

Adolescent Athletes and Leadership: Are We Developing Positive Role Models?

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1984, Athletes Helping Athletes (AHA) has been training and mobilizing high school student-athletes with its Student Athlete Leadership Team (SALT) Program. Currently operating in more than 40 school districts in five counties throughout the New York metropolitan area, SALT has trained more than 20,000 high school student leaders (SL), reaching more than 200,000 elementary school students. SALT's mission is to cultivate leadership skills in young people by capitalizing on the best aspects of sport to address social issues, empower SALT student leaders to exemplify superior standards in citizenship and decision making skills, and to serve as role models in their community, and fortify student leaders with the skills needed to counteract the destructive elements of our society, while promoting positive and healthy lifestyle choices. High school student leaders are required to 1) exhibit exemplary behavior on and off the playing field, 2) remain in good academic standing, 3) have interest in being mentors, and 4) demonstrate good communications skills.

To accomplish SALT's mission, a comprehensive curriculum is disseminated through a series of three full-day workshops attended by student leaders (SL). The three workshop topics [life skills, bullying and teasing (sportsmanship), and substance abuse] are taught by SALT trainers during the SL's visit at a college campus. To reinforce the program's curriculum, a sport leadership program coordinator (PC), at each cooperating high school, debriefs SLs after attending SALT workshops. The PC also help the SLs prepare for their role as mentors and visits with elementary school students. It is expected that this two-tier curriculum format (workshops + debriefings with PC) will lead to student leaders' achievement of the SALT curriculum learning outcomes that correspond with AHA's mission.

PURPOSE

SALT's program and curriculum have never been formerly evaluated to show evidence that leadership is being taught and, more importantly, is learned by its student leaders. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the SALT curriculum and debriefing process at developing leadership qualities in its student leaders.

METHOD

Participants ($N = 175$, $M_{age} = 16.9$, $SD_{age} = 0.77$)

- Gender: 74 males, 101 females
- Enrolled in 15 high schools in NY metropolitan area
- HS Grade: 98 seniors, 60 juniors, 8 sophomores
- No. Years in SALT program: 2-years, $n = 124$, 70.9%; 3-years, $n = 42$, 24.0%
- Sport Leadership Positions: 79% starters, 43% captain, 23% co-captain
- Sport Honors Received: 31% MVP, 17% MIP, 50% All-conference/All-league, 7% All-state

Questionnaires

SALT-Q (Workshops)

- Assessed student leaders' perception of SALT workshops' influence on their development of leadership skills (i.e., leadership, critical thinking, self-regulation, personal empowerment, citizenship)
- 24-item likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

SALT-Q (Debriefing)

- Assessed student leaders' perception of the debriefing process with PC in their high school after attending SALT workshops on the college campus and after visits with elementary school students
- 3-item likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
- 7 multiple choice items

Procedure

- Parent/Guardian informed consent received when students enroll in AHA program, informed consent and demographic and SALT questionnaires completed and returned during a SALT workshop.
- IRB approval was granted and rights of human participants in research adhered to at all times.

RESULTS

RQ1: Do the SALT workshops develop leadership skills in SL?

SLs agree to strongly agree that the SALT workshops influenced their development of leadership skills.

	Subscale α	N	M	SD
Leadership Questionnaire (all 24 items)	0.96	163	4.24	0.57
Leadership Subscale	0.91	169	4.42	0.54
Citizenship Subscale	0.85	167	4.10	0.67
Empowerment Subscale	0.62	169	4.04	0.77
Critical Thinking Subscale	0.78	171	4.09	0.74
Self-Regulation Subscale	0.82	167	4.14	0.71

Workshop orientation at the college



Student Leader visits with elementary school students

Student Leaders at a Mets Game



SALT trainer works one-on-one with student leaders

AHA founder and director, Warren Breining continues to work closely with student leaders

RQ2: What are SLs' perception of the debriefing they undergo with their PC after attending the SALT workshops and elementary school visits?

SL General Perceptions:

- 82.2% agree to strongly agree their PC is easily accessible for Q&A
- 83.4% agree to strongly agree they feel comfortable talking with their PC about their role as a SL
- 83.4% agree to strongly agree their PC answers to their questions about the SALT workshops are very helpful

SL Perceptions of Debriefing with PC after the SALT Workshops:

Did SL meet with PC? 6.9% of SL always meet with PC after attending SALT workshops

When did they meet?

- 57.2% of SL meet with PC within 1 to 5 days after attending SALT workshop
- 25.1% of SL meet with PC within 6 to 9 days after attending SALT workshop

Purpose of meeting with PC after SALT workshop (percent of SL who chose response)

- 75.4% to reinforce what was learned at the SALT workshop
- 56.0% to allow student-leaders to ask additional questions for clarity
- 65.1% to practice and prepare presentation for the elementary school visit (ESV)
- 28.6% to critique other student-leaders' presentation and give constructive feedback
- 46.3% to generate creative ideas to use at ESV

Helpfulness of meeting with PC after SALT workshop?

- 52.0% Very Helpful 38.2% Somewhat Helpful 2.9% Not At All Helpful

SL Perception of Debriefing after Elementary School Visit (ESV):

Did SL meet with PC? 61.1% of SL always meet with PC after ESV

When did they meet?

- 73.1% of SL meet with PC within 1 to 5 days after ESV
- 13.7% of SL meet with PC 6 or more days after ESV
- 5.7% of SL never meet with PC after ESV

Purpose of meeting with PC after ESV (percent of SL who chose response)

- 77.1% to review the events of the visit
- 53.7% to problem-solve and trouble-shoot things that occurred during the visit
- 52.0% to get additional guidance and feedback about mine and my partner's performance during the visit
- 41.1% to begin to prepare for the next visit with the elementary school students

Helpfulness of meeting with PC after ESV?

- 49.1% Very Helpful 40.0% Somewhat Helpful 4.6% Not At All Helpful

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The SALT workshops are teaching and developing leadership qualities in student leaders.
2. The debriefing process with the PC at the high school is meeting the outcomes expected by AHA.
3. At 3 to 5 of the high schools (one high school in particular), PC does not meet and interact with the SL to reinforce SALT training and prepare to visit the elementary schools as expected by AHA.
4. Recommendations to improve debriefing at the high schools: **Ensure that PCs**
 - ❖ debrief SLs within 5 days after each SALT workshop and elementary school visits – when ability to recall events is most salient and reinforcement is most meaningful for learning.
 - ❖ provide SL with more guidance for generating creative ideas for interacting with elementary school students.
 - ❖ teach and reinforce SALT workshop lessons at developing SLs' skills to critique peer performances and give constructive feedback to their peers – both of which are vital characteristics of effective leadership.
 - ❖ integrate SLs' reflection on their elementary school visit experience as an important practice for preparing for future visitations (i.e., build on and continue best practices, improve other leadership skills)

Legend

AHA	Athletes Helping Athletes, Inc.
SALT	Student Athlete Leadership Team
SL	Student Leader (aka HS student-athlete)
PC	Program Coordinator in high school
ESV	elementary school visit

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