THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN URBAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

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Temeka Brantley, M.S

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By

Temeka N. Brantley

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for

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Doctor of Education in Leadership Studies

Dr. James L. Olive, Committee Chair

Dr. Ann Shelly, Committee Member

Dr. Sunny Munn, Committee Member

Dr. Judy Alston, Chair, Department of Leadership Studies

Linda Billman, Interim Dean, Dwight Schar College of Education

John Moser, Interim Director of the Graduate School

Ashland University

March, 2016
THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN URBAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

By
Temeka N. Brantley
ASHLAND UNIVERSITY, 2016

Dr. James Olive, Chair

This study explores youth perceptions on youth leadership development programs (YLDP) in urban Baptist churches. Understanding youth perceptions is a primary source for information that is generally overlooked. Ultimately, this study provides a rubric for YLDP’s. The research question addressed what youth perceived as effective and ineffective practices of YLDP’s. Data was collected from interviews and focus groups with youth. The data generated seven themes: (a) communication (b) preparation (c) learning (d) helping (e) encouragement (f) friendship (g) fun. The findings of this study concluded that youth valued communication as a primary source for leadership growth. Youth felt that the YLDP prepared them in terms of growth and guidance in their personal development. The concept of learning was expressed by the youth as a key component of the YLDP. Youth also identified how they received encouragement to strive for excellence from participating in the YLDP. The idea of having fun was strongly shared by the youth, and was a primary factor expressed. A primary reason youth expressed for participating in the YLDP was friendship. The results are aligned with literature which identifies the importance of communication in reference to youth voice, personal development, and the important role of youth and adult partnerships.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Tony Brantley, my parents Raymond and Fannie Payton, my family, my friends, and everyone who helped me during this journey. I pray that God receives the glory out of my work and that it may become a road map for others to follow. It was once a dream but you helped make it a reality.
Acknowledgement

This accomplishment was achieved because of the support and love of so many people. First, I want to give thanks to Jesus Christ for blessing me with strength, courage, and favor throughout my doctoral journey. It is only by His grace and mercy that I was able to complete my dream.

Growing up my mom always instilled in me the importance of knowing that God could do anything and to believe in myself. My dad was a hard worker who taught me the importance of perseverance and work ethic. They always believed in me, loved me, and supported me every step of the way. Thanks to my parents for instilling in me the tools to accomplish this dream.

“Have faith... you can do it...I have your back….whatever you need me to do…” Throughout this journey, these are the words often spoken by my husband. He was always there to encourage me, pray for me, study with me, and support me in so many ways. Thanks for being my superman and helping me to accomplish this dream.

“Heaven helpers are real and they help make miracles happen every day…” God sent many angels to me throughout this journey. To TaLeiza Calloway-Appleton, my Ashland angels, and all of my many angels sent by God during this time, thank you for helping me throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER I

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future” – Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of U.S. (1882 - 1945).

Introduction

Paradigm Shift in Leadership

The words of Franklin D. Roosevelt are over 100 years old, but are still relevant today, as they relate to youth leadership development. Throughout the past decade there has been an emerging paradigm shift in education which has led to discussions about future needs in leadership (Drinkwater & Smethurst, 2011). Leadership development is now approached with a heightened focus on youth, ages 10-21, as opposed to a traditional focus on adults, thus echoing the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Nelson, 2010; Peter & Wooly, 1999). Preparing leaders for the future is a challenging and critical goal facing this 21st century generation (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011). In discussions about future advancement, leadership has become a topic of focus, placing increasing demands on the need for effective leaders (Northouse, 2010). The growing recognition of leadership development through public interest and literature points to how essential leadership is in relation to the future success of organizations and the economy (Hernez-Broome Hughes, 2004). Leadership plays an intricate role in today’s society, as rapid advancements in education, technology, and business demand higher skill sets for future development in economic growth (Anderson & Kim, 2009; Brady & Spence, 2010). Non-technical skills such as communication and relationship building, both related to leadership, are also important as college graduates enter the workplace. In the last decade, there has been a decline in the number of college graduates
entering the workplace who are prepared for leadership, which presents a challenge for future advancement opportunities. Both, non-technical and technical skills related to leadership are important for college graduates. Eva and Sendjaya (2013) highlighted a decline of college graduates possessing the aforementioned competencies associated with leadership. Rapid advancements have caused an increase in the basic skills organizations deem necessary for employee success, and a concomitant increase in the need for leadership development (Eva & Sendjaya, 2013; Jackson & Hancock, 2010). The demand for leadership development also perpetuates a need for understanding leadership, especially as it relates to youth leadership.

There has not been a consensus among researchers on the definition of leadership, specifically youth leadership (Conner & Strobel, 2007). Northouse, Kouzes, and Posner provide leadership concepts that coincide: Northouse (2001) defined leadership as “a process whereby one individual influence’s a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Kouzes and Posner (2010) stated that “leadership is not about personality; it is about behavior – an observable set of skills” (p. 15). Conner and Strobel (2007) identified youth leadership as entailing competencies in intrapersonal skills, referring to an ability to communicate, and interpersonal skills, referring to an ability to build relationships with others.

Starting Early

The connection between youth and leadership has been growing over the past two decades, although leadership has generally been associated with adults (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006). Kouzes and Posner (2012) asserted that leadership can be learned by anyone regardless of race, gender, or age. Nelson (2010) claimed that youth who display
leadership aptitude by age 10 were more cognitively prepared to learn skills required for leadership. Nelson (2010) described leadership aptitude as the point when “a child has developed cognitively to learn … the skills required in leadership …. Aptitude is the ability to learn something, and it usually predicts how quickly a person will learn and how much he or she will enjoy learning” (p. 1). Although the general perception is that leadership is associated with adults, researchers have suggested that it must be developed during adolescent years for more effective results (Nelson, 2010; Rehm, 2014).

Throughout the years, several adult and youth leadership models have been presented, each increasing our understanding of what is required to be an effective leader. Adult leadership models such as Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) provide a structure for exemplary leadership based on the implementation of five practices and is further discussed in Chapter II. However, there has been limited focus on the impact of youth based leadership models (Ferman, 2012; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002). Youth leadership models such as Van Linden and Fertman (1998) model and Ricketts and Rudd’s (2002) model have added to this field of study, but it still remains limited. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) provided a youth leadership model that consists of three stages of development, including awareness, interaction, and mastery, which is further explained in Chapter II. Ricketts and Rudd (2002) provided a model for youth leadership development that consists of five dimensions of leadership they believe should be taught in three stages of development adopted, from Van Linden and Fertman, which is discussed in Chapter II. With so many rapid changes for standards of performance and such high levels of advancement in education, technology, and business, the importance of youth leadership development is becoming more apparent and essential (Ricketts & Rudd, 2002).
Kouzes and Posner (2012) provided methods for measuring adult leadership, including assessment tools such as the Leadership Practice Inventory, a 360-degree assessment tool. In addition to adult leadership tools, Kouzes and Posner provided a method for measuring youth leadership, using a 360-degree assessment tool, with a design based on their adult mode. Kouzes and Posner research has generally focused on adult leadership, but recent publications such as *The Student Leadership Challenge* demonstrates how their leadership research is shifting toward a focus on youth leadership development. However, as demonstrated by Eva and Sendjaya (2013), most leadership studies are still adult driven, with limited empirical based research on youth development as leaders. There has been an increase in youth leadership development programs; however there is still a dearth of youth leadership models and measuring tools for programs to utilize (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Ferman, 2012; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002). Conner and Strobel (2007) proposed that “more than a half a million high school students participate each year in some form of youth leadership programming” (p. 276). The limitation of research and measurement tools for youth leadership programs is a challenging factor in establishing effective programs (Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004).

**Youth Leadership Programs**

Youth leadership development programs are growing and can be identified in various environments such as community and faith-based programs (Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006). However, despite the growth and expansion there is a great need for improvement. Many youth programs have the goal of producing youth leaders but fail to implement proper programming and assessment. A limited number of effective youth
leadership development models that identify with the needs of youth are implemented in programs. Youth leadership is not a major component of the core curriculum within educational programs for adolescents and is generally associated only with gifted and talented programs (Bonner & Jennings, 2007; Ricketts & Rudd, 2002). Barnett and Kumaran (2012) suggested that organizations outside of the education sector such as religious institutions and community centers have taken on the responsibility of developing youth leaders. However, most of these youth programs focus on the development of youth cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities but do not implement a leadership component that specifically relates to youth (Pittman, Garza, Yohalem, & Artman, 2008). Failure to properly incorporate youth leadership into youth programs is causing a low turnout of developing leaders who are actively involved in the future. Many organizations operate under the assumption that their programs fully implement youth leadership, but research based on participation of youth in church programs suggests otherwise, according to Grossman and Steinburg (2010). Despite an increase in youth leadership development programs, many programs, specifically faith based take a gamble on their approach, as opposed to strategizing and using a proper assessment for improving outcomes (DeVries, 2010).

Youth leadership development programs are critical to the future success of youth in education, employment, and community engagement. Peterson, Newman, Leatherman and Miske (2014) reported positive outcomes from youth participation in youth leadership development programs, like the 4-H program, that benefitted both the individual and the community. Religious institutions also have generally been referred to as a primary resource connected to developing youth leaders (Anderson & Kim, 2009).
Most church sectors, such as the Baptist denomination, are geared toward empowering both youth and adults to take on some aspect of leadership (Cnaan & Boddie, 2002). Youth leadership development is explained further in later chapters.

**Problem Statement**

This study addressed the current state of youth leadership development programs by exploring effectiveness, according to youth perceptions, specifically in urban Baptist churches. Education institutions have been used as a primary source for developing youth academically but are not yielding future leaders (Eva & Sendjaya, 2013). Despite the increase of youth leadership development programs in education and community programs, many are not taking note of actual program results for improvement. The cause of this problem could be lack of program assessment and failure to obtain feedback from participants. This study investigated youth leadership development effectiveness by exploring youth perceptions and assists with further leadership program design by providing best practices.

Leadership is critical as it has a potential to positively impact the future progress of education and business. Northouse (2010) pointed out the explicit need for effective leadership, an ability to lead others toward change in organizations and society. However, Eva and Sendjaya (2013) identified a decline in leadership ability of adult graduates entering the work industry, which points to a need for earlier training during adolescent years for more time to provide leadership development.

Youth are tomorrow’s future and without preparation many of them may not reach their full leadership potential (Conner & Strobel, 2007). For some organizations, such as Cleveland Baptist Churches, the future outcome of youth leadership development
has a major impact on their sustainability. The current state of Cleveland’s Baptist Church sector raises a red flag for sustainability as the population reflects members above age 40 and youth participants below age 20 who are not active or fulfilling leadership roles as anticipated (Hadaway, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Leadership development of youth within the church sector is generally conducted through a designated youth program, so it is imperative that the program produce positive results (Carpenter, 2001). It is also important to determine the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs, specifically urban Baptist churches, for future potential outcomes of youth participation.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question in this study was, “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based upon youth perceptions?” To answer this question, the following sub-questions were used:

a. What do youth perceive as effective practices of youth leadership development programs?

b. What do youth perceive as ineffective practices of youth leadership development programs?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to learn the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs in Cleveland urban Baptist churches, by exploring youth perceptions. This study determined effectiveness of youth leadership development programs by exploring what youth consider effective and ineffective practices of youth leadership development programs. The best method for determining youth leadership
development program effectiveness is by investigating youths’ perception of the programming. The intent of this study was to better understand youth perceptions to determine effectiveness of youth programs. The definition of effectiveness was not predetermined. Instead effectiveness was defined based on youth perceptions obtained from interviews. Results from this study impact youth leadership development programs, specifically in urban Baptist churches, and will help to enlighten society on the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs, for further program development.

**Significance of the Study**

This study holds significance in at least two areas. First, it contributes to the literature in youth leadership development programs by providing a set of best practices that can be used as an assessment tool for programs. Second, it contributes to improving current youth leadership development program practices within urban Baptist churches by adding to the knowledge base. Ultimately, this study contributes to the limited literature on youth leadership development programs and serves as a rubric for the development of future youth leadership development program models.

Yip, Liu, and Nadel (2006) concluded in their work with a Rotary Youth Leadership Program that youth need an effective leadership development process because they lack experience and need to be taught competencies for leadership, such as analyzing personal traits, guiding others to a goal, and committing to action. There is a need for advancements in your leadership development programs, but the field of literature is still limited. Youth leadership studies are not often found throughout the literature on leadership theories, development, and implementation (MacNeil, 2006). The
gap in literature and research highlights a need to examine youth leadership development programs effectiveness.

This study helps to enhance youth leadership development programs in urban Baptist churches. It is important to examine the influence of youth leadership development programs to determine if youth are adequately being prepared for future leadership. This study contributes to identifying the potential gaps in youth leadership development by examining youth perceptions of their leadership growth. Urban Baptist churches invest time and finances into youth programs with hopes of yielding a return, so it is important to determine the effectiveness of programs to potentially create future growth, according to youth perceptions. This study is unique because it focused on an important aspect of church sustainability which is development of youth as it relates to leadership. The research serves as a foundation for future youth leadership development program models.

**Researcher Lens**

The philosophical belief of a researcher has a major impact on how a study is conducted and how conclusions are formulated (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Researchers are used as an instrument in qualitative studies; therefore their belief system is a driving force behind engagement during a study (Merriam, 2009). It is important that the reader has a complete understanding of the qualitative researcher’s epistemological and ontological perspective.

**Ontological Lenses**

Exploring my ontological lenses, or addressing the philosophical questions of what is considered reality or idea of existence, required me to examine my religious
belief system in relation to how I perceive what is real (Merriam, 2009). I learned throughout my experience in research that such an understanding cannot be achieved through simple data or formulas that lead to a specific answer. Many of my conclusions are driven from my religious perspective through which I use to interpret and gain understanding. For example, my assessment of church culture is formulated based on my religious experience and knowledge from studying the Christian Bible. As a Christian believer, my reality is formulated through an understanding of the existence of God as it relates to the existence of human beings. This idea is not synonymous with scientific beliefs in which conclusions are derived from specific facts and formulas, so as a researcher my approach is more subjective. My approach to research is guided by determining what is real based on the belief system that the world and people exist because God exists, which is aligned with the interpretivist-constructivist perspective (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). An interpretivist believes that meaning and understanding is gained from people’s experience which develops a sense of reality, and a constructivist is concerned with how people learn or create understanding from their experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The interpretivist approach is most common in qualitative research and is aligned with this study, which seeks to gain understanding of youth experience based on their perspectives.

Epistemological Lenses

Epistemology is the notion of simply studying the meaning of knowledge, according Merriam (2009). I believe that knowledge is the source of ultimate power. My concept of the construction of knowledge is derived from my aforementioned ontological belief system. I believe knowledge is obtained through the way in which an individual
connects with reality and engages with people, in terms of making sense of what is
perceived. Weick (1993) referred to this as the way in which people give meaning to their
experiences, or a sense making process. This is the way in which knowledge is
constructed by individuals.

An individual’s life experience also has an impact on how knowledge is
formulated and perceived. A person growing up in America has a different view of reality
than someone growing up in India. I never considered my life experience as a part of my
sense-making process. However, throughout the past few years I realized that it is how I
perceive what knowledge really is. Knowledge can only be obtained through interaction
with people, places, and things, and how an individual makes sense of the experience. My
life experiences have shaped how I interact with the world and by understanding the
variables or people involved, causing me to understand problems and by understanding
the variables, or people involved (Merriam, 2009). My age and current position as a
Youth Pastor with former experience in youth programs allowed me to interact and gain
the information necessary for this research project. My preexisting experience introduced
an element of bias and Chapter III explains the trustworthiness steps taken to help
alleviate the bias.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is guided by Kouzes and Posner’s (2002)
leadership development research which fully incorporates important elements of
leadership development. Kouzes and Posner’s leadership model consists of the following
five components: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act,
model the way, and encourage the heart. The model is explained in greater detail in Chapter II.

**Definitions**

The following terms, acronyms, and definitions were used in this study:

Youth Leadership Development— A process in which young people

learn the concepts of leadership and obtain skills that are essential for growth to

promote positive life outcomes. It is aimed at young people overcoming obstacles,

taking control of their own lives and becoming more active and engaged

participants in their communities.

Youth Leadership Development Program— A program designed to help youth develop

skills related to leadership, facilitate development of youth individual strengths,

provide opportunities to develop youth positive relationships with adults,

encourage youth to provide service to others, and emphasize experiential learning

opportunities.

Youth—Refers to a time when one is considered young, a developmental period between

an individual’s childhood years, age 5 to adulthood, years age 21 marked by an

increase of independence, transition to work, education, and social relationship.

