

LAB EXERCISE #11

PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Learning to form social relationships that are appropriate is one of the major tasks of the preschool child's development. One of the most important social relationships is that formed with peers or children around the same age. Peers are neither adults nor children who are significantly older or younger. Those are also social relationships but they are different than peer relationships. It is in these peer relationships that students refine their self-concepts, learn new skills and understand social roles and rules. They learn to be a part of a group and to co-exist with others, important skills for being a citizen of the world.

Children's first social experiences are in their family, with parents and siblings. Extended family provides other socialization experiences. In these interactions, children learn to take turns, to consider others' feelings and wants, to give and take. Some researchers have found that these social experiences relate to intellectual and language development as well.

A child's temperament also influences these interactions. Researchers have identified 3 innate temperaments: easy, difficult and slow to warm up. These temperaments do not determine how a child will behave in groups but they do influence our customary ways of approaching new situations. For example, a slow-to-warm up child may hold back and not jump immediately into new situations. Once they become accustomed to the new setting and new people, most slow-to-warm up children can comfortably deal with the newness.

As neighborhoods become more insular and only children (or siblings with large age differences) become more common, organized educational experiences are increasingly providing these early socialization skills. Thus, how the school structures these learning experiences becomes more critical. Some children can easily enter strange play situations. Others have much more difficulty entering a new group. Some children come into preschools and daycare with negotiation skills; others must be taught these skills. But developing these social skills is critical because peers play a major role in a child's development.

Peers, for young children, serve different functions than they do for older children. Friendships are often based on proximity. Who was your best friend in preschool? The child next door? For children in daycare, their friends are often the children in the center. In the toddler years, peer relationships are more flexible than constant. Friendship is focused on doing activities rather than sharing emotions and feelings. Friends tend to be gender-segregated, especially as children get older.

In this exercise, we will be examining friendships among young children. We will also be looking at other aspects of peer relationships. We look at what children do with peers, how they resolve conflicts and how they view friends. Thus, in this exercise you will be doing some observation and some interviewing.

In Part One of the exercise, you will observe 3-4 children. Watch each for 4-5 minutes at a time. Watch the child when they are in interaction with other children or trying to join a group of children. Try to find children of different ages and genders.

Record who is involved and what happens. Review the observation guidelines of the first week before beginning.

In Part Two you will interview four children. Two (one boy, one girl) will be under 4 and two (one boy, one girl) will be over 5. Interview the children separately (after getting permission from the director) and record the answers of each.

PART ONE PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Choose at least 4 children to observe during the first part of this activity. Vary their ages and gender. Watch for 2 minutes, record, rest. Repeat.

#1

Child's First Name _____ Age _____ Gender _____

Describe physical situation. Describe what is happening. Include what other children are present, materials, adults, etc. Describe only what happens. Do not do any analysis.

#2

Child's First Name _____ Age _____ Gender _____

Describe physical situation. Describe what is happening. Include what other children are present, materials, adults, etc. Describe only what happens. Do not do any analysis.

#3

Child's First Name _____ Age _____ Gender _____

Describe physical situation. Describe what is happening. Include what other children are present, materials, adults, etc. Describe only what happens. Do not do any analysis.

#4

Child's First Name _____ Age _____ Gender _____

Describe physical situation. Describe what is happening. Include what other children are present, materials, adults, etc. Describe only what happens. Do not do any analysis.

Part Two

In Part Two of this exercise, you will interview 4 children. Two will be boys (one under 4, one over 5) and two will be girls (one under 4 and one over 5. With permission of the center staff, interview each out of earshot of the others. Ask the same questions of each. Record only what they tell you.

Boy #1 Age _____

1. Who is your best friend?

2. Why is he/she your friend?

3. What is a friend?

Boy #2 Age _____

1. Who is your best friend?

2. Why is he/she your friend?

3. What is a friend?

Girl #1 Age _____

1. Who is your best friend?
2. Why is he/she your friend?
3. What is a friend?

Girl #2 Age _____

1. Who is your best friend?
2. Why is he/she your friend?
3. What is a friend?

LAB REPORT
PART B QUESTIONS

1. What would you say are the functions of friends for the toddlers in your center?
2. How did the adults in the center teach the children to resolve conflicts? Was it effective? If so, why? If not, how could the situation be handled better?
3. Discuss the issue of temperament in peer relationships. Could you identify the temperament for the children you observed? Did it seem to affect how the children interacted? Refer to the text for a complete description of each of the temperaments.