

Examining Leader Behaviors of Kindergarten Students during Peer Learning

**Elisabeth A. Mlawski, Assistant Professor, and Alexis Cattano, Graduate Student,
Monmouth University, US**

ABSTRACT

Peers working with peers have become an essential component of the learning process as mandated by the Common Core State Standards beginning as early as when children enter kindergarten. Children should be grouped according to the types of behaviors they naturally exhibit when working with a peer to optimize learning that occurs throughout dyadic interactions. The purpose of this paper is to describe the leader behaviors kindergarten children exhibited when working with a peer and identify how to optimize the behaviors when grouping children for peer learning.

Important implications of this research included the identification of leaders as the student who was more verbal and used positive behaviors that demonstrated social competence. Identifying these behaviors will help teachers thoughtfully match students into pairs or small groups when using peer learning in the classroom. Additionally, teachers need to be mindful of their role as a model of leadership skills and should continue to foster behaviors that contribute to learning and leading in a pro-social style.

Keywords: peer learning, leadership, students, kindergarten

INTRODUCTION

Peers' learning from peers occurs naturally in their everyday interactions both in and out of school. But, identifying the various benefits of peers working with peers for the purpose of dyadic learning has only begun to be addressed. First, learning from peers provides the opportunity for children to influence and motivate the other students in their class.¹ Additionally, learning from peers capitalizes on how peers have the ability to enhance what is already occurring during natural and student-centered learning.² Moreover, peer learning provides numerous opportunities over the course of a school day as children inherently work through a variety of interactions.³ From working on lessons across the curriculum with peers during class time to their interactions on the playground during recess, peer learning opportunities can be abundant. Peer learning also utilizes a free resource as the students are used as the tool for learning.⁴ The students themselves are the

¹ Nicole A. Sage and Thomas A. Kindermann, "Peer Networks, behavior contingencies, and children's engagement in the classroom" *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 45, no. 1 (1999), 143-171; Eric A. Hanushek et al., "Does Peer Ability Affect Student Achievement," *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 18, (2003), 527-544; Gary T. Henry and Dana A. Rickman, "Do Peers Influence Children's Skill Development in Preschool?," *Economics of Education Review* 26, (2007), 100-112.

² Cynthia A. Rohrbeck et al., "Peer Assisted Learning Interventions with Elementary School Students: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95, no. 2 (2003), 240-257.

³ Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo, and Miller, 240-257.

⁴ Kristen L. McMaster, Doug Fuchs, and Lynn Fuchs, "Research on Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies: The Promise and Limitations of Peer Mediated Instruction," *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 22, (2006), 5-25.

tools for learning and using the students as a resource lends itself to the opportunity for additional practice of the material taught in class.

THEORY

One of the theories at the heart of peer learning is the Constructivist Theory. This theory is foundational for peer learning, as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction rather than passively receiving information.⁵ Students are the makers of meaning and knowledge within their classrooms. For example, when teachers utilize student engagement during lessons instead of merely providing them with the knowledge, this allows the students to actively create links to what is being taught.

Engaging students in their learning using their peer classmates can create unique opportunities for teachers. Using peer learning strategies allows teachers to provide situations or scenarios for peers to work in pairs or groups. These unique opportunities create additional time for students to provide and receive individual attention during their lessons. Peers working with peers allows for learning and practicing new skills or information during class-time that they might not have otherwise. In turn, the additional time provides the students with the means to become more autonomous in their learning and decreases the pressure on teachers to stretch their instructional time.⁶

Besides the Constructivist Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory is also connected to and has roots in peer learning.⁷ The Social Learning Theory posits that learning occurs when one observes behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes of others. Through interacting and observing the other students and then following their behaviors, learning can occur. As previously stated, children have ample opportunities to observe each other throughout the school day which can lead to copious learning possibilities. Teachers need to learn how to best harness this natural ability in their students and use social learning as a tool for providing additional practice to the lessons occurring throughout the school day.

⁵ John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions (3rd Edition)* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013).

⁶ Edward L. Deci, et al. "On the benefits of giving as well as receiving autonomy support: Mutuality in close friendships," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (2006), 313-327.

⁷ See Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977).

CURRENT LITERATURE

Studies in the area of identifying childhood leadership behaviors in the classroom are limited. One of the possible reasons for the limited amount of studies could be attributable to the difference in social interactions between young children and older children due to maturation, developmental levels, and background knowledge.⁸ Additionally, younger children's vocabularies are limited, and their linguistic knowledge is smaller than that of older students.

