

**A pedagogy of friendship: young children's friendships  
and how schools can support them?**

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## **A Pedagogy of Friendship: Young children's friendships and how schools can support them**

### **Abstract**

Children's friendships are often neglected by teachers and researchers. This phenomenological study conducted with seven children aged five and six years explores young children's perceptions of their everyday friendship experiences. This multi-method study used role play interviews, drawings, and persona doll scenarios to consider children's everyday experiences of friendship in school. The paper discusses the importance of socio-cultural aspects of children's friendship including: imaginary friends; losing friends; protecting time and space to develop friendships and children's routines and practices as they form and maintain friendships. Data and findings are discussed, leading to an original conceptual framework: a 'Pedagogy of Friendship'. This is designed to help children make meaning from their friendship experiences and also provide practitioners with the opportunity to nurture and scaffold children through their friendship experiences in schools. We suggest that there is a need to raise the profile of children's friendships in early childhood education and generate an educational perspective on friendship. Finally we conclude that listening to children's views of friendship indicates that the application of the framework of a 'Pedagogy of Friendship' would be beneficial to children's all round learning and development.

**Keywords:** children's perceptions, phenomenology, friendship, key stage one, Pedagogy of Friendship

### **Introduction**

In this paper we report an original study of children's everyday lived friendship experiences using a phenomenological framework to respectfully identify and faithfully portray their perceptions. This article poses two questions:

- 1) What does friendship mean to this group of five to six year olds?
- 2) How can schools use this data to support the making and maintaining of children's friendships?

This article makes two main points about children's friendships within school. First, it presents the meaning of friendship for children in a year one class. It highlights the art and craft of children's friendships and the hidden peer culture. Second, it argues that practitioners need to be aware of this 'meaning of friendship' in order to support children's friendships. The article concludes by presenting a 'Pedagogy of Friendship' as a means of doing this.

This study took place in a school in north of England. The school was a larger than average infant setting with a four entry form. It is situated within an affluent community of

professional families. The school is multi-cultural and has an average number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and who speak English as an additional language. The two classes where the data were collected are typical of the year one daily structure for children following the English National Curriculum (DFE, 2014). The children were expected to engage in formal written learning activities with Literacy and Maths sessions conducted in the morning and foundation subjects in the afternoon. This is quite a transition from the play-based approach more typical to the reception classroom (Foundation Stage).

The paper first reviews the literature around friendship drawing on psychological and sociological perspectives to provide a context for an educational perspective on friendship. This is followed by an outline of the methodology used to draw out the 'essence of friendship' in a group of seven, five and six year old children. Following discussion of the findings as three units of meaning, a 'Pedagogy of Friendship' is presented and discussed with a consideration of implications for practice.

## **Studies of children's friendships**

### *What is friendship?*

Friendship and its definitions have been the focus of research since the 1940s (Moreno,1943; Koch,1933; Sullivan,1953, Gronlund,1959). Bukowski et al. (1996, 1) argue that friendship is about 'liking' where individuals 'like' one another and 'like' spending time together. Researchers have suggested that specific aspects such as positive interaction and the co-ordination of play are evident in early friendships (Park and Waters, 1989; Youngblade, Park and Belsky, 1993). Howes (1996) noted that successful friendships enabled joint pretend play and this provided an element of intimacy to the relationship.

Dunn (2004, 13) argues that the features and significance of friendship vary greatly according to the stage of a child's social development. For example, toddlers and pre-schoolers view friendship as "understanding and sharing the other person's interests and ideas, as well as mutual affection and support" and as children mature the friendship focus shifts to having greater emphasis upon intimacy and loyalty, including having someone to confide in (Woltering and Lewis, 2009; Doherty and Hughes 2009; Dunn, 2004). Such studies have indicated both similarities and contrasts as children develop and so variation between children age five and six can be expected. Different disciplines also ascribe different definitions of friendship, including a range of views and meanings about how such relationships function (Bagwell and Schmidt 2011).