Urban Community— A location separate from the suburban area, in the city,

with homes and buildings close in proximity, generally with a high population of

people, and low-income in areas such as Cleveland.

Baptist Church— A church defined by the Christian denomination based on a belief of

the doctrine of baptism or immersion into water, which must be professed by

believers.
Summary

This chapter presented information on the study of youth leadership development programs which was explored through the implementation of a qualitative case study. Chapter II further explores youth leadership development programs through a literature review which focuses on four major themes: youth leadership development as it relates to the definition of youth leadership, best practices of youth leadership development, current state of youth and church programs, and conceptual framework for the study, as is portrayed in the literature. Chapter III provides the methodology employed for this qualitative case study as it relates to participants, data collection and analysis tools, and overall research approach. Chapter IV discusses the overall findings of the case study conducted. Chapter V discusses future implications and overall thoughts related to the findings.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Youth leadership development has been identified in literature through the exploration of leadership models, program development, and definition. The purpose of this literature review was to understand the intricacies of youth leadership development. The following areas are discussed in this chapter, according to literature on leadership: definition of youth leadership, best practices of youth leadership development, the current state of youth and church programs, and the conceptual framework of this study. The primary focus of this literature review was youth leadership development as it relates to the following research question and sub-questions:

“What makes a youth leadership development program effective based upon youth perceptions?”

c. What do youth perceive as effective practices of youth leadership development programs?

d. What do youth perceive as ineffective practices of youth leadership development programs?

The following literature strands are discussed to provide a complete overview of youth leadership development in literature as it relates to the research questions:

- The definition of youth leadership
- Best practices of youth leadership development
- The current state of youth and church programs
- Conceptual Framework- leadership lens
Youth Leadership Defined

Conner and Strobel (2007) recognized the absence of consensus among researchers on how youth leadership is defined. This study used one definition as a primary source for understanding the core definition of youth leadership. “Youth leadership is both an internal and an external process leading to (a) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence their opinion and behavior, and show the way by going in advance; and (b) the ability to analyze one’s own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem to carry them out” (Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004, p.4).

Youth Leadership as a Process and its Characteristics

Youth leadership has been referred to as a process of development and as a set of characteristics, which is discussed in this section. The research discussed identified how youth leadership has been described in different ways. Specifically, process and characteristics of youth leadership is discussed in further detail in this section.

**Process.** Youth leadership has been defined as three types of processes: individual, relational, and training. Conner and Strobel (2007) identified youth leadership as a process of development by studying the connection between leadership development and programmatic structure. Conner and Strobel (2007) noted that there is limited agreement in defining youth leadership because of researchers’ various perspectives, but identified that youth leadership is a process in which youth discover their strengths through engaging in activities and having structure. MacNeil (2006) identified youth leadership as a process that followed adult leadership theories acknowledging leadership as a relational process that incorporates skills and influence to impact others. Similarly,
White (2004) also recognized that there are common themes in defining what he calls adolescent leadership, as being a training activity or process driven, in which youth are fully engaged.

**Characteristics.** Research identifies that the central focus of youth leadership is on characteristics and is defined by common themes such as communication (Kohlhagen & Culp, 2000), social and affiliation (Ward & Ellis, 2008), and influence (Yip et al., 2006). Youth leadership is also identified in terms of a central focus on characteristics and actions demonstrated by adolescents (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006) such as problem solving and decision making. Several studies identified communication as a primary characteristic relating to youth leadership (Gould, Voelker, & Griffes, 2013; Kohlhagen & Culp, 2000). Kohlhaenger and Culp (2000) study on youth campers and counselors perception of leadership identified that youth considered communication as a characteristic of leadership. In a similar research study, Gould, Voelker, and Griffes (2013) interviewed coaches to determine the best coaching practices for youth leadership development and identified communicator as a character trait of leadership.

Influence is also a primary characteristic that is associated with youth leadership literature (Ward & Ellis, 2008; Yip et al, 2006). Ward and Ellis (2008) reviewed adolescent peer leader relationships in determining the characteristics of peer leaders that cause peers to follow, which relates to influence. Ward and Ellis (2008) study on peer followership proposed six theory based leadership characteristics to determine the leading factors that adolescents use as a guide when selecting peer leaders. The six characteristics criteria included a leader’s “willingness to provide social support, willingness to enter into close friendships, opportunity for increased social status through affiliation with a
popular leader, similarity of values, possibility for idealized influence, and potential for interpersonal rivalry” (Ward & Ellis, 2008, p. 78). Influence was not found to be the leading factor, but was still identified as a primary criterion for selection of a leader. Similarly to other researchers who identified influence as a primary characteristic of youth leadership, Yip, Liu, and Nadel (2006) argued that youth are limited in terms of life experience and other aspects used to define leadership so they are more reliant on the characteristics of influence. The concept of influence as persuasion is suggested by Yip et al. to be a defining characteristic of youth leadership.

**Youth versus Adult Leadership**

This section discusses the difference between adult and youth leadership. Research has identified that youth and adults view leadership through the lenses of power level, experience, and age (Kohlhagen & Culp, 2000; Nelson, 2010; Yip et al., 2006). To illustrate the differences in leadership, Yip et al. (2006) argued that adult leadership is generally connected with authoritative power and youth leadership is connected with the power of influence. In support of this finding Kohlhagen and Culp (2000) examined leadership perceptions of youth and adults which resulted in youth perceiving leadership as being active participation and adult perceiving leadership as being experience based. Nelson (2010) provided another view of youth and adult perceptions of leadership which enlightens Kohlhagen and Culp’s (2000) findings. In a study on the potential of developing youth leadership skills during preteen years, Nelson (2010) identified it as adults viewed leadership as a practice reserved for older people, which supports Kohlhagen and Culp (2000) ideas on adult perceptions. The study by Nelson (2010) also reported that taking an approach of active engagement, which he references as learning
by doing is an effective method in youth leadership development, which also supports Kohlhagen and Culp’s (2000) ideas on youth perceptions of leadership.

**Environment: After-School, Community, In-School, Faith-Based**

Youth leadership occurs in various environments such as after-school, community, in-school, and faith-based (Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006). Thousands of national programs exist including Boys’ Clubs and Girls’ Clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, YMCA of America, Youth Leader Institute, Youth Leadership based Charter School Networks, and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (Frisco, Muller, & Dodson, 2004).

Researchers such as Pittman, Garza, Yohalem, and Artman (2008) looked at the role of spiritual development within youth development programs as it relates to opportunities and challenges that are faced. Their notion is that the path to implementing a spiritual component into youth development programs is to connect with various programs that focus on youth development (Pittman et al., 2008). The research of Pittman et al. (2008) identified environments as entities providing youth development programs, including: after-school, community, in-school, and faith-based. Each environment contained components essential to youth development, including faith-based communities.

**After-school programs.** Nicholson, Collins and Holmer (2004) identified youth leadership related programs that have a long history of over fifty years in after-school settings such as the National Collaboration for Youth-Girls Scouts of the U.S.A, Boy Scouts of the U.S.A, Girls Incorporated, Big Brothers/ Big Sisters Of America, YWCA, YMCA, 4-H, Camp Fire U.S.A, American Red Cross, and many others. While
conducting a case study on youth leadership development and programmatic development, Conner and Strobel (2007) reported on the experience of two youth in the Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) program, which was identified as an after-school program. The YELL program was an after-school program held at a middle school in California that trained 15-20 youth on how to formulate policy recommendations to empower youth as leaders (Conner & Strobel, 2007). In comparison to Conner and Strobel’s (2007) research, Fredricks and Simpkins (2012) presented a similar argument on the outcomes of minority youth participation in organized activities, by providing research results taken from after-school programs. The research of Conner and Strobel (2007) and Fredricks and Simpkins (2012) recognized after-school programs as a primary source for promoting youth leadership development.

**Community-based programs.** Various studies have identified community based programs as a source for youth leadership development. Detzler, Van Liew, Dorward, Jenkins, and Teslicko (2007) identified youth participants in a year round community program geared toward youth leadership development who engaged in experiential learning through community organizing. Wheeler and Edlebeck (2006) in correlation with Detzler et al. (2007) study provided research that was affiliated with a community-based program. The study focused on how youth civic engagement was a successful path to youth leadership development that was conducted at The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, a community based program (Wheeler & Edelbeck, 2006).

The Chicano-Latino Youth Leadership Institute is another example of a community based youth leadership organization found in the literature (Bloomberg,
Ganey, Albad, Quintero, & Alcantara, 2003). In addressing the challenges of youth, the Chicano-Latino Youth Leadership Institute, a youth development model was created, which Bloomberg et al. (2003) researched to determine the outcomes of the community-based youth leadership program component. Another study was conducted in an Australian Aboriginal community to examine community programs that have helped with creating positive outcomes like limiting youth drug use, such as sniffing (Lopes, Flouris, & Lindermans, 2013). Community-based programs have been a prominent source for youth leadership development programs, as shown in Lopes et al. (2013) research on elements that make a youth program successful.

**In-school programs.** Youth leadership programs have been located in academic based environments for the purpose of conducting research. Mitra (2004) researched youth leadership as it pertains to providing youth with an opportunity to have a voice through activities in a school based program for high school students. In a study about the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs, Bonner and Jennings (2007) referenced a student’s leadership ability as one of the component areas used to identify potential scholars. The study identified that youth leadership development is also prominent in school-based programs, along with other studies such as those by Mitra (2004). In addition to in-school youth leadership-based programs identified by Mitra (2004) and Bonner and Jennings (2007), the Junior Reserves Officer Training Corps (JROTC) an Army based student leadership development program that teaches theory and applied skills was also mentioned by Funk (2002) during his research on developing leaders in high school through theory and practice. Thus, youth leadership-
based programs have been identified in research as occurring through various programs (Bonner et al., 2007; Funk, 2002; Mitra, 2004).

Youth leadership development has been demonstrated in many school systems that have fully integrated leadership models throughout the past decade (Conner & Strobel, 2007). In recent years, a new concept of leadership based independent schools, also referred to as charter schools, has been rapidly progressing across the United States (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Rehm, 2014). Many independent schools implement a leadership development model to produce future leaders (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Rehm, 2014). Leadership has also become a major focus in higher education, as high schools and colleges use leadership based questions as a part of the admissions criteria (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Rehm, 2014). In addition, colleges have increased interest in leadership by integrating the subject not only in admissions, but also in sports and first year student courses (Rehm, 2014).

**Faith-based programs.** Youth leadership development programs are more prevalent in research related to after-school, in-school, and community-based programs, but there is also programing in faith-based programs. Goreham (2004) acknowledged that rural youth ministries across denominations differed, and noted distinct contextual and organizational differences between Catholic and Baptist youth programs. DeVrie (2009) worked with numerous faith-based programs across America to provide consulting services for youth development and program planning to create sustainable youth programs.
Best Practices of Youth Leadership Development

The best practices of youth leadership are described in this section from two perspectives. First, it is approached by looking at the process of youth leadership development as it relates to starting early, participation in programs, and youth having an active voice. The second approach includes a review of youth leadership best practices as it relates to youth and adult partnerships, and one approach methods.

Starting early. Most researchers show that youth leadership start during the early stages of adolescent development. Nelson (2010) assessed what aptitude levels are required by youth to engage in leadership and identified that by age 10 youth have acquired the proper cognitive skills. This finding was supported by Yip et al. (2006) who identified the difference between youth and adult leadership development, suggesting that youth do not have official power but the power of influence during adolescent development. Yip et al. (2006) referred to the process in which youth leaders develop the skill of influence as a period of “growing awareness” (p. 13).

Active participation. Researchers have discussed the important aspect of active participation of youth in programs as it relates to leadership development. There is a leadership component in most programs, which is not always titled as leadership but is described by Gill (2005) as “a way to build on youth capabilities and strength”(p. 2). Throughout research, active participation has been targeted as a primary aspect of youth leadership development (Ferguson, Kim, McCoy, 2010; Mitra, 2006; Walker, 2006; Wheeler et al., 2006).

Fergusson and McCoy (2010) used a qualitative study to look at the involvement of homeless youth in agency decision-making as it relates to enhancing their leadership.
Fergusson and McCoy (2010) identified youth member’s opinions on the importance of having active participation in terms of having a voice: “They [youth participants] stressed the importance of having the opportunity to provide input in agency programming that is designed to help them improve….Youth underscored the importance of taking part in making a difference” (Fergusson & McCoy, 2010, p. 7). Walker (2006) argued for increasing engagement in youth development programs through the implementation of a framework based on developmental intentionality, which is focused on connecting youth ethos and learning experience, and identified that active participation is key as it relates to commitment and skill building through practice. Wheeler and Edelbeck (2006) researched the increase of youth engagement through strategies such as youth and adult partnerships. Walker’s (2006) findings support Wheeler and Edelbeck (2006) research which identified the importance of youth participation as an opportunity for leadership growth and stressed the need for youth to have programs with structured activities that promote active learning. Mitra’s (2006) leadership study on youth participation and the need for youth to have a more active voice also described findings that are aligned with the other research studies, with identifying that students need an opportunity to practice their leadership skills through being active.

**Youth voice.** The participation of youth engaging in a process that allows an ability to communicate and be heard, as it relates to leadership, has been a common theme throughout literature. Many researchers recognized the importance of youth voice as an opportunity for youth to be heard, participate in decision making, and speak for change, which has an impact on youth leadership development (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Detlzer et al., 2007; Libby et al., 2006; Mitra, 2006). Mitra (2004; 2006) conducted
several studies on the value of including youth voice and the intricate role that it plays in youth leadership. In a study on the impact of increasing student voice as it relates to youth development Mitra (2006) proposed that youth want to be heard and that increasing youth voice in such a way is a vehicle in “moving toward youth leadership” (p. 7). Mitra demonstrated how it is essential to provide youth with an outlet to communicate, because it is an important aspect of youth leadership. In addition, youth want to be heard, meaning they had ideas and want to dialogue about changes that will promote positive outcomes, whether it is related to community issues or youth programming. Youth voice is a key aspect of youth leadership development and must be implemented, as Mitra’s (2006) studies demonstrate. Decision-making is a common thread in the literature as it relates to youth leadership (Libby et al., 2006; Mitra, 2006). Mitra (2006) research showed how youth participation in decision making and school change efforts increased youth development. Libby’s et al. (2006) research supports Mitra’s (2004) findings on the role of decision-making in youth leadership development. Libby et al. (2006) revealed that youth develop in leadership through youth and adult partnerships by participating in decision-making. In a study on the role of youth voices in facilitating youth leadership, Detzler et al. (2007) also supported other research findings on the role of decision-making. According to Detzler et al. (2007) the program Facilitating Leadership in Youth (FLY) provided youth with an opportunity to develop critical leadership skills through action oriented program activities. Findings in the Libby et al. study on youth leadership development examined the meaning and approaches to development and identified decision making as a key element of youth leadership development. Specifically, it highlighted that “youth have the right to participate in the decision making….it provides
a developmental process” (p. 14). Research studies have provided common themes in relation to youth leadership through youth voice including youth being heard and decision-making participation.

**Youth and adult partnerships.** Youth and adult partnerships (YAPs) play an intricate role in youth leadership in multiple ways. The relationship between youth and adults allows both to “come together to plan, problem solve, learn, and strengthen their relationships with each other….at the core of successful youth-adult partnerships to build leadership is a transference of creation and share power” (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006, p. 22). In a 12 year study conducted by the Youth Leadership Institution on the exploration of ways to utilize YAPs to support youth participation in the Bay area of San Francisco, the authors revealed several benefits of their YAP experience. According to the study YAPs provide youth and adults with an opportunity to contribute, which allows growth and the learning experience to span across age groups (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005, p. 114).

Along the lines of YAPs building a capacity of youth leadership development, Mitra (2006) also identified another aspect of YAPs in a study conducted on the importance of increasing student voice in school as an approach to move toward youth leadership. In looking at the collaboration between youth and adults in youth leadership development Mitra (2006) identified the results of partnership in reference to a project focusing on the end result of what Libby et al. (2005) referred to as “building learning.” Mitra (2006) also stated that “through the process of reviewing transcripts, youth and adults worked together to develop a common language and a set of skills that created a
shared knowledge base from which each group could communicate and proceed with their activities” (p.8).

**One approach method.** Several research studies on youth leadership have suggested that a cookie cutter approach is not the best method for the development of youth leadership. In the aforementioned Australian aboriginal youth program geared toward leadership development, Lopes, Flouris, and Linderman’s (2013) identified that the problem with most youth leadership programs is taking a “one size fits all approach” (p. 60). Similar to Lopes, Flouris and Linderman (2013) findings, research by Conner and Strobel (2007) also cautioned the notion of youth leadership programs taking a “one size fits all approach.” The research regarding youth leadership has cautioned youth programs against having a standardized program (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Lopes et al., 2013).