Moreover, since kindergarten is the first educational experience for some children, the children are first learning how to be students, how to behave in a classroom environment, and how to learn. The processing of all of the above factors can contribute to the molding of student's social and leadership behaviors.

Studying leadership behaviors has important implications for both the students and teachers. In research by Bornstein, a sensitive period of teaching leadership skills has been identified in children.⁹ During this period, teaching leadership skills is not only an effective classroom strategy but also an effective way to set children up for a lifetime of positive leadership behavior. Information on leadership behavior can also have cross-discipline implications; as the results can not only be applied to the field of education, but to speech-language pathology regarding linguistic development, psychology in terms of motivation and relationship building, and even leadership development in the business world. Besides educational benefits, leadership skills have been identified as a future indicator of success in the workplace. A lifetime model of encouraging leadership qualities should provide those predisposed to leadership more opportunity to hone their skills and better cultivate leadership skills in children whose personalities do not naturally predispose them to leadership qualities. This study will begin to examine the behaviors kindergarten children acting as leaders exhibit while working with a peer during a learning activity.

Statement of the Problem

When you have children working together for a common purpose, differing personalities can emerge and affect the dyadic interaction. Some of the children will emerge as leaders, and some

⁸ Seung Yeon Lee, Susan L. Recchia, and Min Sun Shin "Not the Same Kind of Leaders': Four young Children's Unique Ways of Influencing Others," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 20, no. 2 (2005), 132-148.

⁹ Marc H. Bornstein, "Sensitive Periods in Development: Structural Characteristics and Causal Interpretations," *Psychological Bulletin* 105, no. 2 (1989), 179-197.

will emerge as followers. In a study by Trawick-Smith, a specific set of behaviors was observed in skilled leaders.¹⁰ Most specifically, the skilled leaders exhibited behaviors associated with social competence: adding greater detail and complexity to their interactions, regulating the social interaction, modeling and leading by example, and the use of positive feedback. However, the strongest of leaders have the unique ability to be both the leader and the follower.¹¹ This study sought to identify behaviors associated with leaders during peer interactions. Having knowledge of the behaviors skilled leaders exhibit can help teachers to identify different personality types in their classrooms. Additionally, this paper will discuss how different personalities best interact for creating optimal peer learning dyads.

METHODOLOGY

The current study focuses on the individual leadership skills observed by kindergarten students from the context of learning in the classroom. Keeping the learning activity in the classroom allowed for the leadership behaviors to unfold during a dyadic learning activity in a naturalistic environment. The data used is from a previous study by Mlawski, which looked at mechanisms kindergarten children used when working with a peer for the purpose of learning.¹²

The study employed a qualitative exploratory design that utilized descriptive information gained from observing the peer dyads during a learning activity. A qualitative approach allowed for a holistic exploration and deeper understanding of the complexity and variety of the behaviors associated with peer learning.¹³ A more in-depth understanding of the topic of leadership styles helps to identify the verbal and nonverbal behaviors exhibited by kindergarten students acting as the leader during dyadic peer interactions. The only way to define the leadership behaviors was to observe the students acting as leaders in a naturally occurring environment. Additionally, leadership behaviors were observed when students worked side by side with a peer during a learning activity. By using observations and the coding of transcripts, this paper aims to provide a rich, thick description of leadership behaviors seen during dyadic interactions.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, "Let's say you're the baby okay? Play leadership and following behavior of young children," *Young Children* 43, no. 5 (1988), 51-59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51-99.

¹² See Elisabeth Mlawski, "Exploring Peer Learning in the Context of Dyadic Interactions in Kindergarten Aged Children" (PhD, diss Seton Hall University, 2015).

¹³ Lee, Recchia, and Shin, "Children Influencing Others," 132-148.

Participants

The participants for this study were twelve kindergarten students from a low socio-economic school district in New Jersey. Nine males and three females between 5.5 and 6.5 years-old provided assent following parental consent. This age group was chosen because of the importance of building effective learning strategies, which are an integral component in the overall academic success of children in school.¹⁴ Additionally, kindergarten is the first year included in the Common Core State Standards that are used as the framework for learning in 42 out of 50 states in the United States.¹⁵

Inclusion criteria involved only typically developing children, only children who speak English, and children who had been enrolled in school for a minimum of six months to ensure that they have an understanding of a teaching environment. Exclusion criteria included children younger than 5:0 years-old due to the possibility of limited exposure to instruction secondary to their age and learning experience in school. Children were also excluded if they were older than 6:6 years-old due to their added maturation secondary to age and exposure to learning. Children with any reported disabilities that may interfere with interacting with their peers such as autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, or a speech and language delay/disorder were also excluded, as their learning would not be typical.