Psychology based studies on friendship have traditionally employed socio-metric testing methods to research relations whereby children are asked to nominate the children they like (and do not like) to play with (Gronlund and Anderson 1957; Hymel and Asher 1977 and Coie, Dodge and Copotelli, 1982). Consequently, to conceptualise data Rubin et al (1992) used socio-metric testing to classify children's levels of peer acceptance according to a number of (controversial) categories – 'popular', 'controversial', 'rejected', 'neglected' and 'average' - (Table 1). The socio-metric techniques used during the nineteen eighties and nineties in the field of psychology are useful to consider in relation to children's friendships today. Whilst these techniques contributed new data there could be ethical concerns about categorising children without allowing sufficient time to develop socially. It may also be questionable as to how these categorises might be used in school contexts. Would they just be used to record a child's apparent success or failure with friendship and would there be any intention to help children make and maintain friendships?

Thus, many psychologists have had their own distinct perspective on friendship where friendship between peers are more 'egalitarian in nature' than children's relationships with parents or teachers (Scaffer 1996, 312). Horizontal relationships provide children with opportunities to co-operate and negotiate. In contrast, this paper reports an original study, which aimed to move away from categorisation and to delve deeper, examining the complex dynamics of friendship experience from the child's perspective.

A sociological perspective, focuses on how children construct their own peer culture (Bagwell and Schmidt 2011), and how friendship functions for children in groups. The interest to sociologists is in how children interact within groups and how they make sense of the adult world. For instance, Corsaro (1988) began to study the interactive processes involved in young children's peer culture, arguing for a move away from individualism towards an interpretive approach. For Corsaro, socialization is not about children adopting adult skills and knowledge and, from an interpretive view, childhood socialization is a collective process that occurs in public, rather than private (Harre 1986). Corsaro's findings focused around the routines that allowed children to convert the unfamiliar into the familiar. Thus, children were "attempting to transform confusions and ambiguities from the adult world into the familiar and shared routines of their peer culture" (Corsaro 1988, 13). In creating their own set of routines and practices Corsaro notes that children managed to, "both mock and evade adult authority" (Corsaro and Eder 1990, 215). This suggests that children create their own complex peer culture with specific routines and concerns. Children therefore need to learn how this social world functions and how they can conform to these cultural customs in order to be accepted and be successful in establishing and maintaining friendships and children who can gain access to play will have developed a repertoire of access strategies to achieve this (Corsaro 2003). This paper with an interest in children's peer culture reports research which links more closely with a sociological perspective. However, the primary concern of the project reported in this paper was to obtain individual children's views and perspectives on their friendship experiences and reflect on how schools can support them.

**Table 1 Five categories of peer acceptance**

Popular	These children are selected most frequently as they are most liked. They are ranked high status within their peer group status. Their nominations are mainly positive.
Controversial	These children are either liked or disliked. This is dependent on context and the specific group of children who are selecting them.
Rejected	These children are selected in relation to negative nominations and they are least liked or disliked by their peers.
Neglected	These children are not selected as either most liked or least liked. They are often ignored or overlooked by their peers.
Average	They are average as the name suggests. They are not in demand by their peers as popular children are. Nor are they as unpopular as rejected children can be.

## ***Friendship and School***

Children's friendships have been a somewhat neglected subject in the key stage one school context. Some studies have addressed the preschool years and the strategies used by teachers to effectively support children's friendships (Buysse, Goldman and Skinner 2003; Hollingsworth and Buysse 2009) including: allowing sufficient time for play; allowing children to exclude; arranging play out of preschool and communication between parents and teachers. However, once children reach school age the issue of friendship becomes less of a priority for researchers and teachers too, perhaps because academic progress takes precedence.

The one instance where friendship does emerge in the literature in relation to key stage one children is within the context of transition. Positive experiences and support for friendship has been linked to successful transition to school, (Corsaro 2003; Ladd and Price 1987; Ladd et al. 1996; Ledger et al. 2000; Margetts 2002; Peters 2003 and Vrinioti and Matagouras 2004). Friendship experiences can significantly impact on school transition, starting school with a friend can ease children's adjustment to school life. Margetts (1997) suggested that children should be paired with friends to help them settle into school, and Dockett and Perry (1999) suggested that a successful first transition to school provides a 'blueprint' for future transitions. Ladd (1990) reported that friendship was associated with children's improved attainment in school, and a positive attitude to school. Psychological and sociological perspectives contribute to the development of a new framing of friendship from an educational perspective with friendship studies suggesting that children's friendships significantly impact on social and emotional competency and academic achievement (Campbell et al 2000; Howes et al. 1994, 1998). The project reported here was designed to fill the gap in the literature relating to friendship in the early years of statutory schooling.