**Models.** In addition to researchers showing the implications of a “one approach” method to youth leadership, researchers have also identified several models related to youth leadership development. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) provided a youth leadership model that has been used as a foundation for more recent models such as Ricketts and Rudd (2002) model. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) youth leadership model consisted of three stages of development, including: awareness, interaction, and mastery. The first stage is youth awareness when youth began to understand leadership skills, the second stage is interaction when youth engage, and the final stage is mastery when you transition into leadership. Each stage fall into five scopes of leadership including: leadership information, leadership attitude, communication, decision making, and stress management (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998). In response to the limited amount of research and models for youth leadership development, Ricketts and Rudd
(2002) created the youth leadership model presented in Figure 2.1. According to Ricketts and Rudd (2002) the youth leadership model they designed was influenced by the “research of Fertman and Long” (1990) and other research studies on youth leadership (p. 11).

Ricketts and Rudd believed that youth organizations were helpful for youth development, but indicated there was a greater need for an actual comprehensive model that could be implemented. The youth leadership model designed for the purpose of developing youth leadership curriculum consisted of three stages of youth leadership development: awareness, interaction, and mastery; which fit into the five dimensions listed in Figure 2 (p. 10):

- Leadership information
- Leadership attitude
- Decision making
- Intrapersonal and interpersonal skills
- Communication
Ferman (2012) gained inspiration to conduct a youth study after discovering the lack of information on youth leadership development, similar to the initial motivation and observations of Rickett and Rudd (2002). In support of the Rickett and Rudd (2002) study, Ferman (2012) provided a youth leadership development model in Figure 3 that reflected many of the same concepts. Although it is a continuum based model the structure is aligned with Ricketts and Rudd (2002) approach in their youth leadership development model.
Wheeler and Edelbeck (2006) provided methods on enhancing the leadership of youth and identified four strategies that yield positive results on youth leadership programs. The four strategies of Wheeler and Edelbeck (2006) supported the findings of Rickett and Rudd (2002) and Ferman (2012).

The four youth leadership strategies included:

- Build young people’s connections to their own identity, culture, and community.
- Recognize that young people are assets to and experts about their own communities.
- Engage young people as community leaders on issues that matter to them.
- Create developmental opportunities that are sustained and supported over time (Wheeler & Edelbeck, 2006, p. 90).
The Current State of Youth and Church

This section reviews the current state of youth in America as it relates to crime and the important role of youth leadership development programs. In addition, the current state of urban churches in the Baptist sector is addressed in regards to church participation. Review of youth and the church provide greater insight on the current status.

Youth in America

Crime rates of minority youth in urban communities are continuing to rise, despite the national decrease in juvenile related crimes (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). Armour and Hammond (2009) asserted that one-third of the youth population in juvenile detention centers are comprised of minorities. On a national level, youth have contributed to overall violence, drug abuse, and suicides, with devastating statistics. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2014) reported their findings on juvenile delinquency occurring in 2012, and since then there have been over 640 murder related deaths caused by teen violence, nearly 1.5 million youth arrests, and over 25,000 youth have committed suicide between the ages of 7-17 (OJJDP, 2014). In 2014 OJJDP reported that youth below ages 18 received convictions which include a percentage breakdown reflecting 37% murder, 22% rape, 31% robbery, and 29% assault (OJJDP, 2014). In 2011, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University reported that most youth related crimes are attributed to drug substance abuse. In fact, CASA (2011) research figures indicated that 6.1 million high school students could be identified as drug users (p. 2). Drug and substance abuse is more likely during adolescent years and drug
abuse contributes to violence, according to CASA (2011). Not only are the statistics devastating at a national level, but also in Cuyahoga County, specifically Cleveland, Ohio. Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas- Juvenile Division 2013 Annual report indicated that 19,955 youth related cases were filed in 2013. The report identified Cleveland with 2317 youth offenders, 3678 cases, and 6337 charges which included 1968 person and property as the leading offenses (Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas-Juvenile Division, 2013). The overall analysis indicated that 93% youth committed in Cuyahoga County were Black and the highest age groups were 16 and 17. David-Ferdon and Simon (2014) stated that the future is jeopardized every time youth are involved in violence, because they are the future leaders.

Despite shocking reports by OJJDP (2014) and CASA (2011) on youth related crimes and drug use, there are programs aiming to provide youth with a support structure in hopes of decreasing the negative statistics. A longitudinal study on 4-H, a national youth program, found that 4-H youth participants were more likely to have low trajectories for “depression symptoms, delinquent behaviors…. [and they are] more likely than other youth to contribute to their communities” (Lerner, Lerner, Phelps, 2009, p. 15). Vandell (2013) also indicated that youth participants in afterschool programs or out of school time programs have demonstrated success in academics, behavior, and social interaction, such as building community relationships. Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer (2004) reported on after-school youth development programs which indicated positive outcomes for youth who participate in community related programs, ranging from an increase in academic performance, an increase in volunteerism, and a decrease in drug use. The aforementioned programs identified how youth participation in various
development programs is an important factor in sustaining the future of our country (Lerner, Lerner, Phelps, 2009; Nicholson et al., 2004; Vandell, 2013)

McLaughlin (2000) demonstrated how community programs can have a positive impact on youth, especially programs focused toward building on youth strengths. Many youth leadership development programs are now shifting their focus toward making a positive impact on the community by increasing youth participation in civic engagement (Cao Yu & Lewis-Charp, 2006). Programs such as the National 4-H Council have reported on the positive impact that participants in their youth development program have made in surrounding communities by addressing issues ranging from education to family (Peterson, Newman, Leatherman, & Miske, 2014). It is evident that youth leadership development programs are needed, not only for youth, but also communities, as previously mentioned studies identified (Cao Yu & Lewis-Charp, 2006; McLaughlin, 2000; OJJDP, 2014; Peterson et al., 2014).

Not only have youth leadership development programs been recognized for contributing to positive community outcomes, they also have been recognized at the individual level for positive participant outcomes. Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson and Hare (2004) claimed that youth leadership development contributes to the individual growth of one’s cognitive abilities and life skills. The skills acquired from youth leadership development programs are beneficial to participants, surrounding communities, and organizations (Holt, 2008).

**Urban Baptist Church Sector**

Of the many venues for youth leadership, religious institutions have generally been referred to as a primary place recognized within the community that is connected to
developing youth leaders (Anderson & Kim, 2009). Most church sectors, such as the Baptist denomination, are geared toward empowering people, both youth and adults, to take on some aspect of leadership (Cnaan & Boddie, 2002). The urban Baptist church sector’s sustainability, specifically in Cleveland, Ohio, is based on current and future members taking on many of the leadership roles. Youth members play an intricate role in the sustainability of the urban Baptist church sector in Cleveland, as they have a major impact on future growth of membership and future development of leadership, to keep the church moving forward (Griffin, 2015). In order to ensure that youth are properly developed and engaged, most churches in the Cleveland urban Baptist sector have some type of youth program such as Sunday school (DeVries, 2010).

Research has provided various views on the current state of church participation as it relates to youth development. In conjunction with the limited research on youth leadership development the range of literature on youth participation in church is also scarce. Smith, Denton, Faris, and Regnerus (2002) proposed that when it comes to adolescent religious participation, “we relatively know little about the religious lives of American adolescents…. Few scholars of American adolescents in other fields pay close attention to youth’s religious lives” (p. 597). Goreham (2004) research supported Smith et al. (2002) findings in stating that there have been multiple studies on youth groups in general, but limited studies examining youth groups and the youth religious experience. There is a limitation of research on youth as it relates to participation in religious groups, according to the literature reviewed.
Church Decline

The United States Census Bureau reported a decline in the adult population within the Baptist church denomination (see Figure 2.3). According to Figure 2.3 the Baptist church denomination has a population that is greater than several denominations listed, with many of them showing an increase from 1990 to 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious group</th>
<th>Estimates (1,000)</th>
<th>Religious group</th>
<th>Estimates (1,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult population, total</td>
<td>175,440, 207,983, 228,182</td>
<td>Christian Reform</td>
<td>40, 79, 381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian, total</td>
<td>151,225, 159,514, 173,402</td>
<td>Foursquare Gospel</td>
<td>28, 70, 116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>46,004, 50,873, 57,199</td>
<td>Independent Christian Church</td>
<td>25, 71, 66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>39,964, 33,820, 36,168</td>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>105, 254, 206</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protestant—no denomination supplied</td>
<td>17,214, 4,647, 5,187</td>
<td>Other religions, total</td>
<td>5,853, 7,740, 8,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist/Wesleyan</td>
<td>14,174, 14,039, 11,366</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>3,137, 2,837, 2,680</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>9,110, 9,580, 8,674</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>527, 1,104, 1,349</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian—no denomination supplied</td>
<td>8,073, 14,190, 16,834</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>404, 1,082, 1,169</td>
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<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>5,985, 5,986, 4,723</td>
<td>Unitarian/Universalist</td>
<td>502, 629, 586</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>3,116, 4,407, 5,416</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>227, 766, 682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopalian/Anglican</td>
<td>3,043, 3,451, 2,405</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>47, 103, 186</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mormon/Latter-Day Saints</td>
<td>2,487, 2,697, 3,158</td>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>13, 57, 78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witness</td>
<td>1,381, 1,331, 1,914</td>
<td>Wiccan</td>
<td>8, 134, 342</td>
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<td>Seventh-Day Adventist</td>
<td>668, 724, 936</td>
<td>Pagan</td>
<td>(NA) 140, 340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>617, 1,165, 810</td>
<td>Spiritualist</td>
<td>(NA) 116, 426</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holiness/Holy</td>
<td>610, 569, 352</td>
<td>Other unclassified</td>
<td>991, 774, 1,030</td>
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<td>Congregational/United Church of Christ</td>
<td>438, 1,376, 736</td>
<td>No religion, specified</td>
<td>14,331, 29,481, 34,169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of the Nazarene</td>
<td>549, 544, 358</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>5, 902, 1,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of God</td>
<td>500, 943, 660</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>5, 1,186, 991, 1,985</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthodox (Eastern)</td>
<td>502, 645, 824</td>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>29, 49, 90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evangelical/Born Again</td>
<td>546, 1,088, 2,154</td>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>13,116, 27,486, 30,427</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mennonite</td>
<td>235, 346, 438</td>
<td>Other no religion</td>
<td>(NA) 57, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Science</td>
<td>214, 194, 339</td>
<td>Refused to reply to question</td>
<td>4,031, 11,246, 11,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of the Brethren</td>
<td>206, 358, 231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Nondenominational</td>
<td>194, 2,489, 8,032</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciples of Christ</td>
<td>144, 492, 263</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed/Dutch Reform</td>
<td>161, 289, 206</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostolic/New Apostolic</td>
<td>117, 254, 970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>67, 217, 130</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Gospel</td>
<td>51, 168, 67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3: Self-Described Religious Identification of Adult Population 1990, 2001, and 2008 (United States Census Bureau, 2013)

Hadaway (2011) argued on the growth patterns of faith-based communities, which supported the Census Bureau records, showing a decline within the Baptist denomination. Hadaway (2011) identified that congregations in a small or rural area are unlikely to experience growth. The American Baptist Association (retrieved December
2013) website identified that the Baptist denomination churches are predominately located in urban areas.

Attending church is considered an option in America and attendance in suburban areas is rapidly increasing, which has a direct impact on church growth (Hadaway, 2011). Hadaway concluded that congregations that have an aging population, meaning limited active youth members, are least likely to experience growth, as shown in Figure 2.4. The research has identified the Baptist denomination in a state of decline with limitations in growth potentially due to location and aging population (Hadaway, 2011).

![Figure 2.4: Aging Growth of Congregations](image)

Figure 2.4: Aging Growth of Congregations (Hadaway, 2011)

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Youth Participation

Research on the participation of youth in religious institutions identified that there is limited participation that can be attributed to several factors such as school programs and sports (Carpenter, 2001; Goreham, 2004; Petts, 2009; Smith et al., 2002). In response to the limited research on youth groups in religious settings, Goreham (2004) examined
youth group challenges, organizational structure, activities, and participation, with a conclusion that youth groups across denominations faced similar challenges. Goreham (2004) concluded that the greatest challenge faced by youth is their busy schedule with school along with other outside activities, and also identified a decline in the participation of senior high school students (12th grade) in every denomination category. In a study examining the religious participation of youth ages 13-18 Smith et al. (2002) revealed a lack of participation by high school students referred to as 12th graders. Petts (2009) argued on the patterns of religious participation which supported Goreham (2004) and Smith et al. (2002) findings that showed a decline in participation occurs by the age of 17, once youth transition out of their adolescent stage. Carpenter (2001) observed youth participation by examining the impact of church youth club participation on continued church involvement and concluded that the top predictor for youth continued church involvement were social activities, which supported Goreham (2004) findings as it relates to activities. Overall, research in the literature synonymously concludes that youth participation declines at the peak of adolescence due to their affiliation with other programs.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework or lens used in this study was guided by the leadership development research and theories of Kouzes and Posner (2006). Kouzes and Posner (2006) provided a leadership model that fully incorporates the important elements of leadership development. The heart of this research was based on Kouzes and Posner’s leadership model which includes five components:
• Model the way: This practice is achieved by a leader clarifying values and setting the example. A leader clarifies values by finding their own voice and setting the example by demonstrating actions that are connected with the shared values.

• Inspire a shared vision: This practice is achieved by a leader envisioning the future and enlisting others. A leader envisions the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. A leader enlists others through a common vision by connecting to shared goals.

• Challenge the process: This practice is achieved by a leader searching for opportunities to improve and innovate, along with experimenting and taking risks. A leader seeks opportunities by stepping into the unknown. A leader experiments and take risks by generating small wins and learning from experience to continually improve.

• Enable others to act: This practice is achieved by a leader fostering collaboration and strengthening others. A leader fosters collaboration by building trust from others and fostering relationships. Leaders strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

• Encourage the heart: This practice is achieved by a leader recognizing contributions and celebrating values and victories. A leader recognizes the contributions of others by demonstrating appreciation and promotes values by creating a culture of celebration. (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, pp. 14-26)

Using Kouzes and Posner’s (2006) leadership model as the basis and incorporating several of their key ideas, the following concepts informed the researcher’s
lens and each served as a component of the conceptual framework. The model was adapted from Kouzes and Posner (2006):

**Figure 2.5: Leadership Development Model (Kouzes & Posner, 2006)**

- **Concept 1: Leaders are the Future**

The concept of leaders is the future in business sectors, communities, and the country. The basis of this study was embedded in youth leadership development, in which the research of this literature indicated is more successful when started early. The research has also indicated an increase in youth leadership research, based on a decrease in adult leadership results. Focusing on leadership early is significant as it impacts the future.
• **Concept 2: Leadership is Universal**

Leadership is an understandable and universal process. Leadership has been observed as an adult based activity due to experience. Kouzes and Posner (2006) identified that leadership is not a difficult process, but rather an understandable process indicating that it provides access beyond experience levels. Leadership is accessible to adults and youth, as a universal process that is based on commitment of the individual.

• **Concept 3: Leadership is Omnipresent**

Leadership can happen anywhere and anytime. Youth leadership development can occur in various environments, not just one particular venue. This study focused on youth leadership development within the Baptist church sector.

• **Concept 4: Leadership is Behavior**

Leadership is not based on personality; it is based on behavior. Research indicated that youth leadership has been defined in several capacities ranging from process to characteristics. Leadership is not based on personality but behaviors that can be learned.

(Kouzes & Posner, 2006, pp. 3-26)

**Conclusion**

The overview of literature referenced in this chapter identified several aspects of youth leadership as it relates to being defined, best practices, and state of youth and church. The literature reviewed conveyed that there is limited research in youth leadership development programs. It has been defined through several capacities such as process and characteristics. Best practices has been explained in literature as it relates to
the process, including the importance of youth starting the leadership process early, the importance of youth active participation, and the important role of youth voice. Best practices as it relates to structure showed that youth programs should deviate from a taking a cookie cutter approach and that youth and adult partnerships have a positive impact on youth leadership development. The research highlighted a limitation in youth leadership development models, but studies are increasing from observation of this limitation. Youth participation as it relates to the current status of churches in the Baptist sector detected a decline in youth active participation and that they have an important role in church growth. Overall, the research validates a need for further development in the area of youth leadership development programs.
CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

A qualitative case study was selected to explore the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs of Baptist churches, located in Cleveland urban communities. This approach involved gaining an understanding of youth perceptions, feelings, and beliefs about the youth leadership development programs. Understanding youth experience allowed an in-depth exploration of youth leadership development program effectiveness. This multi-site case study was conducted in urban Baptist churches located in Cleveland, Ohio. Using the method of an emergent design, data were collected through interviews and focus groups. The church sites and participants were selected based on the following criteria: location, active youth program, and availability. Pseudonyms were used for all participants in the study to protect identities. To ensure privacy and rights of participants a Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) application was completed and approved by Ashland University.

