

Correlation between leadership and sociometric status of a pre-school child in a group of peers

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Abstract Our paper focuses on the pre-school children group and the developing system of interpersonal relationship in it which together represent an exciting background for studying leadership. There are few leaders in a group of pre-school children. It happens quite often that children who have leaders' potential due to age specifics (e.g. inflated self-esteem, egocentrism), or personal characteristics (e.g. temperament, undeveloped self-control) quite often have problems in the relationship with their peers.

Among various aspects of this problem, a study of different styles of pre-school children leadership and their interrelation with sociometric status as the marker of acceptance/non-acceptance of personal and behavioural characteristics of a child in a group of peers by children has scientific and applied interest. That constitutes the main purpose of our empirical research of leadership in pre-school groups and the main goal of our paper.

The most substantial value-added of this paper is in finding out the symptom of "anti-leadership" as well as in determining personal and behavioural characteristics of pre-school children with dictatorial and anarchic styles of leadership as a cause for such children's ill-being in a group of peers. Moreover, the results of this paper might contribute to the development of a strategy of rendering psychological and pedagogical assistance to children in developing relationship with their peers.

1 Introduction

At the present time, our society has some interest in forming the younger generation's skills to work in the conditions of competition, to respond promptly to changes, in developing children's and young people's social activity, leader's determination and positive self-actualization in present and future social situation of development. Therefore, in accordance with the demand of society pedagogical practice sees the objective of forming and developing leader's behaviour as one of the most topical.

Pre-school age is a sensitive period for forming and developing positively oriented leader's qualities of a child. Theoretical analysis of psychological and pedagogical studies of leadership at pre-school age found out following areas of focus:

- description of basic characteristics and kinds of children's leadership, specifics of its expression at pre-school age: Arkin (1927); Kuzmin and Semenov (1979); Parygin (1971); Kashirskikh (1999); Bloom and Bella (2005); Briggs and Briggs (2009); Rodd (2006); Pasichnichenko (2017) and others;
- determination of basic personal characteristics of a pre-school child-leader, their systematization in the model of leader's potential of a pre-school child's personality: Zaluzhny (1931); Kolominskiy (1984); Repina (1988); Royak (1988); Senko (1991); Smirnova (2012); Tereschchuk (1989); Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and others;
- finding out conditions of behavior, methods and ways of forming leader's qualities of senior pre-school age children: Yemelyanova (2001); Vikulina (1997); Zalevskaya (1999); Borisova and Androsova (2017); Volkov (2000); Bloom and Bella (2005); Briggs and Briggs (2009); Goffin and Morgan (2009); Jones and Pound (2008); Kagan and Hallmark (2001); Sharp et al. (2012); Scrivens (2002); Moodley (2016) and others. Most researchers discuss the phenomenon of leadership as one of the elements of a group functioning as well as the result of complex influence of different factors and situations. It has been

noted that the same children in different groups and different activities may take a different position and express their potential of a leader in different ways. That is why leader's qualities and the level of their influence is not possible to estimate outside of group structure.

In this paper, we consider that research of the personality of a child-leader will be more effective if we study it in a group context, namely at the level of an organized pre-school group. That is why we chose as the subject for research not leaders as they are but the styles of expressing leadership at pre-school age in groups of children in the conditions of a pre-school educational institution.

Leadership phenomenon as a child's skill to influence peers and activate them is understudied in pre-school pedagogics and psychology. Pedagogical and psychological studies found out characteristics of leaders' styles in a pre-school age group, interrelation of personal characteristics and gaining leader's position by a child in a group of peers: Bonney and Powell (1953); Zaluzhny (1931); Kolominskiy (1984); Repina (1988); Miller and Maruyama (1976); Koch (1956); Schastnaya (1985).

Despite personal appeal of children's leaders, peers' attitude to them is ambiguous: some peers are liked, their skills, organizing abilities are appreciated, others' qualities are ignored or rejected. Finding out causes of difficulties that children with leader's potential have in the relationship with peers has significant applied interest. However, this problem is a focus in a small number of studies: Tikhomirova (2003), Denisenkova and Vyrotskova (2014), Ivanova (2007), Kunitsyna et al. (2015) and others. The purpose of our research is to study various styles of pre-school children's leadership and find out their interrelationship with sociometric status of a child in a group of peers as the marker of acceptance/non-acceptance of personal and behavioural characteristics of a child in a group of peers by children.

The novelty of the research is in the description of the symptom of "anti-leadership", in determining personal characteristics of pre-school children with dictatorial and anarchic styles of leadership as a cause for such children's ill-being in a group of peers, in developing a strategy of rendering them psychological and pedagogical assistance in developing relationship with peers and creating conditions for developing their leader's potential.

