Characteristics of Students without Reciprocal Friendship during School Work

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Children's relationships with peers emerge from 3 years of age. During pre school years friendship group become structured. In the same period some children are at risk to become rejected by peers. However, there is no cause and effect from being rejected to problematic behavior (1). Most essential in middle childhood is the desire to be included in peer-group activities (2). Forces that are maintaining relations with peers have impact on social competence, but also, social adjustment gain from good quality relationships with peers. Both repulsion and popularity emerge within peer groups (3). In classrooms, popular or rejected groups have been shown to be stable over several years. Peer interaction conserves and exaggerates the cluster label (4). Students' status as either popular or rejected belong to the extremes include an unexpected similarity. Individual students within both extremes have differing self-concepts (5).The wellbeing of classmates is affected by good networks; since it has been shown that classrooms without outliers indicate a lower risk of malaise (6). The sociometric subgroups have also been shown to predict adjustment to school in longitudinal studies (e.g. 7). One problem with marginalized individuals or groups is related to whether they become discriminated or not. However, there may be several different reasons when individuals are not popular but have low status and are not chosen as members of networks within classrooms (e.g.8). There is a relation between lonely children´s feelings, social dissatisfaction and their sociometric status. Investigations including a combination of students' self-report measures and their sociometric choices of friends to work with are rare (9). This report deals with lonely students who were not chosen as workmates in the classroom by their peers. Their attitudes to school, teacher and peers were compared between each lonely student (LS) and the classmates who were included in bilateral networks in the same class.

The aim was to visualize different categories of lonely students through their attitudes to school, teacher and peers.

Methods

Self reports on attitudes from 1540 students in 78 classes in grade 6 in Göteborg (10) were used including seven within-class categories of attitudes. Each student was asked to write the name of the 3 peers he/she preferred to work with in the class room, in the order 1-3. A semi-symmetrised matrix was used for calculation in a Matlab program (11), that is only reciprocal choices were included in the networks. Lonely students, which was not chosen by any member of the class were identified, and verified by calculation in a transposed data matrix. Each lonely student was compared to the classmates within networks using one-sample t-test ufor each of the 7 categories (SPSS 17.0). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Different

types of lonely students were detected by inspection of their level of significance compared to the classmates and their attitude profile.

Conclusions, expected outcomes or Findings

Twenty-one consecutive classes were explored (10). In 17 of them 1-4 lonely students were found. Totally 29 students, 16 boys and 13 girls, of 311 were classified as lonely (9%).In each class, 2-7 independent networks with bilateral connections between the members were detected with very few examples of mixed networks (boys and girls). Seven factors were used to describe the attitudes towards school, teacher and classmates (10) , i.e. Interest in School (IS), View of Teacher (VT), Work Atmosphere (WA), Relations with Classmates (RC), View of Peers (VP), Lack of Anxiety (LA) and View of Fuss (VF).

Remarkably high attitude scores were found in 5 LS in almost all factors, and a further 6 LS either had positive or non significant (NS) scores. They were less positive in school factors (IS, VT, WA) than in the remaining peer relational factors.

Five LS had very low scores and a further 5 varied between negative and NS scores. Five LS had very uneven profiles, while 3 were not different from class mean.

Thus, the group of lonely students consisted of several categories of very different origin, some probably needing different kinds of support, others not in any risk at all.

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