Design Rationale

A qualitative methodology was selected because the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of youth leadership development program effectiveness through exploration of youth perspectives. This approach required interaction, dialogue, and interpretation. Qualitative research seeks to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon through understanding how people interpret experiences and construct their worlds (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). It is difficult to explore the feelings, beliefs, and thoughts of participants through standard survey and standard quantitative research methods, such as numerical data collection. Merriam (2009) suggested that such exploration requires the
researcher to serve as an active participant-observer. Therefore this case study was conducted in the participants’ natural settings for greater interaction and observation, as previously mentioned.

**Research Question**

The primary research question addressed in this study was, “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based upon youth perceptions?” To answer this question, the following sub-questions were used:

a. What do youth perceive as effective practices of youth leadership development programs?

b. What do youth perceive as ineffective practices of youth leadership development programs?

**Site Selection**

Prior to starting research, seven religious institutions in Cleveland were identified as possible site locations. Of the seven three were chosen for this study, using the following selection criteria: located in an urban Cleveland community, active program with youth participants, and provides a timely response to my introductory letter and access to interview youth. This study was conducted at three Baptist church sites, predominantly African American, located in a low-income Cleveland neighborhood, near the Eastside. In addition to meeting all criteria, the selected churches were historical landmarks and well known throughout Cleveland. Each church had an average of 20-30 active youth members participating in their youth leadership development program.

The first church selected was located in the heart of a neighborhood referred to as Kinsman. The second church has been in existence for over 100 years and is known for
its partnership and close proximity to the Cleveland Clinic Foundation. The third church did not have an old building, but resides in the Lee/Harvard community and has been in operation for 50 years. To protect the confidentiality of each church site limited information was provided in general terms as it relates to the study criteria. The historical aspect of each church was a major factor in this study, because in terms of community development it is important to preserve a community organization that has longevity. This study aimed to improve further progress of youth leadership development programs through the research conducted, which is critical for the church’s future sustainability.

Participants

The participants in this study included six active youth members from each selected church youth leadership development program, who have been involved with the youth department during the past two to five years. Participants were both male and female and were predominately African American. The youth programs at each church included an estimated total of 10 to 20 active youth members and two adult leaders who facilitate the program. Youth members only were both interviewed individually and then participated in a follow up a focus group at each site.

Table 1 provides the demographic information of all youth participants. Youth members who participated ranged from ages 9-19, which is the typical age group for an urban Baptist church youth program. The majority of participants were above age 13, representing a total of 68%. The gender of participants was evenly distributed with a total of 9 female participants and 9 male participants.
Table 3.1:

Demographic Information

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<th>Church 2</th>
<th>Church 3</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 13-19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Using an emergent design approach, the interviews were conducted at each church site with the selected six youth members. Interviews consisted of a series of 10-15 questions along with additional questions formulated throughout the session (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Each interview was conducted for 20-30 minutes and recorded using a recording device. In addition, a focus group was conducted at each site with a group of the youth participants following the conclusion of all interviews. As the researcher, I conducted all interviews, transcribed, coded, and analyzed results, which is discussed in the findings section of Chapter IV.

The research process included interviews of the youth group members. Individual interviews were conducted with youth members selected by the adult leaders. The interviews were voluntary and participants were given a certificate of appreciation for their participation. All interviews were conducted at the church sites, typically in their fellowship hall or meeting areas during the evening. Interviews were conducted onsite because it is the participants’ natural setting and offered more accessibility. Finding space
to conduct interviews at the church sites was limited and space was selected based on availability. During the sessions pizza and pop was provided to encourage youth members’ attendance and to limit anxiety by creating a relaxed setting. All participants and churches were assigned a pseudonym, or a code, to protect their identities in this study. The first set of interviews at each church site was conducted with male youth members, who were coded using the aliases of randomly selected names. The second set of interviews at each church was conducted with female youth members were also coded using the aliases of randomly selected names. The same coding pattern was used for all youth participants at each church.

In this study, as the researcher, I focused heavily on the interviews and collecting available documents, as needed for the study. This resulted in an estimated total of 10-20 research hours over a course of two months. All interviews took place over a period of two weeks, were recorded electronically in Excel, and used to determine youth perceptions of youth leadership development programs in today’s church. A table is provided in the appendix to show an overview of the timeline and description of data collected.

**Data Analysis**

The field research included interviews which were all recorded electronically and in a journal during each session. Following the completion of my field work an analysis of the data was completed. As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted with six male youth members and female youth members from each church. The youth participant interviews, who names were anonymous were transcribed into a document and coded, which is shown in the appendix. I transcribed the interviews and entered the in-vivo
codes into an Excel spreadsheet (Merriam, 2009). The codes were later developed into categories, which were then formulated into themes to discuss the findings of this study in Chapter 4. This led to the discovery of a thread. A final analysis of interviews was conducted by comparing the information systematically to determine the overall perception of youth on the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs in today’s church.

**Limitations**

I was challenged by a few limitations in my research including establishing the participant pool, scheduling on-site interview sessions, and establishing privacy and appropriate timeframes during interviews. Youth participation in the churches was already low, hosting a meeting at church was difficult, which limited my ability to conduct a large and diverse focus group interview session in terms of age and program experience, as originally planned. Also, the youth members who participated in the interviews were selected by the adult leaders and were most likely the most outstanding and active members, which limited some of the information that I sought. The study focused on the youth perceptions of program effectiveness and the youth interviewed were considered active members who have been involved for at least two years. Members were selected by the church staff. Also, due to low participation numbers youth from a large range of age groups were selected, so ages are not evenly distributed across sites. For interviews, I was placed in the church fellowship hall or meeting areas, which limited privacy and caused time constraints. Often times it was hard to record due to outside noise and maintain the attention of youth during sessions. Throughout the interview sessions adults had access to my meeting area, which often caused my participants to be
nervous when answering questions. In some cases, adults entered the room to engage in
conversation with me. At two sites I had to stop during an interview and speak with an
adult who was interrupting the session. At one site location there was no heat in the room
I was conducting interviews. I was provided a small heater near the end of my sessions,
but it was distracting for youth, as they were cold. Although I met with staff prior to
interviews and provided a letter detailing my research process, there were still several
disruptions. The church staff was very supportive, but at two locations the adults
interrupted my interview sessions and displayed an eagerness to learn what the youth
were stating during their interviews. Also, the youth often gave limited answers and
displayed a short attention span during the sessions, especially those ages 8-12. However,
the few limitations did not have a major impact on the study and I was able to work
around many of them. The study produced rich data as it relates to youth perceptions,
which helped to understand the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs
in urban Baptist churches.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a study is important and can be obtained through various
measures (Merriam, 2009). Although I did not have a previous relationship with the
participants, as a former member of a Cleveland church youth program, and in my current
role as a Youth Pastor, many of the church members allowed me to access ongoing
feedback from them throughout the study, which helped to build a rapport. I also have an
understanding of the participants and culture, as one who has shared the experience.
Throughout the study, I also conducted an informal member checking process by
engaging in conversation with the members about my findings and receiving ongoing
feedback. This process allowed my research to have more accurate accounts of information shared rather than relying on opinions, and information that would not offend the participants but assist with future development of their youth program. The ongoing feedback allowed me to make adjustments and gain more in-depth information and understanding throughout the study (Merriam, 2009).

**Credibility**

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and from documents that were cross referenced to create triangulation, which “ensures trustworthiness” (Merriam, 2009, p.216). The second strategy being implemented was a member-check process to increase credibility. Relationships were developed with participants, which helped with member checking. Throughout the group sessions, I conducted an informal member checking process by sharing information about my data collection and obtaining feedback. Additional insight was gained through this process of generating better understanding from participants, (Merriam, 2009). Cross referencing data, member-checking, and operating in an ethical manner helped to increase the dependability, confirmability, and credibility of this study.

**Dependability**

The multi-site case study was conducted with action steps recommended for qualitative studies. First, seven church sites were identified based on specific criteria, and three were selected to participate based on availability. Participants were selected based on active membership and availability for the study. Each youth member was selected by the church to participate. Youth participation in churches is extremely low so the pool was limited. A meeting was conducted with each church Pastor and youth program leader
prior to conducting the study. A brief presentation of the study was provided and overall expectations. In addition, a letter and consent form to conduct the study was provided during the meeting. The letter highlighted expectations such as requirements for all participants to sign a consent form and to provide a designated quiet area for interviews. Following the meeting, consent forms were provided and collected from participants. Interviews were scheduled and conducted at each church site in a designated room. Each participant was asked a set of the same questions. Following the individual interviews, a focus group session was conducted with participants at each site. Dependability of this study was achieved through the implementation of interviews, focus groups, and review of church documents.

**Confirmability**

To alleviate my bias as the researcher, multiple steps were taken during the process of investigation and analyzation. Triangulation was created through the data collection process by conducting interviews, focus groups, and review of documents. Questions for the interviews were predesigned and reviewed by a committee. As a former Baptist church youth member, I entered the study with a preconceived notion that there would be a negative perception of the adult’s impact on the program, based on my experiences. However, conducting the study objectively allowed me to collect and analyze data that generated a different result. In addition, using the process of in-vivo coding limited bias when analyzing, as themes were constructed based on the actual codes generated from interviews. The overall recommendations provided were not only based on the findings, but correlated directly with the themes and specific information provided by youth members.
Ethics

Conducting an ethical study was extremely important and is a core principle of qualitative research. As the researcher, I was committed to ensuring confidentiality, respect, and communication with participants regarding the study. First, all participants were provided with a verbal or written consent form which outlined their rights and confidentiality (see Appendix B). The informed consent ensured that participants received a full understanding of this study and HSRB protection. All participant churches and participant members were given an alias to protect their identity. Second, to demonstrate respect for the church community engaged in the study, I met and coordinated with the church pastors regarding study boundaries to gain support. Third, all materials and data were collected during the study and was stored in a confidential area that only I could access to ensure all information was protected. In addition, the study was reviewed by my dissertation committee who also provided feedback and guidance to ensure an ethical process was followed.

Summary

Chapter III has outlined the methodology for this study. It included providing an overview of the design rationale, the research questions, overview of the participants and site selection, process of the data collection, a review of data analysis, and limitations of the study. A qualitative case study method was used to explore youth perceptions on the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs in their church. Using an emergent design approach, interviews, and focus groups were conducted to collect data. Information was transcribed into an electronic spreadsheet and in-vivo coding was used to develop themes. The trustworthiness of this study was established through
triangulation. Ethical aspects of this study were also addressed to ensure all participants’ rights and identities were protected. Chapter IV fully discloses the results of this study.
CHAPTER IV

Findings

The primary focus of this case study was to learn the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs in Cleveland urban Baptist churches, by exploring youth perceptions. To capture their perceptions, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with 18 youth members from three Cleveland urban Baptist churches (detailed information regarding the sample is presented in chapter 3). A total of six members from each youth program were interviewed and a focus group was conducted at each site with the youth. Each participant was interviewed separately and then brought together in a focus group at the end of each site session. The definition of effectiveness was not predetermined and will be determined based on youth perceptions obtained from interviews.

The participants in this study included six active youth members from each selected church youth program. Youth members who participated range from ages 9-19, which is the typical age group for an urban Baptist church youth program. The study was conducted at three separate church sites in an urban area of Cleveland, Ohio. The churches in this study were all located within 20 miles of each other and follow the same practices. For the purpose of confidentiality, every youth member and church was given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

The 18 interviews were transcribed and coded, which led to the discovery of seven themes: (a) communication, (b) preparation, (c) learning, (d) helping, (e) encouragement, (f) friendship, and (g) fun. Each theme is presented below in accordance
with the common threads of information that were provided by participants during the interviews.

**Communication**

Communication was a major factor youth discussed when sharing their experience in the program. Throughout the interviews, youth identified communication as a key factor in their growth as leaders in the program overall. Daniel, like most youth being interviewed, seemed timid when answering questions as he gave very short responses. When discussing communication Daniel conveyed how the program is helping him with “communicating more with people.” Although Daniel gave a short answer, when asked another question about growth in the program he stressed again the benefit of improved communication skills and stated “Like, uh, to communicate more with people.” Daniel was not that communicative during the sessions, but his repetition of stating communication’s value and slight smile when answering, showed that it was important to him. When speaking about leadership growth Nicole, who seemed excited about the interview session, shared that she was nervous. She stated this about the program:

> Well its opening me up more because I am a quiet person, meeting new people stop me with being in my own little bubble, help me to reach out to other people, talk with them and say what’s up, things like that, just like the feeling of being more open, come out of my shell more, to communicate more, not be so isolated.

Youth not only shared how they are more open in their communication, a common thread throughout the interview sessions, but also the important role of speaking. Although most youth were shy, nervous, and often provided short responses during the interview session, when speaking about communication they generally were
more responsive. At the beginning of Shelia’s sessions, I could tell she was a bit nervous, and was scared that she would not have a lot of information to provide. Before starting the session, I took time to speak with Shelia and made jokes about the interview night to provide a friendly environment. Following my jokes, Shelia laughed and I could tell that she had a lot to share, despite her fears. In discussion about communication, Shelia explained how the program was an outlet for communication and how the program has helped her grow as a leader:

Um, I would say like, all of us coming together and voicing our opinion, and letting me know I can speak my mind and be an outgoing person. Being able to just say what I want to do and what I feel and to know somebody actually listening. It help me be a leader. Having a bunch of people support you, that help me become a leader.

Michelle stated the program helped her prepare for the future as it relates to speaking in-front of people. With strong conviction Michelle explained:

Like when they do Sunday, they get in a group, that teach me and help me to understand the different people. Like with the devotion and dancing, I can practice at a younger age so when I get older I’ll be ready. When I grew up I won’t be one of those people that just sit in the crowd I’ll stand up and speak in front of people.

Shelia also talked about how the program prepared her by providing opportunities to speak with strangers. In terms of strangers, Shelia was referring to new people she has an opportunity to meet in the program. When prompted to discuss how the program was helping her in terms of leadership she shared, “Just being around everybody
in one room, you have to talk to somebody. So just being able to talk to strangers and knowing it’s not going to be a problem.”

Youth viewed communication in different forms. A repetitive concept youth conveyed was the idea of evangelism, or what was described to me as the act of sharing information with others about their Christian beliefs. This was another way the youth expressed what they considered as key aspects of communication. Although described in different ways, participants explained the role of evangelism or the idea of talking with others in their overall experience. With high enthusiasm, Sonya shared how the program has helped her grow through evangelizing which she associated with leadership growth. Sonya exclaimed,

It helps you evangelize, that’s growing as a leader, telling people about the word, which is basically evangelism. It prepares you for the real world I think, and what the world is like. It’s not just about being a leader in the church but being a leader outside the church. It help you to grow as a leader because the church and the youth program guides you to lead by going to evangelize to others, and teaching others to lead as well, and leading others to do right instead of wrong.

Tony also provided a similar statement about growth in speaking about how the program gives him an opportunity where he can talk with others about his beliefs. Tony stated, “It gives me the ability to talk about Jesus and certain things in the bible that comes to my mind. It gives me a better understanding.” When asked to expound more, Tony went on to explain, “If somebody doesn’t know Jesus I can spread the word.”

Additionally, Shelia related how influencing others was very important to her and talked about the ideas of youth, including telling their friends about the program.
The idea of connection through communication became a major topic as youth discussed the program. Although they did not express a high interest in connection through communication during the interview sessions to answer questions, they seemingly enjoyed discussing the important role that connection through communication played in their program. The idea of connection through communication was repetitive, whether youth were discussing leadership growth, aspects of the program, or relationships within the group. Isaac discussed during our interview how connecting with others through communication is one reason that motivates him to attend the program every week. He shared:

Well, it’s not like that I’m forced. I’m not like forced cause if I don’t want to come, I don’t gotta come. But it’s like, it’s good to come. It’s not gonna hurt you. I’m like talking to people who know me and like can help me. So like, no, there’s nothing really wrong, so why not come?

I followed up with Isaac to gain more insight, and he went on to share that “it’s just friendship and community.” Fellow participants, Lisa and Sonya explained how they get to talk to adults, and the positive impact that it has. Lisa shared her experience in how connecting played a role:

I think if I didn’t have a relationship with as many people here as I did I would not come because I would feel like I was not welcomed and I would feel like I don’t belong. I think they are really beneficial for whole entire also. I feel like if there is a problem, or if I have a conflict with anything there are numerous people I can come talk to, so even if I don’t feel comfortable talking to my aunt or cousin
I can still talk to the people here and they will (be) willing (to) listen and they will have something very wise to say.

