from their experience on the student council. Students want to make a difference - find out how. For instance, maybe a student is really motivated to learn about fundraising and they see this as an opportunity to accomplish that.
- Assign "doable" tasks for all members of the group. For example, students could ask other students in their program about "scheduling needs" for classes.

Provide ongoing support to students on the council

- Go over the notes and agenda from each meeting.
- Clarify what happens at each meeting.
- Encourage students to ask questions and then try to answer them.
- Discuss the "unwritten" rules of the group.
- Help students figure out transportation needs.
- If a student makes a suggestion or states an opinion during a meeting, acknowledge it! *And finally...*
- LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN !

Conclusion

A truly successful Student Council is one where the student voice dominates! For instance, if a group of students does a needs assessment and decides on a purpose or structure for a student council that is completely different from what you envisioned, then you need to keep an open mind and support their decision. If your program already has a student council then try to find ways to improve it and make it even more effective.

Other Resources

Ernest Best, Director, Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (Mass. AAL)
Tel. 617-482-9485 E-mail: ebest@worlded.org

Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE)
www.literacynet.org/value

Michele V. Sacerdote formerly worked with SABES, first as the Hotline Coordinator and then as the Student Leadership Coordinator. She presently works with adult literacy programs in New Hampshire and can be reached at: msacerdote@aol.com

Student Leadership in Your Program

Self-Assessment by Program Staff

Developed by Mina Reddy

This is a tool for you to assess where your program is with student leadership and to think about where you want to go. It focuses on degrees of student involvement and decision-making.

Program Governance and Operations

Check any of the following that apply:

- The program has a student council.
 - Students set the agenda for the student council meetings.
 - Students facilitate the student council meetings.
 - There are student/former student representatives on the ABE Advisory Council.
 - Students have been hired as program staff.
 - There is a formal student evaluation of the ABE program.
 - Students are involved in program operations like outreach, new student orientation, and mentoring of other students.
 - There are established processes for student input into curriculum on a program level as well as on a classroom level.
 - The program fosters a culture in which student voice and student involvement are integral to program governance and operations.
 - The program has dedicated staff time to support student involvement.
 - Other:
-

Student Leadership Projects and Community Connections

Check any of the following that apply to your student leadership projects, e.g. serving on a health team, developing community resource material, or producing a student newsletter.

- Students initiate the project.
- Students make the decisions on the project.
- Students organize and facilitate project meetings.
- Students contact people from other agencies.
- Students produce project materials.
- Students organize events.
- Students make presentations or conduct training on the project.
- Other:

Student Leadership and Student Involvement
Self-Assessment by Program Staff or Students
 Developed by Mina Reddy

Check whether students are involved in any of the following activities. If so, check the degree of decision-making power students have. You can add additional activities to the list. There are no right or wrong answers. This is a way to help you think more consciously about ways students are involved.

Degrees of student decision-making power:

Low	Give input to staff
Medium	Part of a group decision with staff
High	Full decision-making power

Student Leadership and Involvement	Yes/No	Low	Medium	High
Student council				
ABE Advisory Board				
Planning & evaluation team for workplace ed				
Program curriculum development				
Fundraising for the program				
Outreach for the program				
Program evaluation				
Health team				
Student newspaper				
Student support or mentoring activities				
Civic education project				
Advocacy for ABE or community issues				
Community education/public presentations				
Other:				
Other:				

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

WHAT DO LEADERS DO?

- A leader enables a group to work together in the process of developing, sharing and making a plan of action, and then carrying it out.
- The leader builds up the trust necessary for the leadership to be exercised over a period of time
- Some of the common ideas that others include in leadership definitions include exerting influence, motivating and inspiring, helping others realize their potential, leading by example, selflessness, and making a difference.
- Does the leader have to be the one out front, doing all the speaking? Absolutely not.
- Each person can lead through his or her contribution to the project.
- SABES recognizes that adults who come to ABE classes often have played leadership roles in their families and communities. Through this project, you can identify and share those leadership skills, and learn new ways to be a leader.

**EXPERIENCE TO SHARE:
MATERIALS DEVELOPED BY
THE LITERACY PROJECT'S
COMMUNITY LEADERS PROGRAM**

2004

FOREWORD: CAN LEADERSHIP BE TAUGHT?

There are a lot of ways to think about leadership.

Some believe that it's about charisma: you either have it or you don't. It's not something that can be taught.

But charismatic leaders are just one type of leader. Everyone can be a leader in their own way.

We believe that leadership can be thought of as a set of skills that everyone can learn.

