



## PRE-SCHOOL FRIENDSHIP AND PLAY. POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS – A COMPARATIVE REPORT

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### **Abstract:**

The family is the first area of social relations crucial to the child's social learning, while the school for its part offers a complementary and supportive field of interactions. The aim is, among other things, to develop social skills that allow the child to adapt smoothly to the class group and to develop interpersonal relationships with those around him. But what about pre-school children? To what extent can they develop collaborative and interaction skills with their peers? Whether they can develop "friendships" at this age and what is the cultural dimension to these questions?

**Keywords:** friendship, preschool age, peer group, game, cultural dimension

### **1. Introduction**

When we use the term collaboration skills, we refer to a number of techniques aimed at creating social relationships and interactions in their handling. The development of social competence as a concept is used to show the desired expected effect of a child's development (Schaffer, 1996). These skills include the ability to communicate properly, which in turn requires the ability to imagine yourself in each other's shoes, empathy.

The development of social skills allows the child to adapt smoothly to the class group and develop interpersonal relationships with those around him. As Kiridis says, family is the first area of social relations crucial to the child's social learning, while the school for its part offers a complementary and supportive field of interactions (Kyridis, 1996).

While children through their interaction with their family and their parents can learn how to behave in a context of social hierarchy, from contacts with other children they learn better how to survive between equals in a wide range of social situations. (Rubin, 1980).

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As Hinde (1979): reports "*Our ability to work together increases with age, collaboration is a challenge throughout life.*" Moreover, it takes considerable time and effort, as can be seen from the description of the above incident, to create a truly participatory interaction and even more time and effort for a true participatory relationship. But what about pre-school children? To what extent can they develop collaborative and interaction skills with their peers? How much can they develop "friendships" at this age?

## 2. The Possibilities for Cooperation in Early Childhood

We are carving out the conversation between a group of children located in the corner of the building material. The group consists of 3 boys and 2 girls who try to build a house - farm to put animals in.

Lefteris: "*we will put around the wooden (bricks).*"

Theocharis: "*No, we're going to put them up to make it huge.*"

Lefteris: "*Highs will fall and will not become too big..(while the two boys are trying to decide, Thomas and Lydia have already started to place the blocks, around and around, but also some on top of each other..)*"

Lefteris: "*Come on, we said we'll put them around. I know why I have seen it in the movie. You don't know... (there is a fight and the two boys try to get as much as they can, so that each one can build their own farm..)*"

Lydia: "*Thomas, come quickly, so we can finish it first.*"

Thomas quickly follows Lydia's command, while Nicole is added to the group, which also begins to take bricks...

Lydia: "*Nicole, go away we're playing now...*"

Nicole: "*Why, I want to play... Look, I can help you get this over with quickly...*"

Lydia: "*All right, you and Thomas bring me the red. Only the red ones...*"

In the meantime, Lefteris and Theocharis each build their own construction, but they slowly realize that there are not enough bricks for everyone.

Nicole: "*Why don't you want to put the blocks together?*"

The construction for everyone is unfinished, while the fighting and tension swell.

Nicole: "*Why don't we put it all on?*"

The children agree and begin to share the blocks and place them in different ways seeing their work completed collectively. In the end, they show it excitedly to the rest of the class and hug tightly... The next day, entering the classroom, they start, the same team, to build the same construction, while the same team "plays" at the break and in the free time of the clock in the free corners of the class.

As Rogoff (1990) states, children before the age of two can coordinate their actions with another peer and at an elementary level. Successful interaction depends on the presence of a supporting factor, that of the adult who coordinates and facilitates the communication or processing of a project and in the incident described above (Hartup, 1983). After this age, however, children's interactions and their ability to cooperate are

enhanced, while they begin to collaborate, to engage together with the game in order to solve a problem and in particular begin to engage in games that are not based on discussion or that do not require children to take on more than one role (Brownell & Carriger, 1991).

Children at this age develop their ability to symbolize and performance, increase their mobility, socialize with other children and their communication ability so that they can understand something together and solve a problem collectively. Although, as Corsaro (1985) and Garvey (1987) children during the game devise scenarios, justify their views and occasionally compromise, however, the ability to cooperate is more limited. Although they can share the means and alternate in their activities, they cannot explain their views, they can make up for their failure in a joint project while sticking to specific competing solutions, such as obstruction and persistence in the incident described above (Miller, 1987, Selman, 1980).

But what are these difficulties due to this age?

As Garvey points out (1987), in order to solve a problem, all peers are required to target this very goal, something that pre-school children cannot do because the game allows goals to be switched and in order to avoid failure they redefine their goals in every obstacle that is evident in this example. A second reason that pre-schoolers have difficulty interacting and solving a problem is that cognitively and evolutionarily they cannot switch to other strategies or dimensions of a problem (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Children of this age have a self-centered thought that directs them to see only one dimension of the problem (Piaget, 1965) and find it difficult to avoid distraction and distraction. (Cooper & Cooper, 1984). Another limitation to achieving a solution to a collective problem is the nature and nature of the problem and the degree of difficulty. For example, the cooperation of experienced children in a problem goes more smoothly and has more time viability than the collaboration of children who are more beginners (Azmitia, 1989).

As Vygotsky (1978) says, the acquisition of the ability by beginner children, during the collaboration with more experienced children, is influenced by the renegotiation of problem-solving roles (as we see in the example), so that beginners gradually increase their participation in the project until they reach the point of solving the problem themselves. Of course it should be noted that there is difficulty in renegotiating roles because children at this age, as we can see from the description of the incident, are not easily reconciled and do not reconcile the requirements of the project with those of the management of cooperation. Cooperation, among other things, can be maintained if the work is familiar to children or when it has been successfully completed, resulting in children receiving mental satisfaction and feedback to repeat it (Rogoff, 1990).

### **3. Theoretical Approaches to Friendship**

According to Youssis (1994) children build themselves through collaboration with their friends, but also with their parents, and in order for this process to succeed, they must take into account the ideas of others, be good listeners, reach consensus with them,

recognize the principle of reciprocity and share personal reserves for mutual benefit. Peer cultures are a world in which everyone relies on themselves, separate from children's relationships with adults, a world that serves important positive evolutionary functions.

Moreover, Corsaro (1985) argues that these cultures allow the child to create a sense of distance and distance from adults, while at the same time they are environments in which children's interests and concerns can come to light, preparing them to pass smoothly in adolescence, where there the need for independence and the search for personal space is inevitable. Through the cultures of peers, children accept rules and thus reflect the relationships and social institutions of adult societies (Sluckin, 1981). Through play and rituals, children come to terms with the goals, values and attitudes of the wider adult society. But in peer relations not everything is calm as mentioned above.

There is also the "*problematic dimension*" of these relationships, such as violent behavior, tease, aggression. the intense conflicts between rival groups and individuals. (Olweus, 1993). The cultural dimension and the different cultural perceptions of aggression for the tolerance of atypical social behavior, what is ultimately social ability and how important it plays in the different cultures, and not only of Western society, is a visual to be mentioned, but because of the limited scope of the motion will not be analysed.

*"From the first years of his life the child has the need to feel that he belongs to a group, a feeling that can only be realized through friendships with other children"* (Rubin, 1987, p. 22). The creation of groups enables a child to have membership, the exclusivity to belong somewhere, providing him with security, whereas otherwise, rejection results in the development of stralasts in groups, while on a personal level, if it is total has consequences and is reflected in the subsequent life of the child (Sullivan, 1940).

#### **4. Peer Group – Play and Cultural Dimension**

The peer group could interact in the school environment during the break and in the game, where there is not so much control from adults. The school yard, which according to Sluckin (1981) offers a lot of knowledge about adult life, helps create these groups where individuals come together with a community of interests and goals. While pre-school children spend time creating and protecting their toys, having in this way the feeling of emotion and emotional security, in pre-teens children who easily create and maintain group activities, pay special attention to the issues of acceptance, popularity and solidarity of the group (Corsaro, 1997).