In response to how adults impact the program, Sonya mentioned how the adults connect with youth by giving advice by describing different ways they give guidance:

They have a big impact, they plan most of the stuff. They talk to the youth team and give you advice. And that help some of the people in the youth program. The kids, the people love to go to the youth directors for advice and stuff. I think they have a big impact on the program.

When further discussing the role adults play in the program, Sonya went on to explain that the adults participation is a “Good impact, because the people only go to the youth director, because that’s who they supposed to and they have a good relationship.”

Both Lisa and Sonya talked about how communication not only consisted of youth talking to the adults but the adults talking to the youth; As Sonya stated “it has a big impact on the program.” Throughout the sessions, youth expressed how they also enjoyed various opportunities to talk with others about their week and various issues they may have experienced. While discussing motivators for attending the program Nicole shared in a follow up to her statement about communication, “The people, the activities we do, and umm get to talk with them about their week or whatever… everybody, youth the adults, children all of that.” Tony also mentioned that the program contributes to his leadership growth by providing an example of communication, “It gives me the ability to talk about Jesus and certain things in the bible that comes to my mind. It gives me a better understanding… If somebody doesn’t know Jesus I can spread the word.”
In terms of the program lessons, youth highlighted the role of connecting through communication as a major factor. She gave an example of what occurs during sessions and the impact their lessons have through the opportunity to connect through communication and talk about issues:

We talk about relationships and stuff. Now day’s kids are having kids. So that helps cause you know you get an idea. When you have someone talking to you, you get it eventually whether you get it the first day or second day, you get it. You just understand. You pick and choose whether you want that or not. I don’t want that. You just get an idea of what someone is saying. We also talk about school. You know they say stay in school, it’s easier said than done… Like dealing with school, it’s relevant because school is five days a week, Mon-Fri, that’s a lot of days to be around the same people, especially teachers I really don’t care for. It’s just having someone to talk to and explain my problems and I call and tell them, that such and such did this today, and they tell me advice. It’s my choice to take the advice or not. Taking the advice might be best. They help you deal with situations better. Instead of just going off of your first thought. Being in 11th grade, I think about dropping out every day. I know I have goal(s) and wanna be something in life. But dealing with teachers, it’s difficult sometimes. But you know you have somebody like Rick you can talk to and gone help you out.

When discussing the role of connecting through communication, Lisa gave an example of how the program used to be designed, and ways she would change it to incorporate more opportunities for connecting. She shared:
We did devotion at first that last for like an hour or 45 minutes. And we were all incorporated, the little kids had their instruments and the teenagers, we were all singing, all down there together. After that we split into our individual groups, so teenagers would go upstairs, and the 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 and 9 and 12th (grades) would be together. While I don’t specifically know what the other groups would do, but in the high school we would open up our books, and instead of us just reading from it, instead of having someone preach it to us it was more of let us sit down talk about and break it down so everyone can understand it together. I think that was a reason a lot of people didn’t actually come to the church because, I don’t like hearing people preach to me. I would definitely not do that for the youth program. I think it’s important for people to understand what we are talking about and also for the people who get bored.

When asked about the specific lessons offered, Shelia highlighted how discussions were about relationships, Nicole shared that her group discussed real life matters, and Sonya mentioned that lessons included teen related messages. Sonya provided examples by stating: “We use speakers to talk about the situations (that) we mostly have problems with…most of the subjects we talk about is stuff that most of the teens in the program are dealing with.” Isaac pointed out that in terms of program improvement his program would incorporate connection opportunities. He said: “We’d have more time devoted to talking about life, like challenges that we face I guess, in our lives and about God.” Shelia also stated that “they need to be more real to each other” during their discussions. Ray and Lauren shared that the youth need more group meetings.
Most of the 18 interviews had a positive tone, however there were 2 youth with negative opinions regarding the adult’s communication. While discussing communication some youth pointed out how the adult’s role was negatively impacting their program. During my session with Lauren, her demeanor started to change as she shifted to talking about the adult’s communication with youth, expressing the negative implications she thought adults had because of their communication:

Definitely how they speak to us, because I know that older adults seem like they have less respect for the children and they do stuff that can sometimes deter children away from the program. Versus, some of the people who are mainly in the leadership programs are usually very encouraging about it. So, that could definitely affect how people would want to come here or not. It really depends on where you are from and how you came into the church. I was raised in the church, so everyone knows me, but if a boy came off of the street they could really be rude to him.

Kelly also shared how adults raise their voices, which upset the youth as she explained, “if you mess up they scream… I don’t like being screamed at or when other people scream at other people.” Lloyd also discussed adult’s impact on the program in explaining, “I know for sure that the adults have all the power and sometimes I think that the youth needs a say in it. I think that our opinions should be asked for.” Lloyd alluded to the need for adults to allow youth an opportunity to communicate on matters.

**Preparation**

Preparation was a consistent theme echoed throughout many of the interviews. Youth shared common ideas of how the program is helping prepare them in their current
life and for the future. When questioned about how the youth program helps them to
grow as leaders now and in the future, many shared how its helped and prepared them to
better their personal growth. When discussing the program, Daniel shared how the
program has helped him to develop more confidence in himself. Although Daniel’s
answers were very limited, he recognized that the program helped him with “like
communicating more with people. And to like be more confident in what I do.” Ray also
spoke of the impactful role of his youth program and how it has helped with his “self
confidence” in leadership and how he encourages other youth to follow in someone’s
footsteps to be positive and not negative. In addition, Ray mentioned how his self-esteem
also increased while participating in the program:

> It helps me have more self-esteem and have a second thought about my decision
> before I make them, and spiritually it keep me motivated to keep going
> throughout my day… My self-esteem, it helps me because I have a big ego it
> builds me, I grew up around church, it run in the family it’s in my roots basically,
> so it form(s) me as a man to grow up to be a man of God and to keep following
> and doing the right thing.

Shelia also echoed this benefit and provided more detail on how the program is
also increasing her self-confidence. She shared how there has been growth through
participation in the program and further explained how youth need such guidance in their
life.

> Just like being able to stand up for myself, you need that in life. And just far as
> getting along with others and being able to be around each other and not be
> intimidated. That helps. Just, um. Just being around everybody in one room, you
have to talk to somebody. So just being able to talk to strangers and knowing it’s not going to be a problem.

When asked about participating in an outside program, Frank explained that he participates in football. Despite being very fidgety during the session, he described his experience. It was hard to keep Frank’s attention on the question, but he gave great effort to explain how the experience enriched his life.

Because when I first got into football I didn’t think it was gonna be fun. Until after my first year, I thought I was going to be messy and the coach was going to yell at me but he didn’t. So what I’m trying to say here, when I first started I was scared and as I got into it, more years came and I got better and better.

After explaining his football experience, I asked if it made him feel brave, and he nodded up and down stating “mm hmm.” Frank recognized throughout the progression of his program a sense of confidence began to develop, similar to experiences the youth described in reference to the youth program.

It is uncommon to hear youth use language such as discipline, firm, and focus when describing their experience in a program. However, throughout the interviews, youth recognized how preparation through the program has helped them to grow in those three areas. Isaac shared how as a youth member, the program has helped him grow through discipline, he stated, “I guess, uh, discipline. I guess. Like it follow along with like the structure. You have to be like disciplined. Like, you gotta know what we’re like doing.” Junior stated in terms of the program, “it help me to learn to stay focus, don’t let other people distract you… and don’t let others influence you, like don’t let people influence you to help them cheat on a test and stuff.” Kelly provided similar reflections
about the program helping her maintain discipline, stating “Um, the drill team helps me be more firm and focused. I’m very off task in school so I need focus and to look straight ahead and stuff and stop fidgeting.” It became surprising how youth from different youth groups began to use the same exact language when talking about how the program has prepared them for leadership.

In 1989, Spike Lee produced a very popular film titled “Do the Right Thing” which I watched as a young child. Throughout the interviews, several youth from different youth programs began to use the term “do the right thing” when describing how the program prepares them as a youth member. It was interesting because these youth members were born years after Spike Lee’s movie, many have never heard about the movie, and it is not a common term I often hear used amongst youth. Nonetheless, during various interview sessions the youth members from different programs expressed with great sentiment the importance of doing what is right, and how the program has aimed to instill such a value. “Do the right thing” was a statement expressed by both Sonya and Junior when discussing how the program is preparing them. Lloyd, Sonya, and Mary both shared similar statements about doing what is right. Lloyd mentioned that the program helps give guidance in terms of doing right from wrong and shared, “Well, it’s telling me what’s right and wrong. Every Sunday the leaders talk about what they did and what you shouldn’t do... It helps me so that I’ll know that I’m going down the right path and so I’ll know what to do. They talk about what they did in order to teach us lessons that they learned from it.” Sonya explained that the program is preparing her for future leadership in sharing:
Helping for the future… how the Pastor basically prepares you for the future, and how you take the bible and the word and how you are going to be the rest of your life and in the future. Also, it prepares you for the future by the way you act and the way you patrol around and how your actions are. It helps you understand the real world outside the church, and how to be a future leader in the real world and not just church. It helps you know the rights and wrong in the real world, and helps you lead and go down the right path.

Similar to the previously mentioned youth, Mary discussed how she is better because the program has shown her how to be a better person. She exclaimed:

Being in church, it helps you, tells you like how to do right and how to live your life better. With Sunday school, they teach you how you make your life better and how to worship God and they tell you…. Its helping me, like when you have children later on you can teach them what they taught you.

Youth recognized the value of their program in sharing how it helps deter from negative behavior, as Junior reflected,

Uh, the program help me like, it help me learn leadership like…I’m trying to think. It help me learn leadership because it teaches me to take my own actions. Don’t follow other people, ah, follow in my own footsteps and take initiative to what I want over anybody else… Because it like, ah, it help me because like ah, hold on one sec I just had it. It’ll help me learn to stay focus, don’t let other people distract you and ah, and don’t, what’s the word…what’s the word I’m thinking of, people say, don’t let others influence you like, don’t let people influence you to help them cheat on test and stuff.
Frank also shared how the program helps to make sure that youth stay on a positive path in terms of people and not doing negative things. Frank gave a very scattered description that needed a lot of probing. But in the end he was able to make a very clear point, that the program is helping him to stay on a positive path and avoid negativity. Frank explained:

They make sure we don’t do anything bad. Like last year when I went to the bathroom, somebody had punched me. Cause when I went to the bathroom somebody had turned the light off. Somebody had punched me… Making sure we don’t get in fights… Make sure we don’t get around kids that do bad things. Like in the junior department, my cousin acts out. In the junior department, and the teacher, if I’m there late or he is, she makes sure we don’t sit next to each other so I won’t get in trouble talking to him.

Helping others was a popular topic of discussion amongst the youth, as most provided an understanding that the program was preparing them for that purpose. The concept of helping others was explained not only from youth members from different programs, but of different groups ranging from ages 9 to 19. Six of the youth, including Terrence shared how the program has taught them by encouraging others. He stated this is done “by helping people who are in need. By thinking about what I want to do the next day, and in the future.” Lisa shared how the program provides opportunities and teaches her to help others. She shared how her program has a drama team, which allows an opportunity to assist others. Here’s Lisa story:

First of all, I’m in the drama ministry so it really helps with my acting. I’m really into that. And there’s a lot of younger kids here so with the younger kids you
kinda want to help and lead them in the right direction, especially since you are older. In the drama ministry there’s a lot of group activities, there’s a lot of well I need to help these people know what they need to do and get to where they need to be. And so it’s really helpful especially when you’re older, so that you can help the younger kids.

Michelle identified a similar idea in describing how helping with devotion contributes to her development, “I don’t do it a lot but, I like to help with the youth dance. I like helping them with their devotions. I like meeting new people and learning to get along with them.” Brian recognized that one of the purposes for learning in the program is to know “how to show others,” which is a way of preparation, he described.

**Helping**

Throughout the interview sessions, every youth member was asked about their thoughts on the impact youth and adult relationships had on their program. The youth responses conveyed a positive message as some youth viewed their relationship as having a good impact. Eleven youth described the adults as being a great help, great source for advice, and great source for overall guidance. While interviewing, Nicole began to recapitulate how the adults help in sharing:

> It shows that they really care about us and want us to be more focused on Christ. They wanna help us out and lead us in the correct way, how to follow Christ, how to do in the church, and good motivators and give good advice… It’s a good impact. They help us; help prepare us as we grow up in the youth program.

Shelia shared how the adults know more about church and life and a lot of things that can help youth. At this point of the interview, Shelia had a lot to share about the
adults and really began to open up with excitement. It was obvious that she appreciated the adults who helped with the program and how they have made an impression on her life. Shelia gave a few examples of how the adults impact their youth program, as she explained:

I would say adults, they know more about the church, so far as like church etiquette and stuff like that, that can help the youth know how to act in church and stuff. You know, the provider, far as; some kids don’t have jobs and stuff, so you need adults to help out with things. And just having an older person point of view that helps… If you need advice on something, you feel like your friend can’t give you that, your friend gone agree with everything you say so you want to, want to go to someone who will keep it real and just let you know, and it’s an older person… I would say it’s a good impact to have an older person around. Because it give you that extra positive energy that you need besides your friend, because always having your friends around isn’t always a good thing. Sometimes you need someone older around, you know.

Terrence did not have a lot to share during our interview session and generally gave short responses, even with probing. I remember at the beginning of our session he completely froze, so I decided to stop and do a short exercise. I asked him to point to his nose and tell me where it is located, then I asked him to put his hands above his head, and continued with the short exercise. I then explained to him that answering the interview questions were just as easy as him telling me where his nose was at and lifting his hands. The purpose was to take his mind off the interview setting, to energize him through movement, and to show how simple the process was. The process helped Terrence to
start answering questions, but his responses were still limited. Despite the short responses, he was still able to convey how the adults made a positive impact on him in stating, “How they are telling you stuff and helping you… That’s good.” Terrance’s remarks echo the positive views of the other youth members mentioned.

The youth often spoke about adults in a positive manner as it related to advice. Isaac explained:

Uh, Impact? Like it’s not really… it’s not negative… Like, at sometimes it might feel like you’re getting lectured but then again, not really… Like it might turn some people off like to it, but like they still gone come. I wasn’t feeling that but then again, then they get back into something else and it’s like, “Oh, I understand what they were saying. And then it’s like not a lecture anymore. Like, you fully understand what they are saying.

Although from a different youth program, Shelia shared a similar view to Isaac in noting, “If you need advice on something, you feel like your friend can’t give you, [because] your friend gone agree with everything you say so you want to go to someone who will keep it real and just let you know and it’s an older person.” Nicole also viewed the adult’s impact on the program as them being motivators and giving good advice. Nicole had very positive views on the impact of adult relationships. She shared with great emotion:

I think if I didn’t have a relationship with as many people here as I did, I would not come because I would feel like I was not welcomed and I would feel like I don’t belong. I think they are really beneficial for whole entire also. I feel like if there is a problem, or if I have a conflict with anything, there are numerous people I can come talk to, so even if I don’t feel comfortable talking to my aunt or cousin
I can still talk to the people here and they will willing listen and they will have something very wise to say.

Nicole shared how she valued the youth-adult relationship, which Junior from a different youth program also captured during his response. Junior said, “they tell you how they grow up, so they tell you not to follow in their bad footsteps, but to avoid the bad stuff they did so you can avoid it….it telling me, it telling me how to do the good stuff instead of doing the bad stuff.” Brian labeled adults as “professionals” and shared how “they know how to do it… tell you what they been through,” which he stated with great zeal.

Learning

Learning became a main topic of interest during many of the interviews, as youth shared their reasons for attending and how the program adds to their leadership development. During a session Junior reflected on how the program has helped him, in sharing: “It help me learn leadership because it teaches me to take my own actions. Don’t follow other people, ah, follow in my own footsteps and take initiative to what I want over anybody else.” Youth member Isaac, who is from a different program, also shared during his session how learning about God, the highest form of a leader has helped him. Isaac cited:

Talking about him and teaching us and like understanding who he is and what he does for us; I guess like, and like his laws, it teaches you what you can do to be a good person and they like, say being a good person like, helps you to be like a leader.
Lauren discussed the leadership class her program provides and how they offer opportunities for youth to be placed in various ministries, according to age, for an opportunity to take on the role of officer positions and to have responsibilities. An officer position in the church is a high leadership position with multiple responsibilities, usually fulfilled by adults with experience. Lauren explained further:

They have the ministry where it goes up by age, but every ministry puts you in an officer position where you have to have certain responsibilities. They have a leadership class every once in a while, and they have it where they teach adults and youth how to become a leader. We just learn things, like how to be a leader.

