



Social skills and the formation of friendship by preschool children  
by Dorothy Lester Baker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in  
Home Economics

Montana State University

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Abstract:

This study was designed to investigate the relationship between social skills and the formation of friendships among preschool children. Fourteen three year old children were observed during the designated free play period at a laboratory preschool. Observations were made at the beginning of the school term and again during the second quarter, after an appropriate interval had been allowed for friendship formation. During each observation, social skills were coded according to the definitions of Roopnarine and Field (1982).

Three criteria were used to identify friendship dyads: 1) socio-metric testing, 2) teacher selection and 3) rotation observation. Tabulations were made of both the social skills of each child and the number of times each child played with each of the other children in the class. According to the criteria, only one friendship dyad was identified, therefore it was not possible to determine any significant relationship between social skills and friendship formation.

The data also revealed that the girls displayed a greater number of social skills and spent less time playing with one other child than did the boys. There was only minimal consistency in the children's choices of playmates and the actual playing time between children.

The results of this study are discussed in relation to factors which may inhibit friendship formation. Suggestions for further research are given.

SOCIAL SKILLS AND THE FORMATION OF FRIENDSHIP

BY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

by

Dorothy Lester Baker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

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in

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the relationship between social skills and the formation of friendships among preschool children. Fourteen three year old children were observed during the designated free play period at a laboratory preschool. Observations were made at the beginning of the school term and again during the second quarter, after an appropriate interval had been allowed for friendship formation. During each observation, social skills were coded according to the definitions of Roopnarine and Field (1982).

Three criteria were used to identify friendship dyads: 1) sociometric testing, 2) teacher selection and 3) rotation observation. Tabulations were made of both the social skills of each child and the number of times each child played with each of the other children in the class. According to the criteria, only one friendship dyad was identified, therefore it was not possible to determine any significant relationship between social skills and friendship formation. The data also revealed that the girls displayed a greater number of social skills and spent less time playing with one other child than did the boys. There was only minimal consistency in the children's choices of playmates and the actual playing time between children. The results of this study are discussed in relation to factors which may inhibit friendship formation. Suggestions for further research are given.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Importance of Friendship

Friendships are considered valuable to adults for various reasons. They are indications of social competence, social achievement, and a mark of positive mental health (Hartup, 1978). They also provide intimate companionship and social bonds (Damon, 1977). But friendships are not only important for adults in our society. Damon (1977) states:

Friendship is the central social relation between peers during childhood. It even continues to be of primary importance when, later in life, other peer roles (acquaintance, neighbor, rival, mate) become fully elaborated and differentiated from the role of friend. In fact, friendship is so basic that we often use it as a reference point from which to characterize all our other social relations, peer or otherwise. (p. 137)

Childhood friendships furnish the foundations on which to build adult relationships. For children, friends are "someone you like." But as people mature, their conceptions of friendships should develop and advance toward a deeper understanding. During development, conceptions will encompass specific ideas on behaviors, rules, regulations,

expectations and intimacy (Youniss, 1975; Bigelow, 1977; Selman & Selman, 1979). For these developmental conceptions to unfold and grow, both friendship opportunity and experience are necessary.

Research has established that similarity factors such as age, sex and race (Hartup, 1978; Challman, 1932; Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1977) are primary in friendship selection for children. Beyond these personal characteristics, sharing and playing together are considered the fundamental elements (Furman, 1982; Selman & Selman, 1979; Bigelow, 1977) of friendship selection. Personal characteristics are relatively unchanging, but sharing and playing together develop from previously acquired social skills. Since the ability to form friendships in childhood is so important to future relationships, this study will examine social skills to determine which skills relate to the ability of a child to form a successful friendship with another child.

#### Review of Literature

For many years, peer interactions and social participation among children have been of major interest to professionals and parents alike. But only in the last ten years have friendships between children been studied so intensely.

Fifty years ago, Parten (1932) separated the social participation of children into two categories: (1) extensity, the number of social contacts made by a child, and (2) intensity, the kinds of groups in which the child participates and the role of the child while participating. She also devised a continuum of types of play through which

children progress from unoccupied behavior (no participation) to cooperative play (most involved group activity). Because of their applicability, these categories and types of play have been used in research throughout the years.