Children, in order to join such a group of peers, must have acquired "social skills", such as the ability to communicate properly through joint action, which requires the ability to be able to imagine yourself in each other's place, to participate in joint activities, to be discreet, to share without conflict, to accept and to support peers, settle conflicts (Rubin, 1987) have these skills that can be acquired by direct guidance or examples of their classmates. Playing at the break and language in the school yard contribute to gender awareness and for girls I am a form of aid to boys (Grugeon, 1993).

For boys we have focal interests – a special set of values, interests, problems that are central to the group – that revolve around the perception of masculinity, cruelty, cool comfort, self-confidence and physical competition, while for girls in the focal interests dominates romance, love and emotional expression (Adler P., Kless S., Adler P., 1992). From kindergarten, parents and teachers encourage "familiar" for each gender, activities, but also to be with children of the same sex. After all, the similarity in activities and style of interaction still exists more strongly in adolescence (Berndt, 1996) although the importance of playing in the yard generally diminishes and the social interests of teenagers are not as visible to the educational staff (Blatsford, 1998).

Here should be mentioned the cultural dimension for gender differentiation in terms of play, because studies in other societies, such as African Americans and Latinos, boys and girls are less segregated in their game than white middle-class children, and the nature of the group's activities and values are very different. (Goodwin, 1990). The game in preschool age is based on human communication, prevention, implies all social and communication skills (social mindplay) and requires the negotiation of common perception at various levels at the same time serving an important function for the development of the relationship between one self and another, while according to Vygotsky (1978), it helps children acquire skills, social visual and cultural roles that are more advanced than their "real" abilities, while for prepubescent and then adolescence, necessary.

## **5. Aggression – Conflicts and Cultural Dimension**

During the game in schools – at the time of the break- where children interact, conflicts are created, from which we will refer to rejection, "playful banter" and "malicious" but also to aggression giving a cultural dimension. To join a child in a group you need to know access strategies, be careful and subtle in manners, without this being absolute and always successful. Rejection after a group's approach, for boys, is related, according to Blatsford (1998) to aggression, while for girls with a good or no image of themselves. Rejection creates a category of children different from that of popular children but also that of neglected with the use of sociometric techniques to research the popularity of children (Schaffer, 1996).

The stake according to the survey data (Smith, 1991b) is also about family data, such as a lack of affection and a lack of cohesion in the family. The stalwarts / victims and the manifestation of their problems, such as physical violence, aggression, are contradictory within the groups, with victims of shy and marginalized children with a lack of social skills that may also be integrated into this two-way way of behaving. But another aggression and other intense conflict resolution that must be done to teach children to ask for their rights and express their feelings during the game, which is the main area of them.

Children through good-natured banter and conflicts develop strategies and ways to deal with them, become more flexible, smarter, and that is why the intervention of the teacher or parent should be non-existent. As Goodwin argues (1990) conflicts and

cooperation are processes with common elements that are enriched in the broader spirit of the game and which, depending on the culture and cultural environment that take place, are also very important or not. For example, parents from cultural societies such as Thailand had a different perception, classifying a conflict less alarming, less unusual, and more likely to improve automatically (Whiting, B. B. & Edwards, C. P. 1988).

So the school yard is a special environment, where peers dominate, forming groups with rules and cultural elements from adult life, establishing gender boundaries and power relationships, with the position of humor, tease, pretend game, exploring each other's perspective, making the "culture of peers" different and distinct from that of adults.

## 6. Friendship – Criteria – Social dimension

The group is a social entity that exceeds the level of individual personality and relationships of the two persons. (Selman, 1980). So, what about the binary relationship of friendship?

The key feature that separates friends from peers is the mutual obligation and interdependence developed through mutual offering. The interaction that involves the act of both, transforms the individual process into a social, enabling individuals to classify reality through interaction and mutual reflection (Piaget, 1956). Typical is the example of the 12-year-old girl who has appointed a friend who "*helps you understand how you feel*" (Youssis, 1994).