Michelle also discussed leadership, and also detailed her reason for participating in outside activities: “Because a leader is someone who like does things and help around with stuff at school and a non-leader is someone who doesn’t do anything.”

Throughout the interview sessions, at least two or more youth members from each program stated that their leadership and motivation to attend weekly was attributed to learning about God, who they believe is the ultimate leader example. Although from different programs, Junior, Michelle, and Terrence all stated the purpose behind their participation is “to learn about God.” Whether referencing their leadership development or reason for attendance, learning about their ultimate leader God was what one youth member said to be “a major factor.” The youth shared various ways they learn about leadership, which included many stating preaching was an impactful educator. Mary, Frank, and Daniel from different programs stated they like preaching or listening to the Pastor. Mary shared:
They help you like, listening to the sermon help you learn about God and how and what to do when you grow up and how to be a better person… When you are with people your age they break it down a lot better and it like, same thing it teaches you, and you be like one on one.

Although they supplied very short responses, Frank and Daniel provided their reflections on what they enjoy about their youth program, with Frank mentioning: “I like listening to the pastor preach,” and Daniel “Uh, preaching sometimes.” In addition, youth expressed that bible study was another learning forum that contributes to their leadership. Throughout the sessions, every youth member was asked to share ways they would design a youth leadership development program. One of the overarching responses was the implementation of some form of bible study. Whether it was in the form of a bible challenge contest or an actual bible study session, youth such as Sonya reported it as being a high factor in their learning growth. According to Sonya, “how the pastor breaks down the bible so you understand it so it help you to make the right decisions to become a proper leader in the real world” has a direct connection to growth.

Youth discussed the lessons that are taught and materials used in their programs. Examples of materials used included not only the bible, but activities and lesson books that sparked discussion among the youth members. Most youth thought the material to be relevant and conveyed that many lessons are about teenager related matters they often face daily. Sonya shared how what “most of the subjects talked about is stuff that most teens in the program are dealing with.” Nicole also noted the relevance of their lessons in how they “talk about real life situations.” Ray reflected on how the program lessons
connected to everyday life situations, but it takes a mature mind to grasp the teachings, he commented:

They usually connect the lessons to your everyday life, so it will always have something to do with your everyday life, like the lessons we learn at church we might not get right then and there, but later on in life it could affect you in some of the decisions you make… It might not make sense to you because of the development you’re in in you mental stage so you would have to have the knowledge and understanding to know what we are talking about. We use books and everybody into technology, so we add that in somehow. We tie it down into what do you do in your life, what do you do in school, afterschool, on a normal basis, like routine.

Lisa shared how the lessons are about “school related stuff and relationships” and Shelia from a different program, noted that they “talk about relationship and school.” Isaac depicted similar lessons, but acknowledged that he did not think the materials were completely relevant, in stating:

Well, like I guess when we get, like when we go to Sunday school and we get those like books and like they’re scripted. It just talk about a scenario or like a little situation. I don’t feel like it’s all that relevant. I feel like that’s not really how it is. I’d rather like talk about what like we personally go through…Yeah, so it’s like, what’s it called? In-teen, that’s like the name of the book. Some of the scenarios could happen, like you get in a fight or you argue with your friends. But like it just doesn’t like, I don’t feel like it goes down in the book like how it would go down out here.
There was almost a consensus amongst all the youth with a total of sixteen participants explaining the lesson format, which consisted of them reading a lesson and discussing a subject, sometime related to school, relationships, or life situations.

**Encouragement**

Encouragement was a critical factor that many youth referenced in terms of the youth program’s influence and leadership. During an interview, Julie shared an inspiring story of how the program has encouraged her. She shared how it encouraged her to strive in being better and how she received grades in school that were okay, but she was encouraged to keep striving to “work harder.” I was fully captivated by Julie’s story, as she reflected on how when she becomes an adult, challenges will occur but they will not stop her, because the program has prepared her to be encouraged. When explaining this benefit of the program Julie shared:

It encourages us to do like something else. It help encourage us to grow up, it encourage us to stay strong, never give up, always believe in yourself and never put others down and when someone put you down, never back down. It helps us to stand up to others when they’re doing wrong and when we’re doing wrong.

Frank also talked about how the program has encouraged him, but provided more of a description: “when you grow up, you can pick anything you want to be. If you don’t want to do something, you don’t have to; you can do whatever you want.” When stating “you” Frank was referring to himself. Frank was very active during our session. Even with trouble concentrating, he sat very still, leaning back in his seat before he began to speak and share how the program encouraged him. There was a moment when you could hear the innocence of youth coupled with confidence that what he was saying and
experiencing in the program was truth. As he spoke, I could hear the confidence and belief that he could be whatever he wanted to be. I remember walking Frank out of the session and he mentioned that he wanted to be a police officer. It was almost as if his statement was a boost of confidence in that moment for him.

It was evident by the demeanor of the youth interviewed that they were being inspired weekly through their attendance and engagement through the program. Ray mentioned how the program is not only inspiring him, but it has taught him to encourage others,

Three things about the program that help me to grow as a leader is that it help me to have self-confidence, encourage others and the youth under me to grow up and follow in somebody footsteps, to be positive and leave the negativity alone and to be that person you can always rely on.

Lisa thought it was important to attend the program because when not attending it had an impact on her life, she shared:

For a while I was not going to bible study, because I was going to church on Sunday. I start finding that when I didn’t go to church on Tuesday, I start having doubts, wasn’t as motivated in school, wasn’t really on my game. I find that God and Jesus are a really big factor. Things just don’t seem to go my way when I don’t go to church.

Youth also described how they have been encouraged in the program through the support that is provided. Some youth recognized it when discussing their growth performance as a leader while attending the program. Tony talked about how the program was cool because of the support he received from the Pastor and staff. With a huge smile,
Tony proclaimed: “I like the support of our youth administrators and the people we have in the youth divisions are cool.” He talked about how the program director treats him like family which you could tell that he took great pride in as he mentioned, “Well, I’m pretty close to Rick and Teresa, they are cool people and easy to talk to and I’ve known them for 10 years now and he treats me like a little brother.” Shelia talked about how important the support has been to her during the program. She shared that “being able to just say what I want to do and what I feel and somebody actually listening. It help me be a leader. Having a bunch of people support you that help me become a leader.” Shelia went on to further explain her ideas on the level of support and provided an example. Shelia explained how support is shown during times when the youth assemble. For example when they gather to share ideas, she feels comfortable with talking about her ideas because she knows people are listening, willing to consider the idea, and it lets her know that she’ll always have someone to talk to. Basically, Shelia was showing how the support of expressing herself and having the space to do so in a free environment, is helping her to grow as a leader. She further explained how sometimes people don’t really listen and just push your ideas off to the side; but not her group, as they listen and take all ideas into consideration. It was apparent during the sessions through the youth’s facial expressions, tone, demeanor, and comments, that the support of their youth program is important.

**Friendship**

Youth were questioned about reasons they attended the program. There was one answer given that was almost unified across every interview. Fourteen youth participant said that the most dominating factor contributing to their motivation for attending the
program is their friends and their involvement. Although some mentioned their family, which I will share, the majority recognized friends as a leading reason. Lisa shared:

My friends, they do help tip the scale a bit. I have a best friend just at church. And it’s like I need to see her as much as possible, because we don’t go to school together. We communicate but it’s not like when you have a friend in the school so we kinds have to see each other here as possible.

Although Lisa mentioned that her Aunt plays a role in her reason for attending, she highlighted that friends, specifically her best friend at church, is a dominating factor. Lisa explained how she has a best friend in the program who does not attend her school, so the youth program is important because it’s the only place they get a chance to interact. Tony suggested a similar thought as he spoke of different influences, in stating: “Well, my dad tells me that I have to come. Plus it’s really cool that I get to spend more time with the youth, because I really don’t get to see them as much and it brings me closer to my girlfriend.” While letting out a huge laugh, Shelia stated that she was motivated to come by her boyfriend and being around positive people. You can tell she was a little embarrassed to share her boyfriend as a primary reason, but went on to describe how she enjoys interacting and being with youth who are in her age group. With conviction, Shelia spoke poetically on her view that youth of this generation do not have similar interest, in terms of being a part of something that is positive. Shelia illustrated:

Um, my boyfriend, he motivates me to come. To have a closer relationship with God and to have people around my age group into the same thing, that brings me. You know nowadays kids don’t be on the same page, so to have a group that’s on the same page, that make me come.
Without hesitation Sonya stated her reason for attending was because she “loves to see people and church friends.” I noticed that Lisa, Shelia, Tony, and Sonya all described their friends in the program as a special category of “friends” in their lives, which seemed to only exist through the program. Many of the youth generally chuckled when explaining that their reason for attending was because of their friends, and they really became comical when sharing that the person they are dating is a leading factor. When discussing this shared connection to the program, Junior, leaned to the left in his chair, gave a slight grin and stated that he attended “to see some of my friends.” Lloyd shared that his grandmother and friends are a reason he attends,

First of all, my grandmother comes every week and I want to come with her to be her company. Secondly, I like coming here, sometimes to see friends and sometimes to hear what they are saying in the sanctuary… Well everyone here has good vibes all the time and I like being around people like that.

Kelly shared how she is related to many of the people in her program, so she likes to see them and spending time with friends, which she described as “getting with my cousins and stuff, most of the people in there is my cousin, getting with my friends.”

Throughout other sessions, I continued to broach about leading factors related to their program participation. In some cases, they stated an answer of: “friends,” without additional information, thus strengthening the significance of the statement. Terrence and Isaac, youth members from separate programs, both with confidence cited “friends” as the reason for attending, without really expounding on their reasons. Brian, explained how interacting with some of his friends and doing drills is a reason he like to attend, in stating, “Cause I get to drill with some of my friends.” Drill is when the youth come
together and do what is considered step-dancing, which includes dance moves that are focused on rhythmic footsteps. Seeing existing friends was not only a major interest, but Nicole shared how she was motivated by “meeting new people” as she explained other factors.

Although friends were the primary reason that youth gave, some often mentioned family. Mary summarized her motivation in sharing that a reason was “just seeing other people, friends and family.” I found it interesting how youth discussed family, not only in terms of biological kinship, but recognized members of the program as an extended family. Lauren shared: “the people here love you and it’s like a second family and everybody here is always caring about what you’re doing in life and it’s always something that you can fall back on.” It’s important to note that Lauren’s tone throughout the interview was often negative, but she was extremely different when sharing thoughts on her reason for attending. First, she was very interested in the question, she portrayed a more positive demeanor, and even formed a slight smile while speaking. It was obvious that the relationships she has with others in the program are very important, which is quite true with many of the other youth participants. Lisa described the members and program as a family, stating: “I think that all together the people, and church all together are very welcoming, and they are like a really big family.” She explained how she probably would not attend the program if she did not have the various relationships she does with people. Having these relationships are seemingly important as a motivator for attending, as Lisa shared that without the relationships, she would not feel welcomed or feel like she belonged. Overall, the youth were very expressive during this part of my
interviews as they shared how important relationships and interacting with each other is, as it relates to their reasons for attending.

Youth were also provided an opportunity to describe ways in which they would improve their current program. Not surprising, most youth echoed the need for more youth and opportunities to interact. Ray shared how he would improve the program by expanding their communication with one another. He said: “I would try to better the youth and try to connect with them phone call, text, anything just to get that, are you okay, do you need help with anything, are you okay, how are you doing?” This echoes the same thoughts youth expressed in terms of why they attend, in terms of friends and interacting with each other. In separate interviews, Julie, Nicole, and Tony all explained that they simply needed “more youth” in the program. Nicole shared how they should reach out to other programs, and maybe invite their youth to visit as a way to increase their circle, as she exclaimed:

Yeah, invite them to church or whatever. Youth can invite their friends; say the youth at my church are going here. We can meet up. We talk about certain things at a skating (rink) or something. Go skating, interact with other youth, invite other churches to come hang out.

Sonya referenced that there was a need to get more youth involvement. She explained, “I would have more meetings for one, I would have more outings, and I would encourage more people to be a part of our program.” Michelle shared a similar idea, in stating she would get more youth without age limitations as she described with great enthusiasm, “Get more people involved. When we do lock-ins have them more recent. Have everyone be a part of it not just like age 13 and older.” Brian, who spoke and gave a
short answer with a matter of fact tone, simply stated that the program needed to “get a lot of people,” thus resonating with the other interviews, in which the youth identified that there was a need to improve by expanding the program participants.

The youth were also provided an opportunity to describe how they would design the program, and once again they mentioned ideas that involved ways to increase youth membership and interaction. Shelia described various ways to solicit the interest of youth outside of the church to join their youth program. With great detail she explained:

It would be more like open. Basically our youth group is like in the church and everybody is like related to somebody in the church. So you know, they say invite your friends, but I think we should like make flyers and putting it out there, and going to people houses and stuff, get out there more, and just having something to do… Like, people say go out and tell a friend. But you know I tell my friend but that don’t mean my friends gone come. But we should actually go out and take pictures and make a video and show somebody and be like this is what we do, so you know, you wanna be a part of this, so come on over to us. Stuff like that. And some flyers and stuff to show how much fun we have.

As I sat listening, and as someone who does marketing for teens, I realized that Shelia’s concepts were high level ideas, almost better than many I have heard from top firms. I was especially moved as she pitched the idea of how they should show other youth pictures and videos of cool things they are doing, instead of just sharing verbally to help entice them to visit. Tony also mentioned a few ideas on how he would aim to not just increase the youth, but his focus would be to increase the participation of young men. Tony commented, “I would have youth activities and I would try to get more young men
into the church to try to create a sports league with basketball… Like getting uniforms, we could have special tee-shirts that we could wear whenever we go on youth outings and stuff like that.”

Youth described friends as their primary reason for attending the program, and then described increasing youth memberships as a need in the program for improvement. They then went on to describe ways to increase youth membership when describing a new program design. When mentioning outside activities that they participate in, ranging from sports to afterschool programs, most youth referenced that the reason they do so was because of friends, socializing, or the unity through being a part of a team. Mary mentioned that participating in outside activities was important. She explained, “So you can communicate and meet new people. You can tell people about God and learn about them.” Also, in conversation about outside programs, Lloyd and Daniel also described friendships as an important factor. Lloyd said:

I think that it’s good for the brain, so that you can keep thinking. I also think that sports is a good way to make friends, so that you know who your close friends are and so that you can bond and meet new people. So if anything goes wrong, you know who to go to, like people on your team.

Daniel provided a description of his reason, “Basically like the same thing, like to just communicate more with people, like to just interact with different people, like get, like see their personality.” All pointed to the fact that they even participate in outside programs for the purpose of building youth relationships.
Fun

Fun was a consistent theme embedded in every theme observed. Based on the convictions of youth during the interviews, its prevalence required a separate section to note its importance. At the heart of each theme is the concept of fun, as youth described ways to improve the program or ways in which they would design them. Youth responses strongly conveyed that fun was an integral aspect of their program. When asked to describe how they would design the youth program, many responded by stating it would be more fun and provided ways, such as implementing sports, outings, and other youth oriented activities. Youth showed great interest when answering the question about redesigning their programs and really began to open up more when speaking about their ideas.

As Sonya started to talk about her design of a youth program, she responded, “It would be very fun.” Sonya was not the only youth member to share her vision by starting with incorporating fun. I paid very close attention as youth members placed emphasis on fun being the core feature of their program design. Michelle explained her concepts of youth having fun in sharing, “I would do lock-ins, hang out doing fun things, go different places, travel…When we like get together and take mini fieldtrips and like go to museums.” Shelia shared how her program would also be fun and used my interview session night as an example because the youth present were having fun and interacting with each other. She explained:

Like we out there [reference to gathering room during interview session] now, we having fun just sitting around talking and stuff. That could be fun, but it’s also about going out and being around other youth, because you might be out and
somebody might say, ‘that group fun, I want to be a part of what they are doing.’ Just by going out you may influence others… Oh, we would meet at somebody’s house and just (go) out to places, like the malls and places like that and just being able to influence others is a big part for me.

Following a very descriptive model of what the youth program would look like, Lisa shared, “I would ask them [youth] what we would like to do to have fun.” It was clear that she would not simply implement activities but actually consult with the youth group to determine what fun activities they would like to participate in. She went to state that “We have been trying to go to Zip city for the longest, but I don’t think that is ever going to work, but places like that. Places that are fun. Places that are fun for everyone.”

Junior provided ideas about how he would design the youth program, but also mentioned earlier in the interview, that having fun was one of the reasons he attends the program, as he stated, “And to do some fun activities.” Whether describing a new program design or reason for attending, youth associated the concept of fun.