Methodology of empirical research included finding out children with different styles of leadership using the method of observation, carrying out sociometric examination of pre-school groups (sociometric game "Secret" by Repina (1988) was used), analysis of interrelation between a style of leadership and sociometric status of a child, description of the symptom of pre-school children's "anti-leadership" as a cause for ill-being in a group of peers.

2 Leadership styles at pre-school age

The first stage of this research included finding out children with different styles of leadership. The method for collecting data used by the authors included standardized methodology of observation. As the basis for determining criteria and markers for distinguishing children with different styles of leadership we used characteristics of leadership styles given in the works of Levin (2001) that were adapted taking into account age specifics of pre-school age.

Democratic leadership style is collegiate collective. A child leader tends to control a group together with other children. These children feel and take into account emotional states of other children when organizing collective activities, give them sufficient freedom of actions: account their interests, playing intentions, orientation for cognitive activities, they are able to solve conflicts using non-violent methods. We should note that leader's position of a child-leader with democratic style loses its stability from time to time: a child withdraws into the "shadows" and waits for some critical situation where they can apply their organizer's talent; instead of the reputation of a leader a child risks to get the title of a "favourite".

Dictatorial style of leadership is directive, autocratic, authoritarian. A child-leader acts commandingly, strictly giving roles between members of a group (for example, in playing or working activities), concentrates all main functions of regulating other children's behaviour and activities in general in their hands: tries to control all areas of peers' lives, decides who can be friends with whom, who can be accepted to a game; builds hierarchy in a group, make close the most dependent children. Dictatorial behaviour does not contribute to the development of a child's personality, vice versa, makes harm. Children do not want to have friendly relationship with them; a child does not enjoy usual children's games; domineering emotion of such a child is aggression.

Anarchic style of leadership is liberal, lax. A child-leader can captivate and involve children into common activity but withdraws from active control of a group, allows other children do what they want. A child tends to experiment, but the subjects of the experiments are children themselves. A child-leader with anarchic style is more interested in the process and does not think of consequences of their actions. They do not have reasonable aggressiveness, when another active child appears, they can retire into themselves. Observation was performed on the basis of filtration method.

Step 1: discriminating children-leaders. 150 children from 5 to 7 years old attending pre-school educational institutions participated. Totally: 6 pre-school groups. Observation parameters presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Observation parameters

Criteria	Markers
expression of psychological and social leader’s qualities	self-assurance; active attitude and proactivity in building relationship with peers, sociability; justness; ability to advocate the interests of partners in interacting; sensitivity to a situation; readiness to support in difficulties
expression of managerial and organizing leader’s qualities	skills for creating a team (e.g., in playing or working activities); ability to organize a children’s group for solving set problems; flexibility of behaviour; ability to motivate themselves and others for gaining results in common activities

Source: Own results

Observation results: from 150 children at the age of 5-7 22 children-leaders (14.7%) were found out. Step 2: determining leadership style of children-leaders. Participants: 22 children-leaders of 5-7 years old. Observation parameters presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Observation parameters

Criteria	Markers
motivation methods for collective activity	external negative motivation (threatens, manipulates, bribes, etc) / external positive motivation (suggests, convinces, rouses interest, etc)
organizing methods for interaction with children in the process of gaining result	non-constructive methods / constructive methods
control methods of partners’ actions in interaction	strict control / flexible control
emotional reaction to non-obedience from children	negative reaction / adequate reaction
methods for solving conflict situations	Violent methods / non-violent methods
domineering personal motives when organizing collective activities	egotistic motives / altruistic motives

Source: Own results

The following percentage of children with different styles of leadership was found out: anarchic style – 4 children (18 %); dictatorial style – 9 children (41%); democratic style – 9 children (41%). Classified data for children with different leadership styles in experimental groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Classified results for children with different leadership styles

Leadership styles	Pre-school groups						Total
	No. 1 (total: 26 children)	No. 2 (total: 24 children)	No. 3 (total: 23 children)	No. 4 (total: 27 children)	No. 5 (total: 28 children)	No. 6 (total: 22 children)	
Democratic leadership style	2	1	0	2	3	1	9
Dictatorial leadership style	1	1	2	2	2	1	9
Anarchic leadership style	1	0	1	1	0	1	4

Source: Own results

The second stage of research: finding out children-leaders with low sociometric status. Method: sociometric game “Secret” (Repina 1988). The results are presented in Table 4 that follows.

The third stage is the analysis of interrelation between sociometric status and leadership style of a child. Analysis of data showed discordance between a child’s status of “sociometric star” or the status of “favoured” and expression of leader’s qualities. In total 22 children-leaders were found. Out of them 6 children with dictatorial and anarchic leadership styles (27.3 % of total number of children-leaders) are in unfavourable status subgroups that showed the symptom of “anti-leadership” as a cause for these children’s ill-being in a group of peers.

