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I have experienced many valuable and thought provoking experiences while in the Emerging Leaders Institute. The many presenters, individual leadership project, group service project, and close interaction with peers and faculty have exposed me to new ideas to use within future leadership opportunities and for life in general. I have learned many new techniques and ideas to consider while determining future projects and the direction I should take to accomplish the projects I take on. Also interaction with my peers within the class as well as within my small mentor group has helped me in further developing my communication skills. My individual leadership project has provided me with new contacts for the future as well as the courage to develop a project and make the necessary contacts in order to accomplish necessary things.

For my individual leadership project, I chose to visit the Manchester Center, a center which has a preschool program, after school program, and many other important programs to benefit children. I felt that the Manchester filled an important need within the Lexington area in providing supervision and attention in the afternoons to children who might not otherwise receive it. This program could have a profound effect on children who might come into contact with dangerous situations after school hours if there were not a place for them to go in the afternoons. I made the appropriate contacts in order to become involved with the program and found that the best way to help was to simply volunteer my time for the program and actually interact with the children.

I made preparations such as finding craft projects and finding volunteers with advertisements through the volunteer center and simply asking those I knew to volunteer their time. Many things were going well with my project, however, when the actual day arrived, a few things began to go astray. First of all, many of the volunteers who had responded did not show up when it was actually time to visit the center. Secondly, when we arrived at the Manchester Center, I learned that it was spring break for Fayette County and the after school children were not there. This situation definitely taught me some valuable things. I learned that a leader must be flexible when encountering unexpected revelations within a project. When the after school children were not in attendance at the center I simply altered my project and targeted it toward the preschool children instead. The few volunteers who did accompany me and I worked with the preschool program instead.

This was a very rewarding experience for me. The children in this program were so excited to see our faces when we came in the door. They loved the extra attention and I felt that we were doing a great deal to aid the women who help with this preschool program. They have a great deal of responsibility and seem to be spread very thin. They were extremely receptive of my proposed project and seemed genuinely appreciative for our help and care for the children. At the completion of my project, I felt gratified with the experience and the results and walked away with many new ideas about leadership.

In determining what my leadership project was going to focus on and consist of, I looked to the many valuable ideas given within the presentations throughout the semester. Lori Garkovich's presentation about asset based leadership aided me in deciding in which direction I wanted to move with my project. I focused on the assets I possessed and could provide to others in choosing what type of project I was going to tackle. I, myself, have always been enthusiastic in interacting with children and decided after much deliberation, that I would use that asset somehow within my project and select a youth centered project. It was very helpful to note my individual assets in sorting out the infinite amount of project possibilities.

Also, valuable in the process of my project development was Lance Brunner's Mindfulness and Creativity in leadership. I had to use a great deal of creativity to determine what type of project I was going to undertake in working with the children. I had to be mindful of the type of individuals

I was working with including age, gender, interest, etc. After becoming acquainted with the children's interests, I was forced to come up with a creative activity for them to engage in that they would hopefully enjoy. I decided to bring some Spring craft activities and some games in mind that the boys could play such as, HORSE and things of that nature.

After actually arriving at the center and while interacting with the children, the Wynn Stephens and Mimi Haley's presentation about diversity was very helpful. Most of the children in the preschool program were minorities and many of them were from the inner city. They all came from very different backgrounds than the one I, personally, experienced while growing up. While working with them on a personal level, I had to acknowledge our differences and react accordingly. I have learned through ELI how important it is to realize one another's differences and accept. Differences are not negative, people of different backgrounds bring new and valuable experiences and assets to a situation. We should all work to value existing differences when interacting with those around us and consider the experiences others have had that may cause them to react in certain ways.

Though our ELI class was not diverse concerning race, we were very diverse in our different personalities. There were those who were very driven and loud spoken in accomplishing their goals and in getting their points across and there were also those who were more mellow and quiet during class proceedings. Both were very valuable in the class, however, to provide a balance and different people were of course passionate concerning different topics and would become outspoken at different times. I had a great time getting to know so many different and unique people in such a short time period, especially so many people who's goals and ambitions somewhat resembled mine.

I particularly got to know those in my mentor group. They provided help and input while developing my individual project, but more just about life in general. Honestly, I will probably remember the laughs and good times we had in my small mentor group more than anything else. It always provided me with a good outlet for problems and good points I was having in life during our high/low sessions. Brandon, Katie, Erin, and I all interacted very comfortably with our mentor, Melinda, and peer mentor, Justin and could always count on a lot of laughs and fun during our meetings. They were both very helpful with anything I needed for the class and with anything I wished to talk about. Melinda, the advisor that she is, put a great deal of effort in helping me with my indecisiveness concerning a major and career. I feel that I definitely made a lot of connections and created relationships through the small and large ELI group that will last a long time and will be very helpful in things I wish to accomplish in the future .

Team building activities like the ropes course and the planning of our group project helped me to build a much better connection with the others in the institute than in any other class I have ever been a part of. Throughout these activities, we learned many things about each other and our leadership personalities, such as where dominance, influence, accommodation, etc. were displayed in our actions and comments. While working through the ropes course, everyone's leadership strategies really showed through while working to arrive at positive solutions to the encountered problems. While working so closely together, we have all formed connections with one another. Even with our very different personalities and interests, we have become an extremely close class and we will surely keep in touch for years to come.