Like any set of skills, we can support students in developing leadership skills by breaking the activities down into smaller parts, modeling the skills, and giving safe opportunities for practice.

The following pages describe the things that worked for us in teaching leadership skills.

Teaching Leadership Skills

1. Identify the skill or action you are going to teach.
2. Break it down into small parts.
3. Model how it's done.
4. Talk about how to do it. Explain each part.
5. Set up a safe way for students to practice the skills.
6. Ask students to reflect on how they did, and offer feedback about their performance.
7. Continue to practice and reflect until the students are ready to try the skills in a new setting.
8. Do it! Take the project or skills learned to a setting outside the classroom.
9. Reflect on what you all have learned, and celebrate what you've accomplished!

Taking the Mystery Out of the Process

In The Literacy Project's Leadership Institute, we wanted to teach how to plan and run a meeting. Our goal was to take the mystery out of the process so that the participants would feel like they could do it themselves by the end.

Here is what we did:

Over the course of twelve meetings, we modeled the skills of running a meeting, explained each part, and slowly turned over the planning and facilitation to the students. By the end, the students planned and facilitated the final meetings on their own.

- **Meetings 1 & 2:** Leaders modeled the skills of running a meeting
- **Meetings 3-10:** Leaders continued to model the skills and explained each part of running a meeting. Participants volunteered to run selected parts of each meeting, with increasing levels of complexity.
- **Meetings 11 & 12:** Leaders set the goals and participants planned the agenda and facilitated the meetings.

Encouraging Leadership in Students: What Worked for Us

Redefining success

We wanted our projects to be, successful. We wanted the students to feel good about what they had done, and we' wanted to show everyone involved that the money and effort was well-spent.

But what does it mean to succeed? If a teacher "takes over" to ensure success, was it *really* a success?

We chose to focus on creating a successful *learning experience*, rather than focus on a successful *outcome or product*.

This change in focus freed us up to welcome the real learning and growing that each person needed to do.

In some cases, the outcome of the service projects were quite different from what the students originally intended to do, but the lessons they learned along the way made it a *success for them*.

Allowing for different levels of involvement

We found it very helpful to allow for different levels of involvement *each day*. Some people struggled with showing up for the meetings, while others struggled with speaking in a group or voicing their own needs.

Allowing the participants to choose how they wanted to stretch themselves at each stage allowed them each to grow at their own pace.

Reflecting continually

We found it important to continually reflect on what we were learning and where we were going, both as the teachers and the students.

As teachers, we had a general idea of where we were going with the project, but we waited to plan the agenda for each meeting until we saw what needs emerged from the previous meetings. On-going reflection allowed us to be responsive to the real needs of the group.

For the students, we tried to set up a culture of reflection. When began and ended each meeting with a check-in. We asked for written and verbal reflections of what people were learning and how they felt about their involvement. We asked for their reflections after each time they tried cut a new facilitation skill. Building self-awareness as a leader was one of our primary goals, and the on-going reflection helped us work towards that goal.

Using games and having fun

We use a lot of games and activities to help learning happen. Having fun together is a great way to build confidence, self-esteem, comfort and communication skills. When we loosen up, we're more willing to take the risks that allow us to grow.

Using the different context created in a game, participants can try on a new role in a safe way. A shy person can be assertive - because they know it will just be for 15 minutes! A talkative person can see what happens when they step back. Well-chosen games, especially if they are followed up with discussion and reflection, allow us to see what roles we play - or could play - in real life.

Giving up control while providing support

We struggled with how to provide support and guidance while also making sure that the group felt ownership and had a real voice in something they cared about.

We found that one way to do this was to decide what parts of the project could really be left up to the students, and which we needed to hold on to ourselves. We continually asked ourselves what experiences would best facilitate learning and growth for students. The "Breaking It Down" chart is one example of this process.

Roles People Play in Groups

(adapted from www.abacon.com/commstudies/groups/roles.html)

When we think of roles people play in a group, we often think of formal titles like President, Secretary, or Chair.

Another way to think about roles we play is in terms of the way we *act* in a group. There are many ways to contribute to a group. Some people:

- ask key questions
- encourage others
- get things going, or
- make sure everyone is clear about what needs to be done.

Each of these ways of acting in a group can be called a "role." Each role is important. One person can play more than one role. People tend to take on the roles that make the best use of their skills.

Some roles focus on *what* the group will do together. We call these "task-oriented roles."

Other roles focus on *how* the group will do it. We call these "process-oriented roles."