Procedures

No modifications were made to the procedures from Mlawski.¹⁶ Children were evaluated using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Fourth Edition (PPVT-4) to ensure their vocabulary was within normal limits.¹⁷ Then, the students were assigned to dyads based on their scores of the PPVT-4. Each dyad was video recorded during a bean bag toss game. The video recording began with one student being assigned the leader and one student being assigned as the follower. After five minutes, the students were told to reverse roles and the leader became the follower, and the follower became the leader. The interaction concluded after a total of ten minutes. To allow for a

¹⁴ Andrew Biemiller and Naomi Slonmin, "Estimating Root Word Vocabulary Growth in Normative and Advantage Populations: Evidence for a Common Sequence of Vocabulary Acquisition," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 93, no. 3 (1999), 498.

¹⁵ National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, "Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts Standards: Speaking and Listening," *National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers*, 2010. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/K/>.

¹⁶ Mlawski, *Exploring Peer Learning*, 48-53

¹⁷ Lloyd M. Dunn and Douglas M. Dunn, "Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test," (2007)

holistic rich description to be captured, the researcher remained in the room, behind the video camera at the periphery of the interaction. The video recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author utilizing a running record format simulating how the interaction occurred.

Each transcript was examined by the researchers as well as five volunteers. In the transcripts provided to the volunteers, any reference to who was assigned to be a leader or follower at any point of the interaction and any coding was removed to avoid influencing their perception of whom the researchers identified as the leaders. Directions provided to the volunteers asked them first to identify who they believed was the overall leader in each interaction. After identifying the leader, the volunteers noted any behaviors or patterns that guided them to their conclusion. The qualitative observations made by researchers and volunteers provided the basis of how one child was identified and emerged as the leader during the dyadic interaction.

RESULTS

Definitions of Identified Behaviors

Through the coding of transcripts, behaviors were identified as being associated with a leader or a follower. The most common behavior across participants, positive self-reinforcement, was the provision of positive feedback and support for oneself. Examples of nonverbal positive self-reinforcement behaviors included:

“Pumping fist, jumping excitedly after hitting the target.”

Other examples of positive self-reinforcement included verbal behaviors, such as:

“Yes, I made it again.”

“So close.”

Giving directions was a verbal command to a peer such as:

“Go pick them up.”

“First, I go okay? You can’t do the same thing as me.”

Modeling was a nonverbal behavior where one student provided a demonstration of a target behavior. To be an effective modeler, students had to demonstrate joint attention and be focused on the same task.

Another nonverbal behavior related to modeling was imitation. For the model to be

considered successful, it is dependent upon one peer imitating the model of the other peer.

A correction was used as a verbal behavior where one peer pointed out the other peer's error and provided an alternative action. For example:

“You can't stand there; you have to be at the blue line.”

“No, you try to lead me now.”

Prompting was a gesture or other nonverbal behavior that indicated a command:

“Student 7 points to Student 2 to begin.”

“Student 7 cues to Student 2 to pick up beanbags by gesturing with both arms towards the target.”

Positive affect was a clear bonding interaction or a show of enthusiasm for the activity between both peers. This was not necessarily reinforcement for a specific action, simply an overall show of positive attitude towards the game and their partner. The following interaction is an example of positive affect:

Student 3 misses target

Student 3 “oops.”

Student 3 and Student 11 “both laugh.”

Even though student 3 was not successful at hitting the target, both students maintained a positive attitude and took the opportunity to build rapport with each other. Positive affect could also come after success, like the following exclamation after both partners hit the target:

“That's how you play as a team.”

Conversely, negative affect was a demonstration of a negative attitude towards partner or activity. The following non-verbal behaviors indicated negative affect:

“Stomping their foot.”

“Pouting after their partner hits the target.”

Negative affect could also be defined as an unwillingness to work as a team, as illustrated by the following interaction between Students 16 and 1:

Student 16 “Stop Student 1.”

Student 1 “I'm crazy” (continues to make noises and faces into the camera).

