

Meaningful youth leadership opportunities have increased over the past twenty years. As adults recognize the value of intentionally engaging youth in leadership development experiences, the desire to inspire self-awareness and measure gains from these experiences has also increased. But because leadership development has long been considered the territory of business or management, much of the existing research applies to the adults functioning in a corporate environment. The same is true for leadership assessments and inventories, most being written, tested, and tabulated for adult relevance.

The Everyday Leadership Skills and Attitudes (ELSA) Inventory (Free Spirit Publishing, 2010; <http://www.freespirit.com>) is different. This 49-statement, self-scoring leadership inventory is written specifically for tweens and teens. It takes into consideration the unique attitudes and perspectives kids and teens have as they learn to be leaders and seek ways to strengthen and develop leadership skills and competencies. And because kids and teens often have limited exposure to deliberate leadership “training,” the inventory is an excellent springboard for infusing leadership into everyday settings.

The ELSA inventory uses youth-friendly language and a four-point Likert scale: Not like Me (Never), A Little like Me (Sometimes), Often like Me (Usually), and This is Me! (Always). The lack of an Undecided or Don’t Know option is intentional, designed to prompt kids and teens to carefully consider their responses instead of circling a non-committal response. Of course,

The Everyday Leadership Skills and Attitudes Inventory (ELSA) for Tweens and Teens

A Youth-Specific Tool to Use in Any Setting

BY MARIAM MACGREGOR



some statements may leave teens wishing for an Undecided option, particularly if objectively assessing their leadership skills is unfamiliar. In this situation, the facilitator can encourage teens to choose between the two lower options on the scale (Not like me or A little like me) because they aren’t strongly convinced that a particular statement describes their leadership behaviors or connect to their everyday experiences.

After completing the inventory, which takes approximately 15-20 minutes, youth use their results to explore seven youth-leadership relevant categories: Self-Awareness (SA), Working with Others (WWO), Qualities of Leadership (QOL), Communicating, Listening, and Being Heard (CLBH), Decision Making and Problem Solving (DMPS), Social Solutions (SS), and Seeking Opportunities (SO).

LOOKING AHEAD TO LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE XVI

This winter Barbara Lewis will focus on service leadership at Leadership Institute XVI. A national award-winning author, Barbara has penned such works as *What Do You Stand For? For Kids*; *What Do You Stand For? For Teens*; *The Kid’s Guide to Social Action*; *The Kid’s Guide to Service Projects*; *The Teen Guide to Global Action*; and *Kids with Courage*. Mark December 1 and 2 on your calendars, and check the web later this summer for more detailed information.



Cara Pitchford

No two leadership programs are alike, yet leadership skills and attitudes in young people run along similar paths regardless of the leadership experiences in which they're involved. While the *ELSA Inventory* aligns directly with the *Building Everyday Leadership* curriculum, field tests across a wide range of leadership programs and courses involving teens and tweens indicate its validity with all youth, regardless of program. There are various ways to incorporate this tool into one's leadership efforts:

- ▶ As a pre- or post-assessment tool to measure changes in attitudes and skill development.
- ▶ As a goal-setting tool within an experience to identify strengths and challenge areas and establish leadership goals mindful of those areas.
- ▶ As a personal-awareness tool to help teens gain a greater understanding of their leadership abilities.

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE XV

For the past fifteen years, The Center has hosted the Leadership Institute. Designed to equip educators and other interested adults with strategies and resources to develop leadership skills in young people, the Institute shares cutting-edge research and best practices for leadership development. This year Mariam MacGregor of Youth Leadership introduced the *ELSA* inventory (as discussed in her article) in addition to effective strategies from her *Building Everyday Leadership* curriculum. Twenty-five participants came from 18 districts.

- ▶ As a team-awareness tool to help teens assess the skills, talents, and short-comings of their team or group.
- ▶ As part of a leadership program to collect data measuring the effectiveness of leadership education and development efforts.

If you're interested in further exploring youth leadership, using the *Inventory* and the *Building Everyday Leadership* curriculum and supplemental materials, or finding additional resources and training opportunities, visit <http://www.youthleadership.com> or contact Mariam MacGregor at mariam@youthleadership.com.