Youth described in detail what their youth program would consist of in creating the fun environments they shared. Twelve of the youth stated that sports would be incorporated into the program. It was interesting because most of the youth also stated that they participate in sports outside of the youth program. It became apparent that sports was an interest amongst the youth in every youth program interviewed. The leading sport was basketball, which was mentioned by different genders, ages, and youth programs. Ray, Brian, and Terrence both mentioned that basketball would be a sport added to their program, and they both play basketball outside of the program. Tony shared how he would create a sports league with basketball to use as a method to generate more male
participation in the program. Junior shared that his program design would include sports, in stating:

I say, we should have sport activities all the time. Like basketball, football, baseball, and maybe a little bit of hockey here and there. Like, have a little game room with systems and computers. You know we still gone learn about God too, we can’t leave him out. We need TVs so we can watch movies, and like movies about God and stuff.

Frank also shared how he would have different sports including, basketball as he explained,

Basketball and football, that’s two, I would make stations…. Say, you’re doing this, you can switch if you want to and go in any order you want to. Say you’re doing football, ok you don’t want to do it anymore, you can go to any other station. That way so nobody gets hurt.

Isaac also noted that he would incorporate sports, although he did not provide specific types. Shelia mentioned that she does not have a great interest in sports, but would incorporate sports into the youth program: “I would say sports, I not really a sports person. I think as far as being as having a game session, like with any games, board games or if you wanna play basketball go ahead.” In addition to basketball, other types of sports were mentioned throughout the sessions that youth said they would implement. They included other sports such as baseball, football, soccer, hockey, cheerleading, dance, and volleyball.

The youth also conveyed that they would have more outings and activities to increase the fun, as they described their youth program design. Shelia shared: “Oh, we
would meet at somebody’s house and just out to places, like the malls and places like that and just being able to influence others is a big part for me.” Nicole talked about ways youth would hang out together, as she described:

What I mean by that is not always being in the church, because youth be like, ‘I don’t wanna go to the church,’ but something like some kind of church program, we not just gone be in the church, we gone do things go different places, stuff like that, not just gone be boring in sitting in the pews, stuff like that. Interact and certain things…One thing would be to get more youth who don’t hang out with us to come hang out with us. We’re not just, people think we are just one click in church that don’t want to hang out with the youth, but the other youth don’t want to come to us. So I would go to them and try to convince them to come out with us this weekend, or come hang out with us this weekend.

Michelle shared: “I would do lock-ins, hang out doing fun things, go different places, travel.” Sonya provided a similar vision, as she provided her examples:

I think it would be very fun and I would plan mall trips, I would plan like stuff like for us to go out to eat, I would plan movie nights, I would plan to have youth lock ins at the church, every month maybe, no every couple months, I would have a youth bible study maybe, to get everybody together and refresh their memory on the bible.

Tony mentioned that he would not only have outings, but more so retreats, “Like we could do outings where we don’t have to have no electronics and we could talk amongst ourselves about certain things that we can achieve in life and stuff like that.”

Lisa shared a different perspective in terms of one of her outings, sharing, “I don’t think I
would have it every week, once every month I would do something outside in the community, so we just not stuck here every Sunday. I would ask them what we would like to do to have fun. We would meet every Sunday, 12 to 2”.

Along with sharing various outings, youth also described some of the activities they would incorporate. Games and video games were mentioned by a few youth, including Junior who shared how his program would “have a little game room with systems and computers... PS4, Xbox” and Isaac stating, “play like games, sports, video games.” Frank, Isaac, Mary, and Lisa also mentioned that food would be provided during their youth program sessions. Lisa shared: “we would have a break and we would eat lunch and that would include a healthy meal, like hot dogs and fruit, chips and a cookie and juice and water.” Terrence simply stated, “We would have a pizza party.”

Summary

This qualitative case study was conducted to gain an understanding of youth perceptions on the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs in Cleveland urban Baptist churches. Data were collected through the process of interviews and focus groups. As a result of the data collected and coded, seven major themes were developed: (a) communication, (b) prepare, (c) learn, (d) help (e) encourage, (f) friends, and (g) fun.

The youth participants represented age groups 8-12 and 13-19. Although the themes extracted from interviews were pretty universal across age groups, there were differences in terms of what each group valued the most. Age group 8-12 expressed higher interest in preparation, theme they valued most, based on total response. Age group 13-19 expressed higher interest in communication as the theme they valued most,
based on total response. Both age groups expressed great interest in learning, helping, encouragement, friendships, and fun.

Communication was conveyed as a primary source for youth growth in leadership and a reason for attending the program. The ability to voice their opinions and express themselves verbally was also referenced. The idea of sharing their faith values with others served as a motivator for their participation. And the ability to talk with each other during the program was a key factor.

Youth felt that the program prepared them in terms of growth and guidance. In terms growth, the program helped to establish confidence, focus, and positivity. It also provided guidance, or as most stated helped them to “do the right thing” as it relates to choices they make between right and wrong. Last, it teaches them how to help others in need.

Youth and adult relationships in the program were perceived as being a source of help, advice, and guidance. Youth discussed how the adults help them in several different ways. They spoke of how the adults provide advice to youth, which helps them in their development. The adults also provide guidance by sharing their own experience to help give youth direction.

The idea of learning was expressed by the youth as a key component of the program. The program has helped them to learn leadership, learn more about God their ultimate leader, and through the lessons taught that illustrate real life situations. They learn leadership through the lessons of the program and other resources such as the role models.
Youth highlighted that they also felt encouragement through the program. Program leaders encourage them to follow a positive path and to be the best they can be. They also feel a sense of support from the youth program through opportunities such as speaking and expressing themselves and overall guidance.

The number one reason youth expressed for participating in the program was friendship. Youth identified that spending time talking and interacting with friends is a primary reason why they attend. Also, youth expressed that in terms of improving the program they would invite more youth to increase membership.

The idea of having fun was strongly shared by the youth, as they described concepts of how they would design a youth leadership development program. Youth recognized that they would have more functions outside of the program, which they considered as hanging out. Also, sports was highlighted as a key component that would be added to the program, with basketball as the top selection. In addition, youth shared ideas of implementing activities such as games, video games, and adding food to the program.

The themes developed are also connected with the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter III. The conceptual framework used in this study was guided by the leadership development research and theories of Kouzes and Posner (2006). It consist of four concepts including: leaders are the future, leadership is universal, leadership is omnipresent, and leadership is behavior. The connection between each theme is displayed in Figure 4.1.
**Figure 4.1: Concept & Themes Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Concept 1: Leaders are the future</th>
<th>Concept 2: Leadership is universal</th>
<th>Concept 3: Leadership is omnipresent</th>
<th>Concept 4: Leadership is behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

Summary & Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of youth on their youth leadership development programs, specifically in Cleveland urban Baptist churches. This chapter summarizes the findings and provides further discussion with intent of answering the research question. The data results will be summarized according to themes discussed in chapter four. This chapter presents an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, review of methodology, and summary of findings. It concludes with a review of the data through discussion of results, reflections, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Problem

There has been an increase of youth leadership development programs in education and community programs, however, many are failing to focus on program results for improvement. The reason for this problem is lack of program assessment and failure to obtain feedback from youth participants. The proper development of youth leadership skills is critical for future growth in many different capacities. Northouse (2010) pointed to an explicit need for effective leadership - an ability to lead others toward change in organizations and society. However, the current facts show a decline in leadership ability of adult graduates entering the work industry (Eva & Sendjaya, 2013). Youth are an important aspect of future sustainability, specifically for organizations like churches which rely on membership. Currently, the Cleveland Baptist church sector reflects a high population of members above age 40 and youth members below age 20 who are not active or fulfilling leadership roles (Hadaway, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau,
Without adequate preparation, youth may not reach their full leadership potential, which is why determining the effectiveness of such programs is important, as this study has aimed to do (Conner & Strobel, 2007).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of youth leadership development programs by exploring what youth consider effective and ineffective practices of their youth leadership development program. It is important to gain an understanding of youth perceptions as a method to determine what makes a youth leadership development program effective, as they are a primary source for information that is generally overlooked.

**Research Question**

The primary research question addressed in this study was: “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based upon youth perceptions?” To answer this question, the following sub-questions were used:

a. What do youth perceive as effective practices of youth leadership development programs?

b. What do youth perceive as ineffective practices of youth leadership development programs?

**Review of Methodology**

This multi-site case study was conducted in three urban Baptist churches located in Cleveland, Ohio. Using the method of an emergent design, data were collected through interviews and focus groups. The participants in this study included a total of 18 male and female youth members, ages 9-19. A total of six active youth members were interviewed.
at each church site, as originally planned. A focus group was conducted at each church after all of the interview sessions were completed with the youth participants. In accordance with ethical research procedures, consent forms were obtained from all participants in the study, as well as the parents or guardians of the youth participants. Interviews were 15-25 minutes per session and focus groups were 10-15 minutes per session. Pseudonyms were used for all participants in the study to protect identities. Codes were developed using in-vivo coding developed from the interview transcribed. Codes were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and developed into categories, which were then formulated into themes as discussed in chapter four.

**Summary of Findings**

In this section major findings are discussed according to the themes outlined in chapter four. The purpose of this summary is to interpret the data, connect it with literature, and identify how it connects with the research question. The findings in this section provide a synopsis of the youth interview responses that portray their perceptions of their youth leadership development program. The following themes will be discussed in this section to show how youth perceive what is effective and ineffective practices of youth programs: (a) communication, (b) preparation, (c) helping, (d) learning, (e) encouragement, (f) friendship, and (g) fun.

**Communication**

Youth voice, or the idea of simply giving youth an outlet to speak and be heard is a very important aspect of leadership development (Mitra 2004; 2006). An analysis of the interviews concluded that youth value and expressed a great need to have an outlet for communicating in their program. They viewed communication as being a contributor to
their growth as leaders and an important aspect of the program. Having an opportunity to engage with each other and express ideas, concerns and general thoughts, was highly valued by youth. This is aligned with a Fergusson and McCoy (2010) study that identified youth opinions on the importance of active participation by simply having a voice. Overall, the youth projected a positive perception of communication and felt they had opportunities to express their voice. The program provides various outlets for youth voice, which allowed opportunities for participation. Various studies have also identified communication as a primary characteristic relating to youth leadership (Gould, Voelker, & Griffes, 2013 & Kohlhagen & Culp, 2000). Youth expressed that they wanted even more opportunities to be heard not only in their groups, but in surrounding communities, to have a positive impact. Mitra (2006) proposed that youth want to be heard and that finding ways to increase youth voice serves as a catalyst for youth leadership development.

**Preparation**

Youth expressed ways in which the program prepared them as it relates to personal growth in confidence, influence to make good choices, and teaching on how to help others. Based on the overall responses, the program has helped youth with personal development, which not only is shaping their current role as leaders, but is also preparing them for the future. Youth also expressed positive views on the program’s ability to positively influence and teach them. These findings are supported by methods implemented by Wheeler and Edelbeck (2006) on enhancing the leadership of youth, in which they identified four strategies that yield positive results on youth leadership programs. One of the strategies Wheeler and Edelbeck (2006) identified was building
young people’s connections to their own identity, culture, and community. The youth expressed how the program is helping to not only shape their character but teaches them how to help others, which includes their communities.

**Helping**

The impact of youth and adult partnerships has a positive influence on youth leadership development programs. Youth expressed positives views on youth and adult relationships as it relates to the program. The impact of adult’s involvement was viewed as being an aspect of help that was needed from a more experienced source. In addition, the communication in terms of dialogue and advice from adults was valued. This is supported by Libby, Rosen, Sedonaen (2005) who identified how youth and adult partnerships allow growth and a learning experience. The youth explained their growth from interacting and working directly with the adults. They saw value in their learning experiences as adult shared advice about life situations. Not only was there an appreciation for the advice provided, but youth also appreciated working with the adults because they listened and showed a sense of caring.

**Learning**

The program was viewed by youth as a learning experience that was helping them to increase leadership skills, cognitive growth, and life preparation. Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson and Hare (2004) recognized that youth leadership development contributes to the individual growth of one’s cognitive abilities and life skills. Youth described their learning experiences from lessons that they considered relevant in connection with real life situations. Also, they felt the program taught them how to be a leader through different opportunities and training. Walker (2006) recognized the need
for increasing engagement in youth development programs through the implementation of a framework based on developmental intentionality, which is focused on connecting youth ethos and learning experience, and identified that active participation is key as it relates to commitment and skill building through practice. Learning was a reason why youth attended and were interested in the program. It provided another outlet for engagement in the program that allowed youth to express themselves and develop a skill they valued.

**Encouragement**

The programs inspire youth to strive for excellence in life. It provides a support system that not only encourages youth to grow in leadership but aids with creating a foundation to succeed. These are the sentiments shared by youth in regards to how the program has inspired and supported them in such an encouraging way. McLaughlin (2000) demonstrated how community programs can have a positive impact on youth, especially programs focused toward building on youth strengths. This is true for the youth programs, as members described ways in which their leadership, confidence, and life skills have been sharpened while attending, through the encouragement that is provided.

**Friendship**

It was identified that the primary reason for youth attending their program was because of their friends. Youth value the opportunity to interact with members of their age group. There are specific activities that were identified such as group outings, social forums, and interactive activities. Although recognized as a primary reason youth attend, it was also concluded that there was a limited amount of participants in the program.
Youth recommended a need for the program to improve by increasing youth participants and opportunities for more youth interaction. Although literature recognizes the need for youth to have active participation, there is limited information that state peer relation as an intricate component of youth leadership development programs. Mitra (2006) identified the importance of youth having an opportunity to engage in activity, but like others do not mention the important role of friendship development. Friendships are a leading factor in youth leadership development programs as it relates to youth participation and overall interest.

**Fun**

The most critical aspect of a program that must exist is “having fun.” Despite the overwhelming consensus amongst youth identifying the importance of their program being fun, it is not adequately incorporated. This was made apparent as youth described ways they would design their youth program, and recognized what they considered an important feature: the act of being fun. The youth programs were effective in several areas, but youth did not associate fun with them. Fun represents youth desire to have an increase of active participation associated with activities of their interest such as sports, video games and group outings. This indicates how youth programs cannot take one approach to designing their programs, because youth have different interests that must be explored at each program level. Research regarding youth leadership has even cautioned youth programs against having a standardized program (Conner & Strobel, 2007; Lopes et al., 2013). Also, youth must have an opportunity for active participation which they described as an act of having fun. Research on the participation of youth in religious institutions identified that there is limited participation which can be attributed to several
factors such as school programs and sports (Carpenter, 2001; Goreham, 2004; Petts, 2009; Smith et al., 2002). Every youth member identified that they are actively involved in a program outside of their youth program. Many of the programs included sports and activities, which youth have identified as a necessary function that should be implemented to establish an environment they consider fun. The programs do not currently provide the activities that youth have outlined as fun. However, “having fun” was the most repetitive statement that youth conveyed about the program.

**Discussion**

What follows is a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the primary research question and each of the sub-questions. I first address the study’s sub-questions and then, finally, the study’s primary research question.

**Sub-question one. What do youth perceive as effective practices of youth leadership development programs?** The youth perceived active participation, peer relationships, communication, and fun activities as effective practices of youth leadership development programs. In terms of active participation, youth identified the necessity for engagement through activities and learning. Youth enjoyed opportunities to engage in learning, especially if it involved interaction. The ability to help others was another act of engagement expressed by youth. Helping others ranged from activities involving problem-solving to helping people in need in surrounding communities.

Peer relationships, which youth referred to as spending time with friends, was critical. Youth enjoyed the program because of the opportunities to interact with their friends. Many expressed that the program was the only time they could spend time with
them. Spending time with peers who are seeking similar positive goals, such as participating in the program, was important to youth members.

Youth voice is an important aspect of youth leadership development. It was expressed that youth highly valued the communication features of their program. Communication included any outlet that allowed them to be heard and simply have a place to express themselves. Also, youth enjoyed the opportunity to speak with others about their spiritual beliefs and values. The idea of simply “talking” was recognized by youth to be a key factor in their overall leadership development.

**Sub-question two.** What do youth perceive as ineffective practices of youth leadership development programs? Youth perceived the lack of fun and low membership of youth in the program as ineffective practices. Fun was referenced repeatedly by youth as a feature they would incorporate more into the program. However, fun was not often associated with other aspects of the program when youth provided responses. The concept of fun included opportunities for youth engagement in outside activities, such as group outings, sports, and interactive activities. In relation to sports, many youth identified basketball, which was the leading category.