In this example, Student 1 had been disregarding the provided directions and not

following along with the game. Student 16 was becoming visually frustrated and repeatedly asked him to stop. Student 16 also provided his own rendition of the directions related to the rules of the game and continued providing a positive model of play even as Student 1 was ignoring. While Student 1 probably wasn't thinking about the above described interaction unfolding in these behavioral terms, the disregard to directions illustrated a lack of respect for his partner

Table 1 Top Behaviors among Leaders and Followers

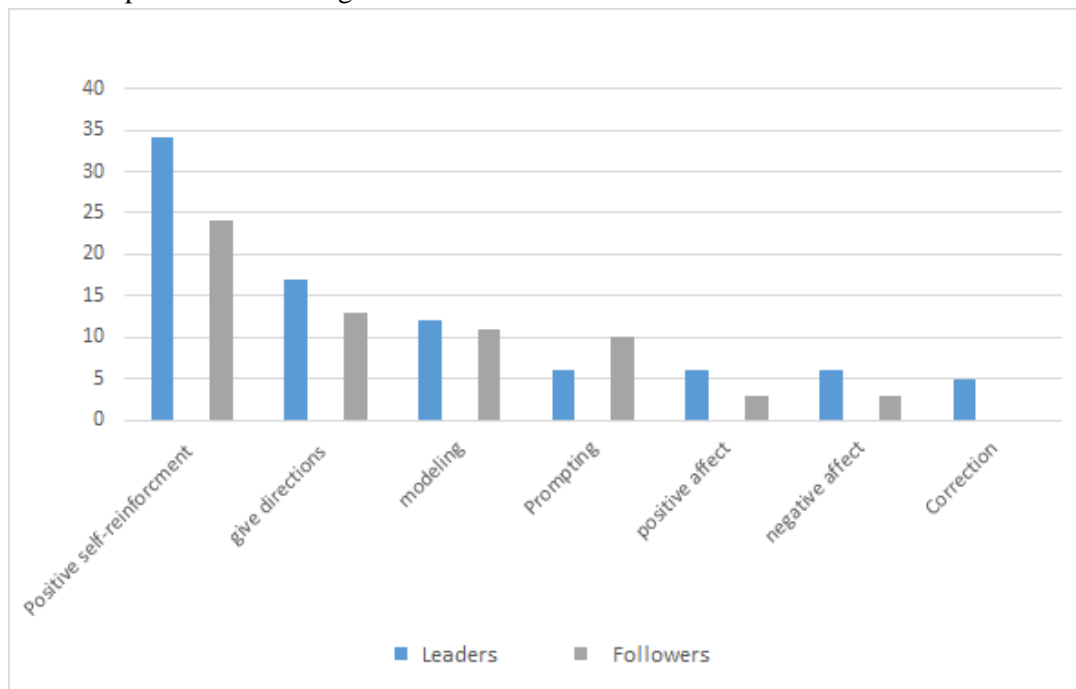


Table 1 quantifies the most common behaviors used across all students. Positive self-reinforcement was the most used behavior across leaders and followers. In general, leaders were observed to use the behaviors listed in Table 1 more often than followers. A pattern of delayed imitation was also noted in the followers, meaning that the leader began the interaction using a variety of behaviors while the follower participated minimally. Across multiple interactions, the followers only demonstrated the various behaviors after observing the leader's example, which could account for the trend of behaviors being used more often by leaders. The only exception was prompting, which is a nonverbal behavior. This is noteworthy since leaders were observed to be more verbal than followers. While the quantitative data is useful, qualitative observations provided a complete narrative of how one

participant emerged as the obvious leader.

Observations of Leader and Follower Behaviors

From the transcripts, patterns of verbal and nonverbal behaviors associated with leaders emerged. The most common observations of children who were identified as the leaders were that they:

“Gave directions to their peers.”

“Corrected or explained information” to their peers.

“Initiated interactions and turn-taking during the exchange.”

“Took control of the interaction when the follower does not follow directions.”

Both leaders and followers gave directions, but the students identified as leaders did so more often than the followers. Providing corrections to their peer was another verbal behavior observed to be more associated with leaders. However, when the transcripts were coded, it was noted that followers never made corrections. These observations support the conclusion that natural leaders verbalize more frequently than followers. Providing corrections and using increased verbalizations also supports the previous finding by Trawick-Smith,¹⁸ identifying classroom leaders as having more social competence than their peers. Social competence can also be described as diplomatic, as indicated in the leader’s ability to give directions and make corrections that are well received by a peer.¹⁹ The lack of corrections made by followers may suggest their inability to use socially competent language skills during cooperative interactions.

Another common observation across volunteers suggested leaders initiated the interaction or initiated turn-taking with their peer. This behavior pattern was observed in four out of six identified leaders. Of those four leaders, three of them were assigned by the primary researcher to be the follower during the interaction. As stated earlier, assigned roles were removed from the transcripts provided to the volunteer coders. Therefore, it is especially interesting that despite these students being assigned as the follower of their peer’s model, these students were perceived to initiate the turn-taking structure of the interaction. It is possible that the perception of who acted as the leader was driven by earlier increased verbalizations and a pattern of delayed imitation observed in followers. Additionally, the

¹⁸ Trawick-Smith, *Play Leadership*, 1988.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 51-59.

perception of the assigned leader may be related to the student's use of frequent verbalizations often in the form of positive self-reinforcement.

Leaders were also identified based on their ability to take control when the follower was not following directions. Students 1 and 16 demonstrated this pattern during their dyadic interaction as each student verbalized almost equally, but differed in their quality of language. Student 1, the follower, was not joining in the turn-taking structure of the activity and was using distracting behaviors such as running around and speaking into the camera saying instead of following the activity. This student's behavior was an example of negative affect, as his distracting behavior made it difficult to complete the activity. Student 16 was chosen as the leader because he used behaviors associated with leadership; for instance, offering directions and modeling correct behaviors in an attempt to redirect the follower back to the activity. However, Student 16 continued to play the game and directed Student 1 to stop the distracting behavior and to take his turn at the appropriate time. Even when Student 1 did not listen or follow directions, Student 16 demonstrated a positive affect and used positive self-reinforcement. This combination of direction and a continued positive attitude are other examples of social competence thought to be instinctive to leader personalities, even as early as kindergarten.²⁰

Besides leader behaviors, characteristics of followers also emerged, such as:

“Imitating the leader's affect.”

“Seeking out modeling and reinforcement.”

“Being less verbal than the leader.”

Volunteer coders identified students as followers if they imitated the leaders modeled affect. Leaders tended to demonstrate positive affect from the beginning of the interaction by showing enthusiasm for the game and creating opportunities for bonding. Consider a previously discussed example of positive affect, like exclaiming:

“That's how you play as a team.”

The above statement occurred after both students hit the target. Interactions similar to this one are reinforcing for both partners and create a warm, supportive environment; which

²⁰ Trawick-Smith, *Play Leadership*, 1988; Recchia, *Preschool Leaders*, 2011.

may encourage the follower to use the same behavior.²¹

Related to another common observation followers were described as:

“Looking to the leader for approval and reinforcement.”

This observation was borne out in the transcripts. Followers often looked towards the leader after each toss or during moments of uncertainty of how to proceed. The students did not heap positive reinforcement onto their partner, so followers seeking praise from their partner likely did not receive it. However, the presence of positive self-reinforcement was identified as a commonly used behavior by both leaders and followers. Followers were perceived to utilize a pattern of delayed imitation suggesting that even though the followers were not receiving direct positive reinforcement from their peer, they adopted the leader’s model of self-reinforcement.

As mentioned before, the follower was perceived to be the less verbal of the two students. In one particular dyad, the type of verbalization used was the only differentiating factor for determining the leader from the follower. The follower was described as nonverbal, as the only word spoken during the interaction was their peer’s name to secure their attention. The leader in this dyad exhibited more verbalizations than the follower. The leader did give directions but did not demonstrate the various behaviors that other leaders displayed. Notable from this dyad was how the lack of interaction between peers muddled determining who the clear leader was, so the most verbal participant was chosen. Overall, followers tended to use less advanced social language skills, such as giving directions and making corrections.²²

IMPLICATIONS

All of the findings are supported by a prevalent, but older theory of education, Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.²³ Bandura describes children’s successful learning of a model to be occurring in four stages: attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. These four tenets are naturally demonstrated in the behaviors of the strong leaders in this study. For example, Stage 1 of Bandura’s theory is attention. Leaders attempted to draw their peer’s attention to the interaction by initiating verbal interaction and modeling positive affect and reinforcement behaviors. Stage 2, retention, is

²¹ Edward L. Deci et al., “Autonomy Support,” (2006): 313-327.