Third stage: quality analysis of children’s motivations. Motivations analysis showed that non-acceptance of children with dictatorial and anarchic leadership styles by their peers is connected with following personal and behavioural characteristics of these children:

- children with dictatorial leadership style: suppression, peers’ activities control, orientation to personal benefits or personal self-presentation, submission of subordinate, dependent children;
- children with anarchic leadership style: instability in relationship, orientation to personal desires, inability to take into account emotional states of others when organizing collective activities.

Table 4. Number of children-leaders with low sociometric status

Pre-school groups	Number of children-leaders with low sociometric status	
	Children with dictatorial leadership style	Children with anarchic leadership style
Group 1 – 26 children	1	0
Group 2 – 24 children	0	0
Group 3 – 23 children	0	0
Group 4 – 27 children	1	1
Group 5 – 28 children	2	0
Group 6 – 22 children	0	1
Total	4	2

Source: Own results

Therefore, this category of children needs, on the one hand, support and development of leader’s qualities and, on the other hand, psychological and pedagogical assistance in building relationship with peers.

3 Pedagogical instruments of assistance to children with the symptom of “anti-leadership”

Psychological and pedagogical assistance to children is performed through two main directions: direct assistance to a child in correcting the cause of their unpopularity among peers, and assistance to a children’s group in building emotionally friendly relationship between its members and in creating favourable environment.

Direction 1 - Direct assistance to a child for correcting the cause of their unpopularity among peers. This direction includes two units: i) unit 1- correction and development; includes classes for correction and development with a child (individual, in groups), as well as interactions for correction and development in daily communication and a child’s interaction with people around, directed for decreasing psycho-emotional tension and connected with correction of their unpopularity; ii) unit 2 – educational; its contents are for development social emotions of a child and, in general, for the development of social competence of a child. These contents are performed in the process of classes for correction and development, as well as in other forms of collective activities a teacher with children.

Direction 2 – “Work with a children’s group” also includes two units: i) unit 1 – correction and development for changing children’s attitude in a group to a child: changing unfriendly attitude, revealing “strong”, attractive sides of a child’s personality and forming the system of appraisal; ii) unit 2 – educational is for emotional approaching between children, forming group closeness and friendly relationship between children.

Psychological and pedagogical assistance to a child in the situation of ill-being in the relationship with peers will be mostly effective considering following conditions:

1. Active interaction of all significant subjects of a child included into their social environment of relationship (peers, parents, family members, educators, specialists of an educational institution);
2. Orientation of correctional influence not as much for changing a child’s personal qualities as changing the character of their relationship with people around in main subsystems of social environment of relationship;
3. Usage of developmental and educational potential of children’s group for overcoming difficulties that a child has in relations with peers;
4. Developmental education of adults (educators, parents) for building relationship with a child with the purpose of forming optimized position in communication with a child and development of perceptive and reflective as well as constructive and managerial abilities.

We suggest using differentiated methods of assistance to children with different leadership styles. For children with dictatorial leadership style the methods would be the following:

- loosening or eliminating the symptom of a positional role “manager” fixation in the conditions of playing activity;
- using fairy tale therapy for a child’s awareness of negative forms of behaviour;
- exercise for ethically valuable forms of communication that will not humiliate anybody and will not lead to conflicts;
- changing social mindsets of a child: forming an attitude to a peer as a subject;
- creating situations initiating help from a child’s side to a friend or to the group;
- performing the role “A judge in the conflict” by a child.

For children with anarchic leadership style:

- loosening of the position of “egocentric” in the relationship with peers;
- creating harmony between personally significant and socially valuable motives;
- including into socially useful activity with simultaneous forming of positive attitude to it and fixation of positive experiences connected with success in the activity for common benefit;
- developing socially perceptive qualities and emotional sphere: teaching other feelings understanding and awareness of consequences of their actions on the basis of the mechanism of emotional anticipation.

4 Conclusions

Our results demonstrated that children with different leadership styles were found in groups of peers. The results can be considered robust since they are based on the analysis of correlation between sociometric status and a child’s leadership style. Analysis of the data showed discordance between a child’s status of “sociometric star” or the status “favourite” and expression of leader’s qualities: 6 children with dictatorial and anarchic leadership styles (27.3% of total number of children-leaders) are in unfavourable status subgroups that indicated the symptom of “anti-leadership” as a cause for these children’s ill-being in a group of peers.

Overall, determination of personal and behavioural characteristics of pre-school children with dictatorial and anarchic leadership styles as a cause for these children ill-being in a group of peers allowed to develop the strategy of psychological and pedagogical assistance in building relationship with peers and to distinguish conditions for positive development of their leadership potential. As the strategy typically focuses on the work with this category of children, we suggest teaching them to understand other people’s feelings and understanding the consequences of their actions on the basis of the mechanism of emotional anticipation, loosening the position of “egocentric” in the relationship with peers.

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