

Education researchers at Pearson are conducting a series of summaries around Pearson's Personal and Social Capabilities (PSCs), the set of skills and competencies that are highly valued in the workplace. This review focuses on teaching and assessing the skill of leadership in K-12 and college classrooms. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

## Why Is Leadership Important?

Leadership is increasingly recognized as a key twenty-first-century skill that benefits learners in school, as they transition to the workplace, and throughout their careers. Research suggests that a focus on developing leadership skills is important for several reasons:

- Higher-education institutions view leadership as an important skill for both incoming and outgoing college students.
- Students who had leadership experiences in high school were more likely to attend and graduate from college and had higher wages as adults.
- Employers view leadership as an important skill for applicants. In one study, having held a leadership position had a stronger influence on employers' hiring decisions than GPA.
- Hiring individuals with leadership potential can support organizational success, as teams and organizations with better leaders demonstrate higher levels of performance, stronger motivation, and more job satisfaction.

## What Does Good Leadership Look Like?

There are several different models of leadership in the research literature, including some developed specifically for young adults. In recent years, there has been a particular interest in shifting the focus of leadership from managing and controlling to inspiring and motivating. There is an increasing interest in nonhierarchical and collaborative leadership strategies. Synthesizing across the literature, Pearson has defined leadership as consisting of eight core skills:

1. Challenges assumptions.
2. Establishes vision and possibilities for the future.
3. Fosters collaboration among followers by promoting communication and cooperation and assigning appropriate roles.
4. Respects and acknowledges contributions of followers and treats them fairly.
5. Empowers followers to complete high-quality work and provides them with the authority to make their own decisions.
6. Maintains accountability – provides adequate rewards (or lack thereof) for accomplishments (both followers and for self).

- 7. Stays open-minded to ideas and viewpoints.
- 8. Provides mentorship and support to help followers accomplish goals.

In addition to our eight core skills, we also highlight the importance of leader facilitation of creative problem-solving. This aspect of leadership requires application of several leadership skills (i.e. challenging assumptions, staying open-minded, facilitating collaboration), critical thinking, and advanced domain knowledge.

Problems presented to leaders and organizations are often ill structured and novel, meaning there are often not clear right or wrong answers, and previous experience might not completely apply. Leaders play a crucial role in defining these problems, identifying what information is relevant to the problem, supporting the generation of solutions, and evaluating and deciding among potential solutions.

### How Can I Teach Students Leadership?

Leading is a complex action, and there are several prerequisite skills that are needed to support effective leadership. For example, because leadership occurs within a social context, leaders must have excellent communication and interpersonal skills. Instructors, particularly those of younger students, can help students develop as leaders by building their competency with the prerequisite skills of communication, collaboration, self-management, and creativity. Developing a “leader identity” is also an important step in learning to be a leader. As students have leadership experiences, they begin to identify the defining characteristics of leaders and how those characteristics relate to their own identity. Instructors can support the development of a leader identity by helping students reflect and make sense of their leadership experiences.

When learning to lead, students will benefit from a combination of direct instruction and practical experience. For many leadership skills, instructors can provide strategies for putting those skills into practice. For example, students can learn how to ask questions in a way that facilitates collaboration and discussion. Instructors can also encourage students to take on leadership responsibilities by assigning roles such as class monitor and group leader. Student

involvement in class planning and decision-making can also provide important leadership experiences. There are a variety of academic and extracurricular activities which are associated with the development of leadership that instructors can encourage students to participate in. These activities include: holding leadership positions, participating in mentorship programs, and participating in extracurricular activities such as clubs, organizations, and community service. Instructors can serve as mentors for student leaders, helping them reflect on and understand their leadership experiences, which can support the development of leader identity and self-efficacy. There is also some evidence that teaching students about leadership using simulations (such as SimuLearn’s vLeader program) can be more effective than classroom and lecture-based instructional methods.

### How Should I Evaluate Students’ Leadership Skills?

Measures of leadership most commonly involved self- and teacher-report questionnaires, which ask individuals to report on their own or others’ characteristics and behavior. Teacher-report questionnaires in particular allow instructors to systematically report on their observations of student behavior. Rubrics are also useful tools for evaluating leadership skills in either role-played or naturally occurring leadership activities. Recent advances in technology have also allowed the assessment of leadership skills through real-time performance data from games and simulations.

Providing students feedback on their leadership skills and experiences may also be important. Among adult populations, leadership training that included feedback was more effective than training that did not. Effective assessments are instrumental in providing useful feedback. For example, rubrics provide a clear description of the criteria for evaluation. Students are able to see how their performance aligns to the level or score they are assigned and what changes they need to make in order to meet the criteria for the next level. This aspect of the assessments help to guide students on how to further develop and demonstrate their leadership skills.

The main conclusions and implications of the research for classroom practice are as follows:

Conclusions	Recommendation
Leadership skills are important for admission to higher-education institutions and in hiring decisions.	Educators should encourage leadership development through their teaching.
Leadership involves the skills of challenges assumptions, establishes vision, fosters collaboration, respects followers, empowers followers, maintains accountability, stays open-minded, and supports followers.	Educators should address each of these specific leadership skills in their instruction.
The development of leadership skills requires several prerequisite and corequisite skills including creativity, communication skills, interpersonal skills, and self-management.	Educators who want to cultivate leadership, especially for younger children, should also consider student development of prerequisite and corequisite skills.

Conclusions	Recommendation
Leaders are key in supporting creative and effective problem-solving within groups or organizations. This requires the application of leadership skills, critical-thinking skills, and advanced domain knowledge.	Educators should also support the development of problem-solving skills and help student leaders support group problem-solving.
Leader identity and leader efficacy are important components of the development of leadership skills.	It is generally not enough to simply teach students about leadership skills. They also need to develop an identity as a leader (leader identity) and believe in their capacity to be an effective leader (leader efficacy).
Effective leadership programs typically have a combination of instruction and application.	When designing leadership training, educators should consider how to combine both instruction and application into their intervention. Leadership application should also be appropriate for the students' developmental level.
Simulation-based leadership training can be just as effective as classroom-based instruction that combines lectures and case-study review.	When it is not possible to involve students in real-life leadership experiences, simulations may be an effective alternative.
A variety of college experiences are associated with increases in leadership skills during college: engaging in conversations with a diverse group of peers; having a faculty mentor; participating in clubs, organizations, and community service; holding formal leadership positions; serving as an RA; and some instances of working off-campus.	Educators should encourage participation in experiences that are associated with increases in leadership skills. It is also important for students to have mentors who can help them make sense and learn from these experiences.
There are many self- and informant-report questionnaires that assess skills in leadership. These questionnaires allow students to rate their own leadership skills and allow teachers to rate students' leadership skills.	Educators may consider self- and informant-report questionnaires to measure students' leadership skills.
ECD provides a useful framework for developing new assessments, particularly those that focus on leadership behaviors.	Consider utilizing ECD to develop new assessments of leadership skills.
Rubrics can be applied to evaluate the skills displayed during role-played or naturally occurring leadership activities (i.e. leading a group project).	Educators may consider rubrics to measure students' leadership skills, particularly if their courses involve role-played or naturally occurring leadership activities.
Recent advances in technology have allowed the assessment of leadership skills through real-time performance data from simulations and games.	Specific behaviors captured in these simulations and games can provide direct evidence of different leadership skills. The consistent tracking of behavior in a simulation also allows for continuous feedback.