## **Project context and methodology**

This paper reports a qualitative phenomenological study of seven children. A phenomenological approach was adopted to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon of friendship from children's perspectives (Carter 2013). Phenomenology focuses on 'lived experiences of the people encountering the phenomena and how they interpret these experiences' (Bogdan and Biklen 2003, 48) state the meaning of everyday experience of a phenomenon for individuals (Creswell 2007). This is extended to include closer examination of what these individuals have in common, in order to faithfully portray a 'collective essence' (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen 1990). The ontological perspective in this study was rooted in a belief that individuals construct their own reality. Here children are seen as those who interpret events, experiences and behaviours and then make sense of these; this links with the concept of 'multiple realities' which phenomenology celebrates (Denscombe, 2010), a notion based on the idea that different groups may see things from a different perspective and these variances are valued. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003, 48) state, reality "allows for the existence of diverse realities within a phenomenon" because it is a personal construct.

The study reported here involved seven children in the same English Infant school, all aged five and six years. Though the children were selected randomly, the sample included boys and girls and children with different academic abilities, personality 'types' (outgoing, shy, thoughtful), and from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Table 2). This was a small sample of children and we make no claim that their experiences are representative of all

children. However, the literature also indicates that the data generated in this study indicates that these children’s perspectives chime with those features in other studies.

**Table 2 Names and ages of the children in the study**

<b>Child</b>	<b>Age at the Start of the Project</b>
Elsa	6 years 9 months
Nancy	6 years 6 months
Isla	5 years 10 months
Gwyneth	5 years 11 months
Henry	6 years 4 months
Max	6 years 5 months
Theo	6 years 6 months

### ***Research Methods***

The study used a range of child-appropriate research methods with individuals and groups: drawings, persona doll work and small world play interviews (Table 3). Traditionally phenomenology uses interviews but adaptations were made to accommodate the needs of young children. All methods were selected and devised to provide a forum where children’s voices could be heard (Kinney 2001). The selected research methods created a range of opportunities for the children to express their friendship experiences. Choice of methods was based a view of the child as a 'human being' rather than a 'human becoming' (Quorstrup 1987) and as being competent, capable and having agency to participate (Nutbrown 2011b; Clark and Moss 2001).

**Table 3 Research methods used with children**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Context</b>
Drawings	Individuals
Persona Doll	Group activity
Philosophy for Children	Group activity
Small World Play Interviews	Individuals

### ***Drawings***

Drawings were used to listen respectfully to the children perspectives (Holliday et al. 2009, 244) and to establish relationships with children within a relaxed and non-threatening environment (Coyne 1998). Whilst many children enjoy drawing, this is not the case for all children (Einarsdottir et al. 2009) and bearing this in mind children participated if they wished. Drawings can help children make sense of the world and express their thoughts and feelings in relation to a particular phenomenon; something often explored further depending

on what children say about their drawings. Einarsdottir et al. (2009: 218) regard, “drawings as an effective means for children to explore and communicate their understandings, particularly when attention is paid to the narratives that develop around the drawings”. Coates (2002) found that children have the most to say about their drawings when they are about five years old and this lessens as they approach seven years of age. Consequently, and in accordance with the literature, the children in this study were keen to draw and talk about their pictures perhaps because they were aware that their drawings were being valued and appreciated. Furthermore, throughout drawing episodes, the emphasis was on what the children had to say about their drawings rather than the drawing *per se*.

### ***Persona Dolls***

Persona dolls are used in school settings to focus on children’s personal, social and emotional development. They can capture children’s interest and imagination because the focus is, essentially on the ‘person’ of the doll. “Persona dolls are specially created dolls (about the size of a toddler) used to tell stories that raise issues of equality, promote talk and discussion of personal thoughts and feelings...” (Nutbrown 2011a, 110). The project doll was called Zack, he was introduced to the children who talked to them about the friendship challenges he faced when moving house and starting school and how to join in a game that other children were playing and gave him advice.

### ***Small World Play Interviews***

The use of a ‘small world play method’ was influenced by the ‘role play method’ used in the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss 2001), which uses role-play figures that children often play with in school. Children were invited to play with a set of miniature figures and playground equipment and to answer a set of semi-structured questions about different playground scenarios. As O’Sullivan (2011, 513) advocates role-play reveals, “truths about people and the world they live in, uncovering and exploring truths about reality, and about how we respond individually to such situations, as we each construct our own understanding of experiences”. This supports a phenomenological approach which aims to capture lived everyday experiences.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Ethical approval was gained through University procedures and access and informed consent was obtained via gatekeepers/guardians and measures were also taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity (Dockrell et al. 2000; Cohen et al. 2007). The children’s individual assent was also obtained at the start of each session (Roberts-Holmes 2005; Oliver 2003). Following a code of ethics was vital to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research (Bryman 2004; Walliman 2006). However, this was the beginning of the ethical practice throughout the study (O’Hara et al. 2011). The guardians and children were given multiple opportunities to refuse consent/assent throughout the project (Nutbrown 2011b). At the beginning of each section they were given the option, in words that they understood, to participate or decline without consequences – a form of ‘process consent’ (Heath et al. 2007, 409). The aim was to strike a balance between protecting children and empowering them to voice their views (Danby and Farrell 2004). If children were absorbed in other classroom activities and did not want to participate their decision was respected and they usually asked to join later or be involved the following week. This indicated that they wanted to participate



and were not coerced. This was an important part of the process of ensuring there was no misuse of power (Nutbrown 2011b).

## Data analysis and interpretation

This study aimed to listen to children to understand how they make meaning about their friendship experiences, and capture the 'description of the universal essence' of their friendship experiences (Van Manen 1997, 177). To arrive at the essence of a phenomenon requires, "a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (Van Manen 1997, 77). To achieve this, a detailed framework for analysis (Table 5) was developed (Carter 2013). As part of this process, the first stage involved, reflexive 'bracketing' through the declaration of researcher positionality. "This means that any subjective judgements or preconceived notions about the phenomenon need to be bracketed out or suspended" (Tay-Lim and Gan 2012, 50). Van Manen (1990) argues that this may be impossible, however, having an awareness and consideration of positionality can help the pursuit of an essence that is authentic to the children. The next stage of the analysis was to list significant statements and categorise emerging themes. Phenomenology describes this as putting the data into themes or units of meaning (Moustakas 1994). Care was taken to preserve the individual experiences of the children by documenting separate individual profiles of each child in order to capture and acknowledge the notion of 'multiple realities' (Moustakas 1994). This prefaced the search for a composite description of the group, which draws together individual views into one 'essence'.

**Table 4 Framework for analysis (phenomenological reduction)**

Personal experiences: The researcher describes their own personal experiences of the phenomenon. This is to bracket experiences to try and reduce their influence on the study
2 Reading and Noting: The researcher reads through the written transcripts several times to get an overall impression. Any initial notes are recorded at this point
3 List of significant statements: The aim is for these statements to be non-repetitive and non-overlapping. The identification of significant statements is known as Horizontalization (Creswell 2007; Moustakas 1994) At this point notes are made about why statements were marked as significant
4 Group statements into meaning units: The researcher puts the statements into units of meaning. Using the individual experiences to formulate meanings
5 Clustering relevant statements into overall units of meaning (Creswell 2007; Moustakas 1994)
6 Description of 'what' the participants experienced within context: This is known as 'textual description'
7 A concluding composite description: The 'essence' of friendship. Drawing together individual views into one common description

Note: Adapted from Colaizzi (1978) and Creswell (2007)

The data have been analysed and are discussed here in two parts. First we will address Question 1 of this article: *What does friendship mean to this group of five to seven year olds?* The children's experiences will be presented under three units of meaning, *i.* 'peer culture and friendship, *ii.* making and maintaining friendship and *iii.* time and space for friendship' (Moustakas 1994). This is followed by a consideration of Question 2: *How can schools support the making and maintaining of children's friendships?* Insights from the children in relation to the literature will demonstrate how the concept of 'A Pedagogy of Friendship' was developed. This part will explain what the 'Pedagogy of Friendship' is, how it relates to the data and why it is necessary in a school context.

### ***What does friendship mean to this group of five to six year olds?***

The children in the study reported here showed considerable emotional understanding in relation to friendship with the implications of their friendship experiences being quite different from an adult perspective. The matters children discussed were not necessarily adult concerns but were evidently very real for them with issues often dismissed or overlooked by practitioners. The children's experiences are discussed here under three units of meaning, *i.* 'peer culture and friendship, *ii.* making and maintaining friendship and *iii.* time and space for friendship' (Moustakas 1994).

#### *i.–Peer culture and friendship*

The children in this study shared many unique aspects of their peer culture, including specific rules, routines, concerns and practices that are often oblivious to adults. Max was asked to draw a picture (figure 1) to help Zack (the persona doll) who was having difficulty joining in and play with other children and making friends. Max talks about the difficulty of joining in with other children's play and seems to portray the climbing frame as a metaphorical barrier to participation. Max says he cannot play because it is a "three-er" game, with just three parts or characters and therefore no role for a fourth child. If children wanted others to join play they often applied the rule of parts saying, 'it's a "two-er" game or "three-er game"'. On rare occasions another part can be created to extend the game from a "two-er" to a "three-er" but only if the established players wanted another child to join. Thinking about whether there was anything else that he could do to try and join in with the game Max said, '*Go to a climbing competition and learn*'.

#### **Figure 1 Max's drawing: The climbing frame**



*“He wants to play with them, but I can’t climb or get over. Those three climbed over. If he asks to play they might pretend they can’t hear as they are so close. They are playing a three-er game of piggy in the middle”.*

Similarly, Elsa gave advice on how to avoid being left to play alone. She says, ‘*Go out quickly at playtime*’. Her advice is to go out speedily at playtime before play gets into full swing. She expresses how this is easier to get involved in play at this stage as once play is established it is much more challenging.

*‘If people are already playing you can ask ‘Can I join in please?’ Sometimes they say no or pretend they can’t hear you. If they don’t like girls they pretend. Kind or lonely people might say yes’.*

Nancy also shared her view of the challenges of being a playground friend. This role had challenged her own established friendships.

*...on the first day I had to look after someone and we were playing a really good game and we didn’t have anywhere to fit her in. I had to just keep her by my side and she helped me in the game. There was a lot people in the game and all the characters that we could think of were being used up.*

Nancy had a real dilemma of whether to leave her established group or try to include this child within her own circle of friends.

## *ii. Making and maintaining friendship*

The children reported many challenges and issues they had to negotiate as part of the making and maintaining of friendship.

Elsa drew a picture of her friends (figure 2) and spoke about each of her friends, including the loss of a friendship.

## Figure 2 Tell me about your friends



*Elsa: And my fourth friend is called Emina. I used to live in Turkey and I was born there but my friend, I, I went there when I was getting born from mummy, then my mum, I knowed her since I was a baby and I played with her quite often, I played with her, every single day we got to the beach and that's why we were best friends.*

*Researcher: Ok, is she still in Turkey?*

*Elsa: Yes, then we went here because we saw this school in a book and then that's why we moved here.*

*Researcher: Ah, so you saw this school when you lived in Turkey?*

*Elsa: Yes.*

*Researcher: And then you moved here?*

*Elsa: Yes and in the summer holidays sometimes I go back to Turkey to see my family, because lots of my family is in Turkey really, and my friends.*

*Researcher: Do you see your friend in Turkey then when you go back?*

*Elsa: Yes, and I get to see her again.*

*Researcher: I'll bet you miss her don't you?*

*Elsa: Yes, I think about her when I'm at school sometimes.*

The loss of this friendship is significant for Elsa even after years. Moving to another country may have been a wrench in terms of her close friendship and this is something that adults at school may not be aware of or appreciate its impact.

Nancy expressed the emotional impact of friendship (Figure 3) when talking about the best things about friends and any problems they encountered.