Much of this research has concentrated on the important aspect of peer interactions among preschool children. According to Lewis and Rosenblum (1975):

In its developing relations with peers, the infant has the opportunity for paced, slowly elaborating enlargement of communicative, aggressive, defensive, and cooperative skills.

(p. 6)

They explain that peer interactions supply opportunities for learning imitation and social roles, while providing time for experimentation and exploration without the potential consequences of error (Lewis & Rosenblum, 1975).

Assessing positive and negative behaviors in young children has shown that while boys are more aggressive than girls, there seems to be a development from aggressive to friendly interactions during the preschool years (Schroeer & Flapan, 1971; Yarrow & Waxler, 1976). This indicates that, through the experience of peer interactions and social participation, children learn which behaviors are more appropriate and accepted by other children. As children acquire these accepted behaviors, social competence increases. This is noteworthy, since socially competent children function better and are more successful in peer relations, school, and life in general (O'Malley, 1977; Kohn & Rosman, 1972; Hartup, 1978).

Sociometric techniques have been devised to measure the social status of children (McCandless & Marshall, 1957; Kohn & Rosman, 1972; Asher, Singleton, Tinsley & Hymel, 1979) and aid in the study of factors relating to that status. In one such study, Hartup, Glaser and Charlesworth (1967) found that social behavior is associated with social status. Children who dispensed more positive reinforcement to their peers were more accepted by their peers than those children who dispensed negative reinforcement. The results of another study showed that children who gave the most positive reinforcements also received the most, thereby engaging in reciprocal positive interaction (Charlesworth & Hartup, 1967).

Although the concepts of positive peer interactions and social competence are valuable in the social development of the child, attention has shifted to the significance of childhood friendships. Using the study technique of identifying friendship and non-friendship dyads from among groups of children before testing a particular variable, many characteristics have been related to children in friendship dyads. Green (1933) found that mutual friends were more quarrelsome (especially the boy/boy dyads), while Mann (1973) found that mutual friends shared more than non-friends. Studies testing the variables of manipulatory curiosity, toy manipulation, joint play and fantasy play (Cook & Cohen, 1978; Berger, 1980; Roopnarine & Field, 1982) revealed that children in friendship dyads performed at higher levels of curiosity, toy manipulation and play than those in non-friendship dyads.

Friends were more successful at sustaining each other's attention and sharing information (George & Krantz, 1981) and needed to use fewer attention-getting devices (Cohen & Melson, 1980) than non-friends. Melson (1980) concluded that the language of children changed both quantitatively and qualitatively when playing with friends compared with non-friends. This inference has been confirmed in studies by George & Krantz (1981), Berger (1980), and Cohen and Melson (1980). A different aspect of friendship was studied when researchers observed the behaviors of friends while separated, and when reunited (Berger, 1980; Melson, 1980; Melson & Cohen, 1981). The results showed that behaviors and verbalizations were dramatically different with the highest quality displayed during reunion. All these studies support Hartup's (1975) statement:

Thus it is possible to distinguish three components of friendship: (a) differentiated behavior by one individual in the presence of another individual, (b) differentiated activity in the absence of the same individual, and (c) conceptual activity relevant to this relationship. (p. 12)

#### Determinants of Friends

Although similar age, sex and race are primary factors in selecting a friend, sharing and playing together are also important variables. According to Hartup (1975) both the quantity and quality of the social interaction between children are important to the formation of a friendship. Children's selections of friends are influenced most by the common activities shared and the specific

interactions between them and the other child (Hayes, Gershman & Bolin, 1980; Furman, 1982). Reciprocal interactions seem to be an important variable in friendship formation. Positive reinforcing and neutral acts which are dispensed and received between children tend to create this reciprocity (Masters & Furman, 1981; Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1977). Altruistic characteristics such as sharing, helping and empathy also facilitate reciprocal behavior (Hartup, 1975; Marcus, 1980). These reciprocal interactions are dependent on the social skills of the children involved.

Gottman and Parkhurst (1980) hypothesize that a hierarchy of interactional events builds as children become friends. They state that "lower events in the hierarchy, if successfully completed by the application of specific social skills, make it possible to proceed to other events that create greater intimacy" (p. 242). Although their study focused on verbal interactions, behavioral interactions (social skills) are also factors in this process.

#### Rationale for this Study

Childhood friendship plays an essential role in the social and cognitive development of a child. It provides a relationship in which the child can attempt diverse adult roles, problem-solving techniques, affection giving, and other interpersonal skills while enhancing his/her self-esteem (Furman, 1982). Many studies have shown that social skills are important aspects of friendships and that children in friendship dyads perform these skills at higher levels.

Roopnarine and Field (1982) identify and categorize frequently observed behaviors (fantasy, social activities, verbal interactions, facial expressions) and discuss those behaviors that are common to children who have formed friendships. However, their data do not reveal if social skills contributed to friendship formation or whether having friends increased children's social skills. This knowledge is necessary for caregivers and teachers so that they may provide an environment to promote friendship (Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1977). Also, teachers may be able to provide opportunities to enhance particular social skills with individual children. The present study investigated the relationship between social skills and friendship formation.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine which social skills from the categories of verbal interactions, fantasy play and social behaviors are related to the formation of a friendship between preschool children.

#### Hypotheses

There were two null hypotheses that were addressed in this study:

- 1) There will be no relationship between the social skills of verbal interactions, fantasy play, and social behaviors and the formation of friendships between preschool children.
- 2) Children who have formed friendships will not display more social skills than children who have not formed friendships.



## CHAPTER 2

## METHOD

This chapter includes the techniques and procedures used for data collection and the data analysis. For the purpose of this study, the following criteria were used to assure that a friendship was not unilateral but reciprocal: (1) the dyad was voluntary in that both children sought the presence and companionship of the other child (Furman, 1982), (2) the rate and duration of their interactions were substantial in that the children spent over 50% of the free-play time together (Challman, 1932; Hayes, Gershman & Bolin, 1980), and (3) the quality of their interactions were positive in that the children shared, helped and played cooperatively (Charlesworth & Hartup, 1967; Damon, 1977).

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 14 preschool children (7 boys and 7 girls) attending the Child Development Center at Montana State University. The class met on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings for 2½ hours. Their ages ranged from 2/10 to 3/6 at the beginning of the fall term. The children came from white, middle-class families which was typical for children attending any preschool class in Bozeman, Montana.

### Techniques for Data Collection

The techniques chosen for this study have been used in previous studies (Roopnarine & Field, 1982; Masters & Furman, 1981; Connolly & Doyle, 1981).

#### Observations

Two observational techniques were employed in this study: time-sampling and rotation.

Time-Sampling. This technique refers to observing a particular child for a precise time-unit, then recording the behavior displayed by that child. This is repeated for a specified number of intervals. The recorded data then serve as a representative sample of that child's general behavior. Time-sampling was used to collect social skills data and is described in detail in the Procedures for Data Collection section. This technique has been used frequently (Masters & Furman, 1981; Gottman, Gonso & Rasmussen, 1975; Yarrow & Waxler, 1976; Connolly & Doyle, 1981) with reliability determined by interrater agreement.

Rotation. This technique refers to systematic rotation in a particular area, by an observer. In this study, it consisted of systematically rotating through the preschool every five minutes, for a total of 50 rotations over a two week period (Roopnarine & Field, 1982). In each "learning center", the observer recorded each child's name, the activity or interaction, and the nature of the play

(positive, negative or neutral). Positive play included giving positive attention and approval, giving affection, submitting, sharing and giving (Charlesworth & Hartup, 1967). Negative play included quarreling, disapproval, taking or damaging property and physical attack (Masters & Furman, 1981). Neutral play consisted of all activities not included in either the positive or negative category. This was a source of measurement for the frequency and duration (using the five minute intervals), plus the quality of interactions between children, to aid in the determination of friendship dyads.

#### Picture Sociometric Test

The picture sociometric test was administered to the children individually by the researcher. The children selected, from photographs of their classmates, three children with whom they liked to play most and three children with whom they did not like to play. The names of the children preferred and the reasons given were recorded for each child. Before selection began, the children identified each of the photographs. The picture sociometric test chosen for this study came from Moore and Updegraff (1964). By adapting and compiling a picture sociometric test (McCandless & Marshall, 1957) with an individual verbal interview, a deeper understanding into the perception of friendship by children was revealed. This technique has been used frequently by researchers (Hartup, 1964; Masters & Furman, 1981; Tolan & Krantz, 1981) and is considered a valid measure for friendship status.

### Teacher Selection

The head teacher listed and ranked, beside each child's name, the three children she considered to be the best liked by that child. There was no specific criterion given to the teacher. Various forms of teacher selections have been employed by researchers (Cook & Cohen, 1978; McCandless & Marshall, 1957; Marcus, 1980) and are useful as an additional source for determining friendships.

### Procedures for Data Collection

This study was divided into three major components so that all necessary data were collected at the most appropriate time.

#### Prior to Friendship Formation

To collect social skills data on the children prior to their forming friendships, observations were made during the indoor free-play time of the first seven days of preschool. The social skills displayed by each child were coded in 5 five-minute observation sessions, using a time-sampling technique. In each session, an observer watched a particular child for 10 seconds, then coded his/her social skills behavior. This continued for 30 consecutive time-sampling units (Roopnarine & Field, 1982). The specific social skills, or independent variables, that were observed and coded (Roopnarine & Field, 1982), along with the definitions adopted for this study are as follows:

## A. Verbal Interactions

1. question - inquiring; asking for information ("Are you playing with that doll?")
2. request - asking permission; asking someone to comply to own wishes ("Will you dress this doll?")
3. imperative - a command; strong demand ("Give that doll back to me!")
4. statement - a declaration; giving information; recorded as positive, negative or neutral ("I put a hat on my doll.")

## B. Fantasy Play

1. domestic - house, food preparation or eating, doctor, phone calls, family, pets, working, or any realistic situation
2. adventure - monsters, superheroes, TV characters, or any unrealistic situation

## C. Social Behaviors

1. directing - managing, controlling or conducting the other children in play
2. submitting - being directed by or complying to the wishes of others in play; accepting ideas or suggestion in play
3. giving - positively (handing to other) or negatively (thrusting on other)

4. taking - positively (offered by other) or negatively (grab or grasp from other)
5. sharing - dividing or playing cooperatively with same toys or materials
6. helping - assisting or giving aid (verbal or active)
7. imitation - impersonating other; repeating some manner or action
8. watching - observing or looking at others only; no interaction or participation
9. fighting - active or verbal struggle; defiance; disagreement; disruptive or aggressive behavior

Since this study was concerned with the social skills relating to peer friendship, only the behaviors and interactions with other children were coded. Any behaviors/verbalizations exhibited when the child was alone or any interactions with teachers/adults were disregarded on the coding sheet.

#### Identifying Friendships

Three procedures were used to determine friendship dyads in order to assure that a particular child was able to form a reciprocal friendship. These procedures were (1) rotation observation, (2) a picture sociometric test, and (3) teacher selection. They were administered according to the description in the Techniques for Data Collection section of this text. An appropriate interval of four months had been allowed for friendship formation.

### Following Friendship Formation

In order to assure that the social skills displayed by each child were consistently assessed, the data collection procedure employed at the beginning of the study was duplicated: observations of social skills were coded during 5 five-minute sessions using the consecutive time-sampling units. Although the code sheets were identical to the first observation, a code of 1 or 0 was added for this observation, with a code of 1 indicating that a child interacted with his/her friend and a code of 0 indicating he/she interacted with a non-friend.

### Data Analysis

An interrater reliability agreement of .91 was obtained during a pre-study observation period. The researcher and a qualified, trained observer, simultaneously watching the same child, coded the social skills observed on a study code sheet using the time-sampling units described in the method. Agreement was randomly checked three times during the data collection process to assure that it remained above the .90 level.

Since only one friendship dyad was found in this study, no relationship between social skills and the formation of friendships was determined. However, the observational data were used to discuss some issues pertaining to friendships, and the environment of the center.

### Scoring

Tabulations from the time-sampling code sheets used in the social skills observations consisted of totaling the number of times each social skill was coded for each child. Each child had scores from before and after friendship formation. (See Appendix)

To assess the quantity of interactions from the rotation observation, tabulations were made on (1) the number of times each child played with each of the other children, and (2) the duration of the play (Challman, 1932). The quality of the interaction depended on the cooperativeness of activity and the positiveness of play. Friendship dyads were defined as those in which the children spent more than 50% of the free-play time together, in either positive or neutral play (Hayes, Gershman & Bolin, 1980).