Every program had a low number of active youth members who consistently participate in the program, ranging from 15-20 participants who were active in the program. Youth recognized the need for soliciting more youth to participate in the program. In providing ways to improve the program youth mentioned that they would invite friends and try to get more youth involved in the program. Youth shared ideas such as creating t-shirts, flyers, evangelizing to peers at school, inviting other churches, and simply taking initiative to increase the youth members.
**Research question.** *What makes a youth leadership development program effective based upon youth perceptions?* Based on youth perceptions, the following are considered effective practices of youth leadership development programs: communication, active participation, peer relationships, and having fun. As Mitra (2006) identified, it is important for youth to have an opportunity to actively participate in a program and be provided with an opportunity to communicate, as they are key aspects of youth leadership development. Youth recognized the important role that communication played in their growth as a leader and participation in the program. Youth enjoy the opportunity to have a voice and outlet for self-expression. Active participation is also an important aspect of youth leadership development programs as perceived by youth. Interacting with friends in the program and building peer relationships is also important to youth. The program must have a culture that is supportive, including adults who play a key role. One of the most important factors of establishing an effective program is incorporating activities that create an environment that allow youth to have fun. Based on youth perceptions, an effective youth leadership development program is one that incorporates: communication, active participation, peer relationships, a supportive environment, and having fun.

The themes also connect with the conceptual framework reflected in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Themes & Conceptual Framework
Implications for Action

The purpose of this study was to address the question of “what makes a youth leadership development program effective based on youth perceptions?” The results of this study suggest that an effective program is one that includes: communication, active participation, peer relationships, a supportive environment, and having fun. This information can serve as a rubric of best practices for youth leadership development programs, especially for use in urban Baptist churches.

Additionally, this research may help with the retention of youth members, which is critical for the future sustainability of urban Baptist churches. Youth members play an intricate role in the sustainability of the urban Baptist church sector in Cleveland. As Griffin (2015) identified, youth have a major impact on future growth of membership and future development of leadership, to keep the church moving forward.

To ensure an effective program, the youth leaders will need to assemble and establish a plan, based on the effective practices shared. These practices encouraged that youth members be included in the meeting, as it is a way to increase communication or the aspect of “youth voice.” It is important for youth to have a voice in decision-making, dialogue about change, and an opportunity to be heard (Mitra, 2006). Table 2 provides a list of action items that should be implemented into a program to ensure effectiveness, based on youth perceptions:
Communication was recognized as an opportunity for youth to express themselves, through what is referred to by Mitra (2006) as youth voice. To establish an effective program, it is recommended that youth leadership development programs provide communication outlets.

Table 5.1:

*Ideas for Action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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</table>

- Provide opportunities for youth to share their beliefs with others through evangelism.
- Provide interactive group sessions once a week that allow youth to speak about their issues and concerns in life with their peers and adult leaders.
- Provide youth with opportunities to voice their opinions, be a part of decision making, as it relates to the youth program.
- Provide activities that encourage youth to interact with new group members and youth outside of the program.
- Provide lessons specifically on communication, teaching youth how to speak with others and large crowds. Provide an opportunity for them to give a speech in-front of others for practice.

Preparation is an aspect of the program that youth valued as it relates to the personal development. To establish an effective program it is recommended that a structure of expectations is developed. The structure should include program expectation as it relates to goals, rules, positive feedback, and opportunities for youth to volunteer.
Theme | Ideas for Action
--- | ---
Preparation

- Provide a structured program that provides youth with standards of expectations, growth goals, and rules to establish a fun but disciplined environment.

- Provide weekly tips to youth on how to be positive and stay on the right track by using personal experience and connecting examples to their current life situations: school, relationships, family, and friends.

- Provide youth with opportunities to help others within the program and outside of the program through volunteering in the community.

- Provide a program that is geared toward helping youth build their confidence.

Helping was described by youth as an important aspect of the program as it reflects the positive youth and adult partnership (YAP’s). In developing an effective program it is recommended that the promotion of YAP’s are incorporated. Create an environment that facilitates relationship building and learning opportunities.

Helping

- Provide a program that is geared toward positive youth and adult partnerships. Provide training for all youth adults who participate to ensure they are equipped to properly guide the youth.

- Provide training to adult leaders on methods for engaging in meaningful conversations with you and providing positive advice.

- Provide a time for adult leaders to connect with youth by calling them on the phone or through text message, at least once per month.

- Provide an opportunity for youth to interact with adults in the church, in and outside of the program at least once per month.
Learning was identified by youth as an important factor in their development as a leader, in their religious beliefs, and as positive young person. To establish an effective program, training and lessons should be incorporated that reflect real life situations, role models, and experiential learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Ideas for Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>➢ Provide teaching on leadership lessons that include examples of role models for youth. Provide action steps after each lesson that youth can integrate into their life toward being an effective leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide youth with opportunities to learn about their ultimate leader example, which is God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide a separate youth church that provides them with an opportunity to learn about God in their own environment with lessons that are youth-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide lessons that are connected to youth real life situations. Use materials in addition to the bible that are relevant and provide a realistic depiction of life.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide a special leadership class every month for youth and adults to develop their skills and an opportunity to assume an actual role in the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide youth with opportunities to shadow leaders in specific roles during a trial period. Every church role should be included.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Encouragement was recognized by youth as an important aspect of the program they valued. Youth identified that the program encouraged them to excel in various areas. To establish an effective program a structure should be incorporated to recognize youth accomplishments, provide support, and ongoing positive feedback.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Ideas for Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>➢ Provide awards to youth monthly on their accomplishments in the program and also outside activities, such as school and sports.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide lessons on ways youth can encourage others to be leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide a strong support system for youth by participating in some of their outside activities. Once per month have an outing that is connected to one of the youth. For example, schedule to attend a youth member’s basketball game or a youth member’s cheerleading competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendships were recognized as a primary reason youth participated in the program. Interacting with peers was a key component of the program youth placed high emphasis on. Youth valued the opportunity to connect with their peers through social outings and program activities. To establish an effective program a youth oriented environment should be formulated that facilitates peer interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>➢ Provide special events such as a “bring your friend” day once every two months and have a quarterly award for members who bring friends that attend at least 3 consecutive times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide a social media page for youth that is active and allows everyone to interact daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide social time at the beginning and end of each program, where youth can just hang out and spend time with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provide a brainstorming meeting with the youth on ways to encourage their peers to be in the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fun was the most valued aspect of programming that youth recognized. Engaging in social outings, sports, activities were key aspects of what youth described as a way of incorporating fun into the program. To establish an effective program an element of fun should be embedded that includes activities, sports, and other extracurricular activities expressed by youth as ways to have fun. It is important to establish an understanding of what youth consider fun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Ideas for Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
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</table>

- Provide youth outings into the program and gain insight from members on things they would like to do.
- Provide a meeting area that is designated for youth and create an environment that is fun and youthful:
  - Television and game console
  - Tables, bean bags, couches (not a standard classroom)
  - Games and a pool/air hockey/ fuse ball table
- Provide a sports program that includes various sports, especially basketball and cheerleading.
- Provide a retreat once a year at an unfamiliar location in an effort to learn about new places.
- Provide refreshments to the program structure.
- Provide the youth with activities they would like to do.

Youth recognized various themes as important aspects of an effective program. To establish an effective program there are general concepts that should be incorporated to develop a model that reflects the ideas expressed for each theme.
Theme: Ideas for Action

General

➢ Provide a monthly program assessment, as it relates to youth attendance, engagement, participation rate and effectiveness of lessons.

➢ Provide a yearly audit of the youth program to measure the program effectiveness.

➢ Provide a quarterly survey of the youth to gauge their perception of the program and gain ideas.

➢ Provide a youth summit once a year and have a planning committee that includes the youth.

➢ Provide surveys asking youth members to complete an information card upon entering the program that provides information about their interests, age, outside affiliations, reason for joining, and other important data.

➢ Provide a separate identity for the youth program:
  - Provide the youth program with a name and do not refer to the youth as “kids.”
  - Create t-shirts for youth members and other marketing items such as hats, bracelets, or drawstring bags

Future Directions for Research

This study contributes to the larger body of research on youth leadership development for ages 9-19. It captures the perceptions and gives voice to a population that is not often questioned about the performance of their youth programs. For future research studies, it is recommended that program leaders continue to give a voice to the youth who are impacted by the program to determine its effectiveness. To gain further insight, the themes described in this study should be further explore, by possibly having youth rank each theme according to importance. This study was completed in a short time frame, but a longitudinal study is recommended to track the development of youth who
participate in a program that is using effective practices and produce an overview of results. Other studies should be conducted in different youth leadership development program settings in addition to churches, such as schools, afterschool programs, and beyond. In addition, based on my site visits there is a high interest from adults to participate in a study to determine their perceptions versus youth of different program aspects. A study should be conducted that includes both adults and youth to gain insight on both perspectives in terms of program effectiveness. Additional research in these areas of study is important for the future growth of youth leadership, as literature is limited. Deeper understanding of the various aspects of youth leadership will be beneficial, as youth are the future.

Summary

The study aimed to examine the perceptions of youth on their youth leadership development programs, specifically in Cleveland urban Baptist churches. This chapter summarized the findings on each theme and concluded that the following makes an effective youth program, based on youth perceptions: (a) communication (b) preparation (c) learning, (d) helping, (e) encouragement, (f) friendship, and (g) fun. A guide was provided for youth leadership development programs to implement. It is critical that the findings and recommendations of this study are considered by programs for the development of our future leaders. The process must start early and programs must be effective. In echoing the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt, “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future” as cited in (Peter & Wooly, 1999).
References


http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15860


APPENDIX A:

HUMAN SUBJECT RESOURCE BOARD APPROVAL
TO: Temeka Brantley and Dr. James Olive
FROM: Chris Chartier, HSRB Chair
DATE: October 9, 2015
SUBJECT: Human Subjects Review Board Approval
PROJECT TITLE: The Future of Leadership: A Case Study Examining the Effectiveness of Youth Leadership Development Programs in Urban Baptist Churches

HSRB APPROVAL CODE: 10-2-15-S032

The Human Subjects Review Board has approved your research study. You may proceed with the study as you have outlined in your proposal. The approval is granted for one calendar year. Research participant interaction and/or data collection is to cease at this time, unless application for extension has been submitted and approval for continuance is obtained.

The primary role of the HSRB is to ensure the protection of human research participants. As a result of this mandate, we ask that you adhere to the ethical principles of autonomy, justice, and beneficence. We would also like to remind you of your responsibility to report any violation to participant protections immediately upon discovery. Likewise, we would like to remind you that any alteration to the research proposal as it was approved cannot move forward. Any amendment to the application must be submitted for approval before the project can resume.

We wish you success in your discoveries.

[Signature]

Doctor Chris Chartier
Ashland University
Chair Human Subjects Review Board
APPENDIX B:

PROGRAM DIRECTOR CONSENT FORM
PROGRAM DIRECTOR CONSENT FORM

Future of Leadership:
A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Youth on Youth Leadership Development Programs in Urban Baptist Churches

Dear Program Director:

The Department of Education at Ashland University supports the practice of informed consent and protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will allow the youth in your youth program to participate in the present study. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

This study is designed to explore youth participant's perceptions of their youth leadership development program. The primary research question this study seeks to address is: “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based on youth perceptions?” The study involves interviews with youth participants to collect data that will help develop a list of effective practices in youth leadership development programs. Each interview session will last approximately 30 minutes.

Your youth member participation is solicited but strictly voluntary. We assure you that the names of your youth members will in no way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identifiable only through a code number and pseudonym.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, or have any issues or concerns, please contact either one of us by phone or mail. Thank you very much for your time - we appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Name of Principal Investigator

Temeka Brantley

Name of Faculty Member

Dr. James Olive

Address _130 Scha College of Ed
City, State, Zip_Ashland, OH, 44805

I have read and understand the information about “Future of Leadership: A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Youth on Youth Leadership Development Programs” I give consent for the youth within my program to participate in this study. I understand that this consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn without penalty at any time.

____________________________________
Name of Church

____________________________________
Printed Name of Pastor/Program Director

____________________________________
Signature of Pastor/Program Director

Date: ____/____/____
APPENDIX C:

PARENT CONSENT FORM
PARENT CONSENT FORM

Future of Leadership:
A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Youth on Youth Leadership Development Programs in Urban Baptist Churches

Dear Parent:

The Department of Education at Ashland University supports the practice of informed consent and protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will allow your child in the church youth leadership development program to participate in the present study. Your child will have the option to withdraw from this study at any time.

This study is designed to explore youth participant’s perceptions of their youth leadership development program. The primary research question this study seeks to address is: “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based on youth perceptions?” The study involves interviews with youth participants to collect data that will help develop a list of effective practices in youth leadership development programs. Each interview session will last approximately 30 minutes.

Your child participation is solicited but strictly voluntary. We assure you that the name of your child will in no way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identifiable only through a code number and pseudonym.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, or have any issues or concerns, please contact either one of us by phone or mail. Thank you very much for your time - we appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Name of Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student:
Temeka Brantley

Name of Faculty Member
Associate Professor:
Dr. James Olive

Address _130 Schar College of Ed
City, State, Zip_Ashland, OH, 44805

I have read and understand the information about “Future of Leadership: A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Youth on Youth Leadership Development Programs.” I give consent for my child, in the youth program to participate in this study. I understand that this consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn without penalty at any time.

Printed Name of Youth Participant

Printed Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

_____ / ____ / ____
Date
APPENDIX D:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Future of Leadership:
A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Youth on Youth Leadership Development Programs in Urban Baptist Churches

Dear Participant:

The Department of Education at Ashland University supports the practice of informed consent and protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will participate in the present study. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

This study is designed to explore youth participant’s perceptions of their youth leadership development program. The primary research question this study seeks to address is: “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based on youth perceptions?” The study involves interviews with youth participants to collect data that will help develop a list of effective practices in youth leadership development programs. Each interview session will last approximately 30 minutes.

Your participation is solicited but strictly voluntary. We assure you that the names of youth members will in no way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identifiable only through a code number and pseudonym.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, or have any issues or concerns, please contact either one of us by phone or mail. Thank you very much for your time - we appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Name of Principal Investigator

Doctoral Student:

Temeka Brantley

Name of Faculty Member

Associate Professor:

Dr. James Olive

Address _130 Schar College of Ed

City, State, Zip_Ashland, OH, 44805

*******************************************************************************

I have read and understand the information about “Future of Leadership: A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Youth on Youth Leadership Development Programs” I give consent to participate in this study. I understand that this consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn without penalty at any time.

Name of Church

Print Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date ___ / ___ / ___
APPENDIX E

CHURCH PARTICIPATION LETTER
Dear Pastor/Program Director:

I am a doctoral student at Ashland University. As a requirement for my doctorate I have to complete a dissertation study. My study is on youth leadership development programs in Baptist churches. This study will obtain information that will help further development of youth programs in today’s church. As a former youth member and Youth Pastor I understand the importance of preparing our youth to serve as future leaders. I would like your church youth group to participate in the study. It’s a simple process! I will need the Pastor to sign a consent form, youth participants, and their parents, which I will provide. In addition, I will need to meet and interview youth members (ages 10-19), which I will schedule with you accordingly. I will also need a quite area in the church with limited traffic to conduct interviews. Please contact me to confirm your church participation by November 6, 2016.

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will allow the youth in your youth program to participate in the present study. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

This study is designed to explore youth participant’s perceptions of their youth leadership development program. The primary research question this study seeks to address is: “What makes a youth leadership development program effective based on youth perceptions?” The study involves interviews with youth participants to collect data that will help develop a list of effective practices in youth leadership development programs. Each interview session will last approximately 15-30 minutes.

Your youth member participation is solicited but strictly voluntary. I assure you that the names of your youth members will in no way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identifiable only through a code number and pseudonym.
If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, or have any issues or concerns, you can contact me by phone or email. Thank you very much for your time I appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator

Temeka Brantley
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

The Future of Leadership:

A Case Study Examining the Effectiveness of Youth Leadership Development Programs in Urban Baptist Churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name: ___________________________</th>
<th>Church: ___________________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:<strong>/</strong>/__   Start time: _____ End Time:_____</td>
<td>Recording Status: ______ Data Entered:___</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Research Question:

What makes a youth leadership development program effective based on youth perceptions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Concept 1: Leaders are the Future</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are 3 things about the program that help you to grow as a leader?</td>
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<td>What are the top 3 ways this program is helping you prepare for future leadership roles?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Concept 2: Leadership is Universal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are 3 things about this program that motivates you to attend every week?</td>
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<td>What impact do youth and adult partnership/relationships have on the YLDP? Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>Concept 3: Leadership is Omnipresent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If you were able to design a youth leadership development program, what would it look like?</td>
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<td>Describe activities you participate in outside of your YLDP and why participating in an outside program is important.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Concept 4: Leadership is Behavior</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide some examples of materials and lessons that are used in your program and how they are relevant for today’s youth.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are 3 things you would do to improve this program?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Extra Notes: