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2. **Title:** A Methodology for Accommodating Traditional Leadership Training Exercises for Diverse Populations

3. **Presentation Track:** Practice

4. **Abstract**

With the increased participation of individuals with disabilities in educational and workplace settings, the need for leadership training within the disability community has been identified. Oklahoma has implemented a weeklong forum offering leadership training for youth with disabilities while at the same time offering hands on training for educational professionals in accommodation techniques. Participants in this session will have the opportunity to have hands on experience in accommodating individuals with disabilities in a traditional leadership exercises and will be provided with copies of Oklahoma's overarching leadership curriculum for their Youth Leadership Forum.

5. **Biographical Information**

Bob is currently working on a Ph.D. in Agricultural Education, Extension, and Communication at Oklahoma State University. Bob is a Director of an Oklahoma State University research facility and an adjunct instructor at Carl Albert State College. He serves on Oklahoma's Developmental Disabilities Council as the Chair of the Education and Child Development Committee. As the Chair of this committee, he has been the primary principle in the establishment of a five day leadership forum (YLF) for Oklahoma junior and senior year high school students with disabilities.

Penny is an Assistant Professor in Agricultural Leadership at Oklahoma State University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in leadership and provides leadership for the University's major in Agricultural Leadership and minor in Leadership Education. She has worked with the Oklahoma Development Disabilities Council over the last two years providing training for faculty and staff involved in YLF. She has also written the leadership curriculum used during YLF and served as the opening keynote.

Title: A Methodology for Accommodating Traditional Leadership Training Exercises for Diverse Populations

Introduction

Currently, one in five individuals in the United States has a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Recent legislation guaranteeing access and the increased societal awareness of the abilities of individuals with disabilities has increased the potential and opportunity for participation in traditional educational settings and the workplace (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1990).

As a result of guaranteed access and increased societal awareness, individuals with disabilities are faced with opportunities that were previously unavailable to people with disabilities (Bush, 2006). In turn, the need and desire of individuals with disabilities for professional development, challenges educators and employers to explore and utilize methods of accommodating traditional education protocol to meet the unique needs of these *new professionals*.

Background

In 2001, the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council (ODDC) embarked on a program of leadership development for promising young leaders in Oklahoma's disability community. (ODDC, 2001) Members of the council and council staff investigated and participated in hands on observation of successful youth leadership programs in an effort to develop a leadership program to meet Oklahoma's unique needs.

After assessing established youth leadership programs and Oklahoma's needs, it was decided to use a two pronged approach in developing a youth leadership program for Oklahoma. The program would place its major emphasis on developing leadership skills of high school juniors and seniors while at the same time providing hands on experience for pre-service special education teachers and graduate students in disability related fields

on how to accommodate instructional skills/techniques. The result of ODDC's efforts was the development of an overarching leadership curriculum that could be overlaid on a nation wide leadership and self-advocacy training model for youth (Pennington, 2005)

How Does It Work

Using established criteria to assess leadership skills, facilitators and forum staff were recruited from Oklahoma's institutions of higher education. A combination of pre-service special education teachers, master's level and Ph.D. level graduate students were recruited as facilitators. A two day facilitators retreat was convened to beta test the leadership curriculum for accommodations (Pennington, 2005). Group facilitators were paired based on their educational and professional experience.

Prior to the retreat, council staff screened, interviewed, and selected the high school delegates that would take part in the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). The group of delegates selected was then divided into five groups based on their abilities and disabilities. These cohort groups were maintained throughout the weeklong forum for post exercise processing.

Each pair of facilitators was assigned a cohort group and provided with the information about the individuals in that group. Over the duration of the retreat, all of the facilitators were exposed to basic leadership theory and were given the opportunity to actively participate in the leadership exercises that each of the YLF delegates would take part in during the YLF. After each exercise, the facilitators were brought back together to discuss apparent accommodations that would need to be made for each exercise.

Throughout the weeklong leadership forum, twice each day, once in the morning and once again in the evening, all YLF facilitators participated in a debriefing to assess and modify suggested accommodations for all delegates. At the close of the forum, staff, facilitators and delegates participated in a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of each exercise used in the forum.

Currently Oklahoma has successfully completed two leadership forums and each forum has been modified based on success and failures identified by feedback from participants at all levels (ODDC, 2006). Based on these successes, the overarching leadership curriculum is being made available to the 23 established YLFs and the 13 that are in the planning process (Epstein, 2006).

Results to Date

The Oklahoma Developmental Disability Council has successfully implemented a program that integrates accommodations to established leadership exercises. The methodology used in training the Oklahoma YLF staff and facilitators has been effective in maximizing the participation of the YLF delegates. The increased participation level of the YLF delegates, through accommodation, has aided in advancing the YLF delegates' leadership development.

To date, forty-three delegates have graduated from Oklahoma's YLF and returned to their home communities to utilize their enhanced leadership skills in educational, employment, and community service settings. Three graduates have made presentations at state level conferences, including the 2006 Governor's Conference on Developmental Disabilities (OUHSC, 2006). Other graduates have become active within their home communities as Junior City Council members, enrolled and are attending major universities, gone on to lobby state legislature regarding disability related issues, and have developed a networking alumni association (ODDC, 2006).

In addition to maximizing the YLF delegates leadership experience, the Oklahoma YLF overarching leadership curriculum and staff training retreat, effectively taught accommodation techniques to eight pre-service special education teachers, six doctoral level special education graduate students, one masters level special education graduate student, and two bachelors level special education teachers. Since 2005, eight of these YLF facilitators have gone to implement their accommodation and leadership skills in several high schools throughout Oklahoma.

In an effort to continually improve Oklahoma's YLF, an in-house evaluation process will be implemented by the ODDC. The ODDC, in conjunction with Dr. Pennington and Mr. Heinemann, has developed a protocol for qualitatively and quantitatively assessing the impact of the YLF on its participants' leadership abilities. The evaluation process will be implemented at the 2006 YLF, its validity will be assessed, and the process will be modified, as needed, so that it can be used evaluate the effectiveness of all future YLFs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When educational accommodations are implemented for individuals with disabilities the educational experience is greatly enhanced (Lawson, 1998). The successful application of Oklahoma's YLF facilitators' training program and the YLF overarching leadership curriculum demonstrates that traditional methods of leadership education can be accommodated to ensure total participation by individuals in the disability community (Pennington, 2005). Programs such as the one implemented in Oklahoma, strengthen participant's abilities, while considering their disabilities, so that the learning experience is maximized.

As individuals with disabilities continue to exercise their rights under the law, they will increasingly access opportunities that were previously denied them (Bush, 2006). As opportunities for access increase, there will certainly be an ever increasing appearance of individuals with disabilities in educational and workplace settings.

The authors suggest that professional educators and trainers include formal accommodation training in their educational secessions. To do so will: Challenge educators and employers to accommodate individuals with disabilities, encourage exploration and utilization of new methodology, and, in turn, meet the unique needs of these new professionals.

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