**Figure 3 - The best thing...the problem...**



***Best:** If you fall out I say I will never talk to them. I promise myself, but then I just can't stop myself. It's like a lion would eat meat. It's like nature. You're just friends again.*

***Problem:** I came up with the game Elves and Santas. Nigel didn't like it and then he said, I actually came up with it. Then it got into a row. Nigel always does that. He went to the teacher. Teacher says keep away from them. We all went off. Nigel wanted us to play. Nigel would feel sorry for himself. I have come to have more friends. Sometimes I play with him.*

The importance of a small object or toy was expressed by the children, being allowed to bring a pocket toy (a lego figure for example) to school was vital to them. Children indicated that these were a source of comfort at playtime if they were unsuccessful accessing play and friendship and to attract friends who might otherwise have been missed. These toys were kept in coat pockets and came out at playtime. Henry referred to his pocket toy as security if he found they had no-one to play in the playground.

**Figure 4 Snake and volcano**



*Zack should say 'shall I take this to school so I can play with this at playtime'. I have drawn a snake and a volcano. This is a "four-er" game. Zack should still try to make friends but if they say 'no' he still has something to play with.*

These examples (Figures 2, 3, and 4) demonstrate friendship issues which can occupy children and distract them from their learning if they are not appreciated.

### *iii. Time and space for friendship*

The children in this study showed how they manipulated the organisation of time and space to protect their spaces and time in school, for example, Nancy discussed how threatened she sometimes felt if a child tried to enter an established play scenario. She said: *They might say horrible things and do horrible things to you.* This echoes the previous examples on the challenges of accessing play.

Henry seemed to be constantly considering and applying tactics that could be used to maintain harmony within his friendships. He shared how when there needed to be a decision about what they were going to play rather than squabble over who would decide they used the rhyme 'black shoe, black shoe'.

This suggests that children often need time and space to negotiate and problem solve themselves without adult intrusion.

*R: Right now, these two have decided to play together, this girl and this boy, who do you think should decide what game they play?*

*H: Maybe they could both go on there.*

*R: They could but who's going to decide that out of those two, who will make the decision to play on there on the roundabout?*

*H: I don't know.*

*R: You don't know? Ok, how do you decide with your friends? Who decides the game that you play?*

*H: We do something like black shoe black shoe.*

*R: Black shoe black shoe, I don't know that one can you tell me?*

*H: You put one shoe in and then you go black shoe black shoe change or black shoe and then you change it and if both the shoes are out it won't be what you've decided to be doing.*

*R: Oh and if your foot's in you're the one who decides the game?*

*H: Yes if your foot's in. Well sometimes people use it in tig to decide who's it.*

*R: Oh I see, so say that again, black shoe black shoe and you have to swap your foot over?*

*H: Yes, if it lands on you.*

*R: Can you show me? Shall we do it? How would I do it then? Tell me what to do?*

*H: Black shoe black shoe change your black, black shoe black shoe change your black shoe. Then you change your shoe. Black shoe black shoe change your black shoe and you keep that one.*

*R: Oh how many times?*

*H: Black shoe black shoe change your black shoe, like that which means you're it.*

*R: Oh I see, ah so do you have to do it twice like that then?*

*H: Yes, but it depends how many people there are so if there are five people you'd have to make sure that everyone's out except for one person.*

*R: Do you think that's a good way of choosing who decides?*

*H: Yes. It's a bit like eeny meeny miny mo.*

### ***How can schools support the making and maintaining of children's friendships?***

Having identified an understanding of children's perceptions of friendships, insights from the children and the literature were used to create the concept of a 'Pedagogy of Friendship'. This section will demonstrate how the concept of 'A Pedagogy of Friendship' was developed and explain what the 'Pedagogy of Friendship' is, how it relates to the data and why it is necessary in a school context.

### *A 'Pedagogy of Friendship'*

This study was limited as it only had a small number of children from one school. Therefore, this may not be transferable to other schools. This warrants further research and would benefit from comparison with other schools within a similar context. We suggest the use of a 'Pedagogy of Friendship' which is a concept that has emerged from the data and is the art and craft of children's friendships. Such a framework, used by teachers has the potential to help them nurture and scaffold children through their friendship experiences. Using the Pedagogy of Friendship is a tool to listen to and focus on children's friendship experiences so as to enhance their learning and well-being. This conceptual framework has been devised after reflection and analysis of the data from the children's friendship experience and the literature which will be detailed in this section. Using this framework would allow schools to develop a more nuanced approach to friendship experiences and consider how this impacts on children's social well-being and holistic learning. The 'Pedagogy of Friendship' has three distinct features: Practitioner knowledge; Making and maintaining friendship and Children's agency and friendship (time and space) (Table 5).