²² Trawick-Smith, *Play Behaviors*, 1988

²³ Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 1977.

when a learner observes and stores information about the model; without retention reproduction cannot occur. Leaders facilitated retention through repeated modeling and making corrections when necessary so that followers did not retain an inaccurate model. Stage 3, production, was demonstrated through the follower's delayed imitation of positive behaviors. As previously discussed, leaders initiated verbal interaction and used positive affect and self-reinforcement behaviors from the beginning of an interaction while followers tended to observe these behaviors for a bit and then begin using them themselves. Interestingly, the volunteers, who are not known to be familiar with Bandura's work, also used the term delayed imitation to describe increased aggressive play behaviors observed in children who had been exposed to an aggressive model.²⁴ Imitation of these behaviors led to step 4, motivation. The imitation of positive affect and self-reinforcement resulted in bonding between peers and an increased desire to self-motivate. Additionally, the adoption of behaviors equivalent to directing, modeling, and prompting led to increased success amid the activity for both students. Bandura's finding, which informed the development of this model, posits that children learn social behavior through observation of a model.²⁵ The aforementioned supports a conclusion of this study, that matching student who demonstrate a leader personality with students who demonstrate follower personalities for peer learning will strengthen dyads for successful learning of content as well as positive collaborative behaviors.

Another theory, Autonomy Support, relates to the findings of this study as it addresses reinforcement and motivation.²⁶ According to Deci et al., the most positive teacher-student relationships occur when a teacher offers autonomous support by acknowledging the other's perspective, providing choice, encouraging self-initiation, and being responsive to the other. Successful teacher-student relationships also must have a lack of mutuality meaning that for a successful interaction to occur, there needs to be an established authority figure and a subordinate.²⁷ Lack of mutuality is in contrast with peer friendships, in which a reciprocal partnership is an indicator of satisfaction. In the context of a peer learning interaction, creating

²⁴ Albert Bandura., Dorothea Ross, & Sheila A. Ross, (1963). Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66(1), 3.

²⁵ Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 1977.

²⁶ Edward L. Deci et al., "Autonomy Support," (2006): 313-327.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 313-327.

dyads that have a lack of mutuality is ideal to ensure learning.²⁸ This dynamic is closer in form to a teacher-student interaction and creates an appropriate atmosphere for learning because it is differentiated from play. Relationships of this kind have been shown to be self-reinforcing and fulfilling to both partners, as the leader, and the follower will both derive satisfaction from improvement and success.²⁹ Moreover, autonomy support asserts that the most effective peer learning matches will have one leader and one follower, to replicate this dynamic best.³⁰

Currently, leadership modeling is not an instructional focus in early elementary classrooms because so little is known about what defines leadership at this stage and how to teach it. Not practicing leadership modeling would mean teachers miss an incidental teaching opportunity to utilize a sensitive period in development to foster and create more skilled leaders from childhood. Fostering sensitive periods has the potential to address skills and abilities that may help in the development of the students' future self as a sensitive period is a time when skills are more easily and rapidly developed.³¹ Bornstein, (in his framework for utilizing a sensitive period), explains that learning is not only related to age but also influenced by experience and exposure to learning.³² Being knowledgeable about the rapid changes occurring during the sensitive period of early childhood, teachers can model desirable and influential leadership behaviors. Modeling the leadership behaviors specifically for learning is necessary as an aid in the learning process as these skills tend not to be discussed or explicitly taught until adulthood. Another strategy for teachers would be highlighting positive peer models of leadership in the early learning period to provide additional stimulus needed to take advantage of this sensitive period and encourage a lifetime of leadership skills in young students.³³

Meta-analysis of leadership development interventions has shown that effect size for interventions focused on younger participants (younger than 22) was not significantly different than interventions focused on older participants (older than 45), but the difference in

²⁸ Ibid, 313-327.

²⁹ Ibid, 313-327.

³⁰ Ibid, 313-327.

³¹ Bornstein, "Sensitive Periods," (1989): 179-197.; Bruce J. Avolio, and G. Vogelgesang. "Beginnings matter in genuine leadership development." *Early development and leadership: Building the next generation of leaders* (2011): 179-204.