Friendship dyads from the sociometric test were determined on the basis that both children designated the other as either their first or second choice of playmates. The teacher selection instrument was scored in the same manner as the sociometric test. If a friendship dyad was identified at least 2 out of the 3 procedures, it was accepted as a reciprocal friendship, indicating that those children had formed a friendship.

### Analyses

Since interactions with friends and non-friends were also coded while observations were made on the social skills following friendship formation, a randomization model was employed (Levin, Marascuilo & Hubert, 1978). From the total of 150 time-sampling units (5 x 30)



for each child, there was a random selection of 15 observations from interactions with his/her friends and 15 observations from interactions with non-friends. A phi coefficient was calculated for friends/non-friends and social skills displayed/social skills not displayed on each child and each social skill to obtain summary measures that were approximately independent random variables.

In addition, a frequency tally and comparison of the means were made on each social skill for each child, to determine the difference between the social skills displayed by children who have formed friendships and those who have not formed friendships.

## CHAPTER 3

## RESULTS

Friendship Dyad

According to the definition and guidelines stated in Chapter 2, only one friendship dyad was identified in this study. The boys in the dyad were similar in height and the youngest in the class.

Dyad Criteria

During the sociometric test, both the children in the friendship dyad chose the other as first choice, without hesitation, when asked who they liked to play with the most. Their reasons were "I like him" and "He loves me and I love him". The teacher also considered these children as best liked by each other. During rotation through the center, these children were found to play with each other 58% of the free play time. The highest percentage of time each played with another child was 20% and 24% and it was with the same boy.

Social Behavior

Of the 19 social skills observed, one of the boys in the friendship dyad displayed seven of the skills at the beginning of the study and exhibited eight of the social skills after formation of the friendship. The other boy in the dyad performed 14 of the social skills at the beginning, decreasing to seven at the end of the study.

Only the score of 14 was above the average of 9.43 social skills displayed by the seven boys in the class and by the total class.

Table 1. The mean number of social skills displayed by the children.

Category of Children	Beginning of Study	End of Study
Girls	9.43	10.14
Boys	9.43	8.00
Total Class	9.43	9.07

These data confirm the second null hypothesis of this study: Children who have formed friendships will not display more social skills than children who have not formed friendships.

The data collected after friendship formation showed that while one of the boys in the dyad was helping, taking, making neutral statements and asking questions, the other boy was submitting, giving and fighting. A phi coefficient was calculated on these social skills, but was non-significant ( $p < .05$ ). This indicates that the social skills were independent of each other and of the formation of friendship. These data confirm the first null hypothesis of this study: There will be no relationship between the social skills of verbal interactions, fantasy play, and social behaviors and the formation of friendships between preschool children.

The play engaged in by the boys in the friendship dyad included 1) running around and tumbling, 2) blocks, both wooden and bristle, 3) "water table" activities, no matter which medium was being used, and 4) activities such as art, scissors, cooking, play dough, and

reading books. Even when there was no interaction between the boys or no common goal being attained, they were together, often excluding others. During observations of the social skills, it was noted that when the boy who submitted and gave to the other was absent or removed by a teacher, the other boy was unable to get involved in other activities, wandered, ignored others, followed after his friend, or looked for his friend when he was missing. At the reunion, his behavior returned to normal.

#### Sociometric Choices and Play Interactions

A tally was made of the number of contacts each child had with each of the other children from the rotation observations. From this tally, percentages were calculated according to the total number of contact (or playing) opportunities. For each child in the class, the three children who received the highest contact percentages were ranked and labeled "most play" for that child. A class median of 31% was calculated when the greatest contact percentage for each child was ranked. Because of the skewed distribution of these percentages, a median was used to more clearly represent the group.

#### Choices of Children

During the sociometric test, six of the 14 children mutually designated another child as one of the first two children they liked to play with most: the boys in the friendship dyad, and four girls. But only two of these girls chose one of the children in her "most play" list. Five children (4 boys, 1 girl) mutually disliked another

child, while five children (1 boy, 4 girls) stated they disliked a child who was listed as one of their "most play".

