LEADERSHIP THAT BEGINS AT SCHOOL: SMALL INITIATIVES — BIG RESULTS

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Abstract. The article addresses the development of leadership qualities in pupils through small initiatives carried out at school. Leadership is substantiated not as an innate quality or an exceptional trait of a few pupils, but as a competence that can be developed step by step. Four components of pupils’ leadership are specified: self-management, communication and cooperation, initiative and responsibility, and social influence. A model for the gradual introduction of small initiatives at the class, school and neighbourhood levels is proposed, together with the requirements placed on such initiatives and the mentoring role of the teacher.

Keywords: leadership, pupils’ leadership, small initiative, student voice, initiative-taking, project activity, educational work, mentoring.

Introduction. One of the tasks facing contemporary education is to bring up pupils who are not only knowledgeable, but also enterprising, responsible and capable of improving the environment around them. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On State Youth Policy” defines increasing the social activity of young people and supporting their initiatives as one of the priority directions of state policy [1]. In practice, however, leadership is often confined to the class monitor, the winner of a competition or a member of the pupils’ council, while the remaining pupils retain the role of observers.

Another habit is observed in school practice: the development of leadership is understood to mean a large event, a major project or a nationwide competition. Such

events involve only a handful of pupils and require lengthy preparation. Yet leadership skills are formed precisely in everyday, small undertakings that pupils can manage themselves: organising a book corner in the classroom, reducing the waste of water in the schoolyard, helping a younger pupil with reading.

The aim of the article is to substantiate the content and the organisational-pedagogical conditions for developing pupils' leadership at school step by step through small initiatives.

Literature review. J.M.Burns substantiated the transformational nature of leadership and showed that genuine leadership means not controlling followers but developing them [2]. J.M.Kouzes and B.Z.Posner, in a leadership model adapted for school and university students, identified five practices: modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart [3]. S.R.Komives and colleagues established that the formation of a leadership identity is a stage-based process that begins with self-awareness and with the first experiences gained in a small group [4].

D.L.Mitra provided empirical evidence that strengthening "student voice" at school increases pupils' self-confidence, social ties and sense of responsibility [5]. N.Dempster and A.Lizzio, analysing research on pupils' leadership, pointed out the lack of coherent pedagogical models for developing leadership at school [6]. Nevertheless, the question of turning small, everyday initiatives at school into a systematic means of developing leadership remains insufficiently studied.

Research methodology. The study employed theoretical analysis of scholarly sources and international recommendations, content analysis of the educational-work plans of general secondary schools, generalisation of pupils' initiatives in school practice, and pedagogical modelling. The components of leadership were specified by comparing them with the age characteristics of pupils and with the real scope of activity available at school.

Results and discussion. The analysis made it possible to distinguish four components of pupils' leadership and to describe how each of them appears at school (Table 1).

Table 1

Components of pupils' leadership and how they appear at school

Component of pupils' leadership	Content and how it appears at school
Self-management	Setting goals, planning time, finishing what has been started, drawing conclusions from failure
Communication and cooperation	Justifying one's opinion, listening, distributing tasks within a group, resolving disagreements through negotiation
Initiative and responsibility	Noticing a problem in one's surroundings independently, proposing a solution and taking responsibility for the outcome
Social influence	Involving peers in the work, leading a small team, placing the common interest above personal interest

Table 1 shows that at the centre of pupils' leadership lies not eloquence or outward activity, but the ability to take responsibility and to bring an undertaking to a result. It is exactly these qualities that are consolidated in small tasks that are nevertheless carried through to the end.

By a small initiative we mean an activity that meets the following requirements: it is short in duration (two to four weeks); its idea comes from the pupil; it does not require substantial financial resources; its result is visible and measurable; and it is safe for the pupil. Pupils plan such an initiative themselves, involve their peers and present the result publicly.

It is proposed that initiatives be expanded gradually in line with the pupils' age: from the scope of the classroom to that of the school, and then to the neighbourhood and the wider community (Table 2).

Table 2

Directions for the gradual introduction of small initiatives

Stage (grades)	Scope of the initiative and examples	Expected outcome

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Preparatory (grades 1–4)	Within the classroom: a “class library corner”, pupils drawing up the duty rota themselves, a small charity collection	A sense of responsibility, experience of working together, the experience of “my proposal was accepted”
Developmental (grades 5–7)	Within the school: greening the schoolyard, a campaign to reduce waste of water and electricity, peer assistance in reading for the primary grades	Skills of planning and presenting a project, experience of leading a small team
Independence (grades 8–11)	Beyond the school: studying a problem in the neighbourhood, a digital-literacy club helping older people, a school media group, a pupils’ council	Social responsibility, analysing a problem and finding resources, a basis for choosing a career path

For example, at the developmental stage pupils of grade 6 are given the following task: “Find one small problem at your school that bothers you. Draw up a plan to solve it within two weeks using your own efforts: who does what, how much time is needed, how you will measure the result. Defend the plan in class, carry it out, and present the result with photographs.” In such a task the teacher does not announce the solution in advance, but helps by asking questions, directing pupils towards resources and assisting in the analysis of the result.

The effective organisation of initiatives rests on the following pedagogical conditions: freedom of choice — pupils select the topic themselves; the right to make mistakes — an initiative that ends in failure is also analysed and is not punished; visibility — every result is presented before the class or the school; reflection — the questions “what happened, what was difficult, what will I change next time” are discussed; and coverage — the role of leader is performed in turn by different pupils over the course of the year. The last condition is particularly important: otherwise leadership again concentrates around the same few active pupils.

By way of discussion, it should be noted that small initiatives do not replace the

existing content of educational work, but enrich it with pupils' personal experience. As Mitra has shown, when pupils feel that they have genuinely influenced decisions at school, their attitude towards school and their confidence in their own abilities increase markedly [5]. A sequence of "small wins", in turn, forms in pupils the inner conviction that "I can change things" and provides a psychological foundation for larger social projects in the future.

Conclusion. It is advisable that the development of leadership at school begin not with large-scale events, but with small initiatives that pupils start and complete themselves. Pupils' leadership comprises the components of self-management, communication and cooperation, initiative and responsibility, and social influence, and these are formed step by step through initiatives at the level of the class, the school and the neighbourhood. Freedom of choice, the right to make mistakes, the visibility of results, reflection, and the involvement of all pupils constitute the principal pedagogical conditions.

Further research is planned to determine the effectiveness of the proposed model through experimental testing and to develop criteria for assessing pupils' leadership.

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