Empathy, the ability to stand metaphorically and see the relationship from one's perspective, is a skill that evolves and can be seen as a sign of cognitive and social maturation, as interaction relationships evolve by becoming closer, more intimate. (Schaffer, 1996). Friends through this intimacy of the relationship, collaborate, help each other for spiritual and personal progress by making concessions, discussing, justifying, confronting arguments (Youssis, 1994). Loyalty, camaraderie, security as well as fairness and reliability depend on mutual understanding and determine quality in friendship. But what are the ingredients of friendship?

Resemblance is a basis. Similarity in interests, preferences, attitudes towards other members of the group, values, a criterion common to adolescence later. Complementarity, according to Rubin (1987), is another criterion of friendship building, in which everyone brings to the relationship something special, each learns something to the other, acting as a role model that can copy the desired property and playing a role in the process of mental development (White, 1972). The one who supports his friend at a difficult time, and the one with whom he will share the secrets, the one with whom one can be sincere, "*the friend with the appropriate responsibilities and mutual contribution*" are criteria for building a friendship, not only pre-adolescents but also teenagers, albeit more intensely and with more segregated boundaries.

But despite the terms of mutual offer, open discussion and cooperation, and Piaget's view (1965) that there is no self except through each other's relationships, friendship can also have negative feelings, conflicts, intense influence, but not dangerous

(Coleman, 1961). Loss can bring about feelings of loneliness, depression, anger, and here the role of family and teachers is decisive.

## **7. Teachers Contribution**

As Selman mentions (1980) friendship is one of the strongest motivations in a project to successfully complete, as is the ability to combine groups of children whose abilities do not differ significantly and to select projects that each child's skills are not so evident in. Positive support from the educator for the gradual change of behavior and verbal guidance are effective strategies in the direction of improving social development (Asher & Renshaw, 1981).

The teacher can organize activities such as theatrical play, dramatization, or approaches through literary texts, appropriate role-playing games or rules that contribute to the development of social skills. In most of these activities, social learning is cultivated without becoming an end, in an indirect and natural way. However, new teaching practices such as interdisciplinary approach, work projects, group collaborative teaching, are teaching suggestions in small groups and offer opportunities for more interaction (Kanakis, 2001; Matsagouras, 2000).

In conclusion, we would like to refer to the role of adults and the family in terms of friendship and social relations. Parents reflect views on their children's social relationships. A typical example is children adopting "participatory" or "exclusive" interaction patterns. The need for a balance between independence and control, freedom and intrusiveness, the discretion that adults should have in all children's activities, the creation of friendly relationships, in the view that the child should by nature, go to self-regulation, to self-control, to self-realization, in self-government and these are important factors in encouraging and creating healthy social relationships of communication and interaction.

## **8. Recommendations**

Through this paper, we tried to see how children in preschool age develop collaborative and interaction skills with their peers, what are the difficulties and limitations and whether they can develop "friendships" and how teacher could contribute.

## **9. Conclusion**

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factors in encouraging and creating healthy social relationships of communication and interaction.

### **About the Author**

Paraskevi Foti is a Coordinator of the Primary and Secondary Education at the 3rd Region of Attica (Greek Ministry of Education) and formerly Head of the 4th Kindergarten of Agia Varvara. She has studied piano and higher theory at the National Conservatory of Athens and has completed her master's degree in Intercultural Education and Management of Diversity. She completed her second degree in Psychology at Ethnic Kai Kapodistrian University of Athens with a specialization in Psychology and at the same department she completed her doctoral dissertation with the title: "The contribution of ancient Greek language to art and language of Aesop and the added value of ICT Technology". Her first book, entitled "Otherness, Prejudice and Stereotypes in the School Class. Teacher Management Methods" (2016, Athens: Grigoris) was selected as a university textbook at Harokopeio University of Athens and has participated in a collective volume on Teaching Scripts through ICT. (2017, Athens: Grigoris). He has published in international and national conference proceedings as well as in scientific journals and has a keen interest in Information and Communication Technologies and their contribution to the teaching process while being an eTwinning and Moodle trainer in support of open source software. She is a Researcher Associator in the Early Childhood Department of Education and Care at the University of West Attica teaching the courses in "Children's Literature" and "Pedagogy of Image" and in the Interdisciplinary Program of Pedagogy through New Technologies.

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