The girls designated other girls as best liked in 90% of their choices and identified boys as disliked in 73%. The boys, however, chose boys as best liked only 50% of the time, and disliked girls 47%. Although the girls showed a higher same sex preference in playmates, all the children, except the boys in the friendship dyad, had at least one classmate of the opposite sex on their "most play" list. When ranking the highest percentage of time each child spent with another child, other gender differences were shown. Six of the boys played with another child above the median of 31% of the free play time, and five of these were boy/boy pairs. The girls were divided equally; three played more with other girls, three played more with boys, and one played with a boy and girl equal percentages of time. Only one girl played with another child (a boy) above the median percentage of time.

There was no consistency in the number of times a child was chosen as best liked or disliked and the number of times he/she was listed as "most play". The three children chosen most often as best liked, were not listed most often as "most play". The child who was listed most often in "most play" lists, was never chosen as best liked, but was identified as disliked by four peers (the highest number given).

Although the teacher could not select a best liked peer for three of the children, others had two best liked. Of the girls, two of the seven the teacher chose matched with their "most play" list and four of the seven paired with the children's sociometric choices. Of the

boys, eight of the ten selections corresponded with their "most play" list, but only three of the ten matched with the sociometric choices of the children.

#### Reasons for Choices

The children stated two very common reasons for choosing another child as someone they liked to play with most. The most frequent reply was "He/She is my friend", and the next was "I like him/her". "He/She is not my friend" was the most stated response for disliked children, while "I don't like him/her" and "He/She hits me" were equal as second reasons.

#### Social Skills

From the observation code sheets, tabulations were made on the number of times each child displayed each of the social skills described in Chapter 2. The tabulations were ranked and a mean was calculated for each social skill, along with a list of the children who performed that skill above the mean.

The means for 10 of the 19 social skills increased and six decreased for the total class during the study (see Table 2). When the means were divided by gender, a difference was found. The means were raised for 11 of the 19 social skills for the girls; however, only five were raised for the boys. Five means decreased for the girls and 10 means decreased for the boys.

The social skills that had an increase by the boys and the girls were positive taking, helping, neutral statements and domestic play.

Imitating, positive statements, imperatives and requests were the social skills that showed a decrease in both girls and boys.

A greater number of girls than boys performed 13 of the 19 social skills above the average number of times performed by the class as a whole (see Table 3). The total number of girls who displayed these skills also increased from the beginning of the study to the end. The number of boys decreased. Two of the social skills which showed an increase by girls and a decrease by boys were watching and fighting.

Table 2. The mean number of times each social skill was performed by the children before friendship formation (at the beginning of the study) and after friendship formation (at the end of the study).

Social Skill	Total Class		Girls		Boys	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
<b>Social Behavior</b>						
Directing	.50	.79	.29	.86	.71	.71
Submitting	.29	.43	.14	.57	.43	.29
Positive Giving	1.00	.64	.86	.86	1.14	.43
Negative Giving	0	0	0	0	0	0
Positive Taking	.71	.86	.71	.86	.71	.86
Negative Taking	.43	.43	.29	.45	.57	.43
Sharing	1.29	2.07	1.86	3.86	.71	.29
Helping	.43	1.71	.57	2.14	.29	1.29
Imitating	2.93	1.71	3.86	3.00	2.00	.43
Watching	46.71	34.43	33.43	38.43	60.00	30.43
Fighting	.36	.21	0	.29	.71	.14
<b>Verbal Interaction</b>						
Positive Statement	2.64	.29	3.00	.29	2.29	.29
Negative Statement	1.00	1.14	1.00	1.43	1.00	.86
Neutral Statement	12.07	27.36	13.43	29.71	10.71	25.00
Questions	2.00	2.29	1.71	1.57	2.29	3.00
Imperatives	.79	.36	.71	.57	.86	.14
Requests	2.64	1.21	3.14	1.57	2.14	.86
<b>Fantasy Play</b>						
Domestic	2.00	17.21	1.57	16.71	2.43	17.71
Adventure	.29	.29	.57	.57	0	0



Table 3. The number of children who performed each social skill above the mean of the total class.