³² Avolio & Vogelgesang, "Genuine Leadership Development" (2011): 179-204

³³ Ibid, 179-197.

long-term retention of skills was significantly stronger for younger individuals.³⁴ This evidence lends strong support to the idea of putting a stronger focus on teaching the language of leadership as early as kindergarten. Leadership skills have become an area of interest for learning and research during the period individuals begin to enter the workforce, around college or adulthood. Unfortunately by this time, leadership skills are already an explicit requirement of many employment opportunities.³⁵ Although long-term outcomes in leadership skills have not yet been studied in an age group as young as kindergarten, there is evidence of better results for earlier learners utilizing sensitive periods.³⁶

Becoming socially competent is another important set of skills that can be developed and enhanced through leadership instruction. Trawick-Smith addresses leadership behaviors of young children by suggesting teachers identify students as leaders in the classroom using both pro-social and bullying behaviors.³⁷ When student are described as using bullying behaviors, they use acts that attempt to dominate peers.³⁸ In five of the six dyads, when both students had thrown all their bean bags, they would both go and collect them together. An example of a bullying behavior occurred in one dyad, as the identified leader directed his peer to clean up, but wouldn't help pick up the bean bags. In this example, the follower eventually became frustrated with the leader, calling him names and complaining that he doesn't get a turn.

Positive behaviors and diplomatic language skills, such as negotiation and tactful rejection tended to be more effective and resulted in better learning for both peers.³⁹ Teaching and modeling the high level language involved in pro-social leadership not only sets children up to be more effective leaders but also serves as a model of high-level social language skills.

In addition to bullying behaviors being ineffective, finding the correct balance between encouraging leadership behaviors without cultivating domineering, manipulative behaviors need to be identified.⁴⁰ By offering instruction and positive models of peer leadership, teachers

³⁴ Ibid, 179-204.

³⁵ Ibid, 179-204.

³⁶ Bornstein, "Sensitive Periods," (1989): 179-197.; Avolio & Vogelsang, "Genuine Leadership Development" (2011): 179-204

³⁷ Trawick-Smith, *Play Leadership*, 1988;

³⁸ Trawick-Smith, *Play Leadership*, 1988.

³⁹ Lee, Recchia and Shin, "Children Influencing Others," 132-148.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 132-148.

could gain more control over the types of behaviors being encouraged than if they were to let leadership skills develop naturally. Leaders also need to learn about the importance of collaboration, to listen to other's ideas, and to take another person's perspective.⁴¹ When leaders use bullying behaviors, it does not fulfill the follower's need for autonomy support and camaraderie.⁴² Teaching leadership skills to students whose personalities do not predispose them towards leader behaviors are still valuable as students learn how to negotiate with their peers to have their ideas heard and not allow themselves to be bullied.⁴³

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, what has emerged from the naturalistic observations of students working with their peer for the purpose of learning is that leaders were identified as the student who was more verbal and used positive, constructive behaviors that demonstrated social competence naturally.⁴⁴ The observations highlight the importance of identifying student's language abilities. Teachers knowing as much as they can about their students can help them to match students thoughtfully into pairs or small groups when using peer learning in the classroom. Additionally, teachers need to be mindful of their role as a model of leadership skills and should continue to foster behaviors that contribute to learning and leading in a pro-social style.

Also emerging from the observations was a pattern of how one natural leader in a dyad made for a richer, more successful interaction. The natural leader served as a positive model of pro-social behaviors. These interactions illustrated that even though participants tended to use similar behaviors, the leader was the model of positive behaviors that the follower imitated as the interaction progressed. For example, leaders initiated verbal interaction, positive affect, and self-reinforcement, and provided constructive feedback through directions and correcting without being perceived as a bully. Students identified as followers did not begin interactions using these behaviors, but adopted them after being provided with a model. This evidence suggests that modeling of positive leadership skills can cultivate the development of

⁴¹ Trawick-Smith, *Play Leadership*, 1988; Recchia, *Preschool Leaders*, 2011; Lee, Recchia, and Shin, "Children Influencing Others," 132-148.

⁴² Carrie J. Furrer, Ellen A. Skinner, and Jennifer R. Pitzer, "The Influence of Teacher and Peer Relationships on Students' Classroom Engagement and Everyday Motivational Resilience," *National Society for the Study of Education* 113, no. 1 (2014): 101-123.

⁴³ Lee, Recchia, and Shin, "Children Influencing Others," 132-148; Recchia, *Preschool Leaders*, 2011.

⁴⁴ Trawick-Smith, *Play Leadership*, 1988; Lee, Recchia, and Shin, "Children Influencing Others," 132-148.

leadership skills in children who do not instinctively employ them.