Mass AAL: Who We Are

by Ernest Best

The potential of the adult learner in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and in English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs to advance the cause of adult education in the state of Massachusetts has been too long overlooked. The Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (Mass AAL) is a statewide organization created and run by current and former ABE and ESOL students. Mass AAL's membership is in full support of the great work of practitioners in the field. We feel that practitioners, teachers in particular, are not compensated commensurate to their worth to society. We feel that this is due in large part to uniformed policy-makers lack of understanding of the kind of life-changing impact adult education has on the lives of individuals, and even on entire communities. Mass AAL views adult education as a vehicle for social change. Adult ed programs can be (and some already are) designed to have a positive impact on entire communities giving people the tools to become self-sufficient, thus allowing them to rise up the social economic ladder-achieving the "American Dream."

By developing the skills of the state's adult learners to enhance what they really already are, which is the single most credible, and therefore, with Mass AAL's help, the most effective voice for the field of adult education, we will begin to make incredible in-roads to achieving the goal of increased capacity and improved quality for the field. By helping the field, we will be helping ourselves. In addition, we will be gaining useful skills that will be with us for the rest of our lives.

Mass AAL is creating true student leadership by training adult learners in a number of leadership roles. One is to give them the tools to educate elected officials on the power of adult ed to create change like no other level of education has done to date. Knowing this fact, we feel that the field of adult education should be funded in a way that would give it the capacity to have the greatest impact. This would be the best investment in our commonwealth that could be made. By increasing capacity, this will create the opportunity for more people to gain marketable skills. Therefore, we will be giving more and more people the ability to contribute to the tax base. We would in fact be creating taxpayers, instead of "tax-eaters." With this scenario, everybody wins.

Ways to Become Involved

We understand that the lives of adult learners can sometimes be complicated, and that the level of involvement in our organization at this point in their lives may have to be limited. For those who fit that category you may join Mass AAL as a General Member and receive our Mass AAL Newsletter twice a year. You'll also have access to information, and activities of which Mass AAL is a part. There you will be able to pick and choose, the activities with which you'd like to become involved when they are best able to fit into your lives.

However, for those of you who see the importance for the field of adult education to be able to continue the great work that it does, on a much larger scale, and realize that the time to act is now, here's an opportunity to become involved with one or more of the Mass AAL initiatives listed below.

- Massachusetts Speakers' Bureau . Mass AAL Regional Teams
- Mass AAL Membership Committees
- Mass AAL Board of Directors/Regional Representatives.
- Student Council Training: How to Start, or Maintain Existing Ones

We are placing particular emphasis on having a strong adult learner leader from your region to serve as a working member on Mass AAL's Board of Directors. Remember, no one "sits" on the board of directors. They "work" on our board of directors. Student leadership is serious, meaningful work. Remember, we're talking about advancing the field of adult literacy to create large-scale social change, by creating awareness among the public and elected officials.

There are still other ways to become involved with student leadership. Practitioners are not exempt. Educators like Bob Bickerton of the Mass. Department of Education believes in it enough to provide the resources to keep the organization up and running since its inception. Because of this, Mass AAL has been a shining star among student leadership organizations around the country. We challenge other professionals in the field to be progressive enough to follow his lead and help us (with your time, and expertise) to reach our goal in giving the world more of what you do best. The word "Alliance" in our organization's name is the alliance between adult learners and practitioners, because we realize that we're all in this together.

(Ernest Best, a former adult learner, is the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy [Mass AAL]. Students and practitioners are encouraged to contact him with questions by phone at (617) 482-9485, or by e-mail at ebest@worlded.org)

A STUDENT LEADERSHIP BIBLIOGRAPHY

Compiled by Mev Miller, SABES SE

This is a sample listing of books and materials on this topic, most of which may be found at the SABES Literacy Library (877-605-5400 or www.sabes.org/library). Many more resources exist on this topic. Please use this information as a guide and don't hesitate to ask us about the availability of additional materials.

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From Energy to Action: Learners Involved in Literacy.
A good introductory guide for learners who want to set up their own groups, to participate in program boards or to plan conferences and workshops. All in all, a key student leadership resource.

Learner Involvement in Community-Based Literacy Programs: A Discussion Paper. Donald Duff-McCracken, and Barbara Fretz. 1992.
Although this extensive guide primarily is written for administrators, it engagingly addresses the philosophical and logistical issues which pertain to increasing learner involvement in program activities. A key student leadership resource.

Student Leadership in Computer Literacy. Labranche Villa. June 1997.
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