Social Skill	Beginning of Study		End of Study	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Social Behavior				
Directing	2	3	3	2
Submitting	1	2	3	2
Positive Giving	1	2	3	2
Negative Giving	0	0	0	0
Positive Taking	3	5	3	5
Negative Taking	1	2	1	2
Sharing	5	1	3	0
Helping	3	1	3	3
Imitating	4	2	5	1
Watching	2	4	4	2
Fighting	0	4	2	1
Verbal Interaction				
Positive Statement	2	2	2	2
Negative Statement	2	1	3	1
Neutral Statement	3	2	4	3
Questions	2	2	3	4
Imperatives	3	2	3	1
Requests	3	1	4	1
Fantasy Play				
Domestic	2	2	3	2
Adventure	1	0	1	0
Totals	40	38	53	34

## CHAPTER 4

## DISCUSSION

Since only one friendship dyad was found in this study, it was not possible to determine any significant relationship between social skills and the formation of friendship between preschool children. The data did, however, support earlier research concerning friendship dyads. The children in the friendship dyad in this study were the same sex, height, race, and age (Hartup, 1978; Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1977). In addition, they played together 58% of the free play time, which supports the findings of Furman (1982) and Bigelow (1977). According to the stages of friendship developed by Selman and Selman (1979), the boys belonged in stages 0 and 1. Stage 0 was indicated by the physical similarities and the exclusion of play toward others. Stage 1 was implied by the one-way assistance of one child doing what the other wanted. Both stages are appropriate for their ages.

The behaviors of the children in the dyad during separation and reunion (disoriented then normal) gave support to the studies by Berger (1980), Melson (1980) and Melson and Cohen (1981). However, the boys in this dyad did not show a higher level of fantasy play, verbal use or taking turns directing and submitting over the children who had not formed friendships (Roopnarine & Field, 1982).

The results of this study have raised some new questions. Why was only one friendship dyad formed? Why was there only minimal

consistency in the children's choices with whom they best liked to play and with whom they actually played? Why was the interaction level of the class so low? Why did the girls perform more social skills than the boys? An evaluation of the center and the play of the children gave some insights into these issues.

The Child Development Center is a laboratory school where university students learn to be teachers of young children. Therefore, the teacher/child ratio often reaches 1:3. Although in many ways that is an advantage, for socialization purposes it may be a disadvantage. The center is "activity" oriented to provide a variety of learning experiences for the children, yet allows fantasy play to develop in several of the learning centers. Data collected by observation revealed that an average of 45% of the designated free play time for each child was spent in an experience shared with a teacher (either alone or with others). These data showed that when a teacher was present, peer interaction decreased sharply or was terminated completely. Often the teacher would suppress or eliminate the need for the children to use social skills by: 1) providing enough materials so that sharing was not necessary, 2) giving directions so that the children need not help each other, or 3) redirecting so that verbal exchanges were not completed. This may account for the low level of social skills observed in the class, since interactions with peers were the only ones coded.

The activity-oriented center may also inhibit friendship formation and contribute to the inconsistency of whom the children choose as playmates. One possibility is that, with such a variety of

experiences and activities from which to choose, the children may not really focus on other children but only on the enjoyment of the experience. Another possibility is that these activities may actually prevent the children from initiating and developing play with each other, since the necessity of entertaining themselves is removed. Since playing together is one of the primary factors in selecting a friend (Furman, 1982; Bigelow, 1977; Selman & Selman, 1979) a limited amount of free play may curb the formation of friendships.

The observations revealed that the boys played with another child for a greater percentage of time than the girls, perhaps indicating some future friendships. Previously reported research indicated that more social skills were performed by children who had friends than by children who did not have friends. However, in this present study the social skills decreased for the boys as a group. One of the boys in the friendship dyad displayed fewer than the average number of social skills. The social skills performed by the other boy (although above the average) declined to half (from 14 to 7) during the course of the study. If social skills are not necessarily performed between friends at a high rate, then as the boys in this class start forming pairs, their displayed social skills may decrease. Further research completed in a naturalistic setting is needed to clarify the discrepancy between these findings.

This inconsistency with other research may also explain the higher number of social skills displayed by the girls. Six of the seven girls in this class showed a lower percent (below median) of time played with any one child, implying less preference in playmates.





