Since these behaviors also contribute to bonding and motivation between peers, pairing a leader and a follower is also optimal for learning in a peer tutoring scenario. In dyads where neither participant demonstrated a high-level of language nor verbalized to one another, no clear leader emerged, and the use of positive behaviors was not seen. Additionally, when a dyad contained two participants whom both used a high-level of language and verbalized equally, tension developed in the dyad. This suggests two leaders in a dyad is equally as unproductive as having none. Teachers need to identify the students that require additional support learning leadership skills and model the skills for building social competency for the purpose of learning with a peer. Students who naturally use these behaviors can also benefit from reinforcement and enhancement through classroom based instruction on pro-social leadership skills. Developing pro-social leadership skills early in a child's educational career will help to develop personhood and citizenship skills that will only grow and further develop as they continue through school.

REFERENCES

- Avolio, Bruce J., and G. Vogelgesang. "Beginnings Matter in Genuine Leadership Development." *Early development and leadership: Building the next generation of leaders* (2011): 179-204.
- Bandura, Albert. *Social Learning Theory*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977).
- Bandura, Albert. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A social cognitive theory*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1986).
- Biemiller, Andrew and Slonim, Naomi. "Estimating Root Word Vocabulary Growth in Normative and Advantaged Populations: Evidence for a Common Sequence of Vocabulary Acquisition." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 93, no. 3 (2001): 498-520.
- Bornstein, Marc H. "Sensitive Periods in Development: Structural Characteristics and Causal Interpretations." *Psychological Bulletin* 105, no. 2 (1989): 179-197.
- Clements, Jessica, Elizabeth Angeli, Karen Schiller, S. C. Gooch, Laurie Pinkert, and Allen Brizee. "General Format." *The Purdue OWL*. October 12, 2011.
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/13/>.
- Creswell, John, W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (California: Sage Publication, 2013).
- Deci, Edward L., Jennifer G. La Guardia, Arlen C. Moller, Marc J. Scheiner, and Richard M. Ryan. "On the Benefits of Giving As Well As Receiving Autonomy Support: Mutuality

- in Close Friendships." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32, no.3 (2006): 313-327.
- Dunn, Lloyd M., and Dunn, Douglas M. *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition*, Minneapolis, MN: Pearson Assessments, 2007.
- Furrer, Carrie J., Skinner, Ellen A. and Pitzer, Jennifer R. "The Influence of Teacher and Peer Relationships on Students' Classroom Engagement and Everyday Motivational Resilience." *National Society for the Study of Education* 113, no. 1 (2014): 101-123.
- Gardner, Howard, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. "Positioning future leaders on the good work track." *Early development and leadership: Building the next generation of leaders* (2011): 255-272.
- Hanushek, Eric A., Kain, John F., Markman, Jacob M., and Rivkin, Steven G. "Does Peer Ability Affect Student Achievement." *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 18 (2003): 527-544.
- Henry, Gary T., and Rickman, Dana K., "Do Peers Influence Children's Skill Development in Preschool." *Economics of Education Review* 26 (2007): 100-112.
- Lee, Seung Yeon, Susan L. Recchia, and Min Sun Shin. "Not the Same Kind of Leaders": Four Young Children's Unique Ways of Influencing Others." *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 20, no. 2 (2005): 132-148.
- McMaster, Kristen, L., Fuchs, Doug, and Fuchs, Lynn S. "Research on Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies: The Promise and Limitations of Peer-Mediated Instruction." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 22 (2006): 5-25.
- Mlawski, Elisabeth. "Exploring Peer Learning in the Context of Dyadic Interactions in Kindergarten Aged Children." Ph.D. diss Seton Hall University, 2015.
- Murphy, Susan Elaine, and Johnson, Stefanie K. "The Benefits of a Long-Lens Approach to Leader Development: Understanding the Seeds of Leadership." *The Leadership Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2011): 459-470.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards* (English Language Arts Standards: Speaking and Listening) National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington D.C.
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/K/>.
- Recchia, Susan. "Preschool Leaders in the Early Childhood Classroom." *Early Development and Leadership: Building the Next Generation of Leaders* (2011): 39-58.
- Rohrbeck, Cynthia A., Ginsburg-Block, Marika D., Fantuzzo, John W., and Miller, Traci R. "Peer-Assisted Learning Interventions with Elementary School Students: A Meta-Analytic Review." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95 (2003): 240-257.
- Sage, Nicole A., and Kindermann, Thomas A. "Peer Networks, Behavior Contingencies, and Children's Engagement in the Classroom." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 45 (1999): 143-171.

Trawick-Smith, Jeffrey. "Let's Say You're the Baby Okay? Play Leadership and Following Behavior of Young Children." *Young Children* 43, no. 5 (1988): 51-59.