**Table 5 Summary: Three features of a 'Pedagogy of Friendship'**

<p><b>Feature 1</b> Practitioner knowledge relates to 'peer culture and friendship' findings This feature emerged from what children expressed about their peer cultural practices. Having knowledge and awareness of children's peer cultural practices in relation to children's friendships will support practitioners to make appropriate practice decisions which are well informed by research in the field and in tune with children</p>
<p><b>Feature 2</b> Valuing friendship relates to 'making and maintaining friendship' findings The children told me how much friendship meant to them. Having the belief and conviction to focus on children's friendships. This includes getting to know individual children well, knowing details about their personality, interests, previous social experience, home culture, childcare provision and family context. This will enhance children's social and emotional development and ultimately their holistic development</p>
<p><b>Feature 3</b> Time and Space for friendship relates to 'time and space for friendship' findings The children were telling me they needed time and space to make and maintain their friendships. Allowing children to have their own agency to organise time and space in a school or setting to create the capacity for friendship. Allowing the time for children to establish and maintain friendships</p>



The three features of a Pedagogy of Friendship will now be discussed and related to the data.

### Pedagogy of Friendship': Feature 1 - Practitioner Knowledge

Practitioners who are aware of children's peer culture will be more attuned to children on a social and emotional level, facilitating their learning and development more effectively. It is important for practitioners to be mindful of children's routines and practices around access to play and friendship. Max was able to articulate how accessing play and friendship was something that you had to master like learning to get over a climbing frame. It gave a sense of the frustration and effort involved. Corsaro (2003) agrees that children have to learn strategies in order to access play. Elsa suggested getting out into the playground as quickly as possible as a strategy that she used. Classroom practices do not always make this possible, for example, having to go to the toilet at playtime, drink milk or eat snack at playtime or being kept in class for a few minutes to complete tasks can all prevent children being able to access play and friendship.

The issue of access is often approached by teachers in two ways, either insisting that children play and encouraging children to be inclusive or suggesting children find someone else to play with. Paley (1993) in her study "You can't say you can't play" stressed the importance of compassionate and understanding adults. Paley did not allow children in her setting to refuse access to other children who asked to join play and she provided the children with an inclusive way of working, offering a strategy to carry forward into adulthood. Paley found that children were sympathetic and responsive to their peers if they were physically hurt, perhaps having fallen but socially they insulted one another verbally; "you can't play; don't sit by me; stop following us; I don't want you for a partner; go away"(Paley 1993:14). Paley's work included compassionate role modelling for young children through their role-play.

Corsaro (2003) offers a partial contradiction of this inclusive approach, arguing that young children invest a great deal of energy establishing and sustaining play scenarios (Corsaro and Eder 1990) and so insisting that children allow another child to enter this play may be inappropriate and threatening to the play. Corsaro (2003) suggested that children must learn non-threatening and unobtrusive strategies to help them to enter play situations, and argues that adults should not expect children always to allow access to play and friendship circles because in doing so they are asking children to internalise adult skills and knowledge. He proposes that childhood holds a distinct peer culture where children use 'interpretive reproduction' to make sense of the world including learning strategies to manage their play and friendships.

This knowledge of children's peer culture and the rules, routines and practices could heighten teacher's skills and practices in relation to children's friendships and learning. Teachers could therefore make informed decisions about how to nurture friendships and be sensitive to children's emotions and offer children facilitative support without excessive intrusion. This friendship knowledge-base can be acquired by listening to and observing friendship encounters. Again gaining this awareness will allow adults appropriately to interact with children and scaffold their friendship strategies. Learning can be enhanced if children feel a sense of belonging and social success therefore concentrating on children's friendships is an important foundation to holistic education (Bath 2009).

The children shared a great deal about their cultural practices in relation to friendship. The children felt there were times they found it challenging to access play scenarios that were already established. Max used the climbing frame to explain this, Esme felt it was important

to be out first on the playground to be involved in games from the outset and Nancy was concerned that whilst she was helping others to make and maintain friendships as a playground buddy her own friendships were under threat. Practitioners can support children with these challenges and concerns when they are armed with this knowledge. This will allow for sensitive and reflective responses to children's friendship dilemmas and reduce any potential anxiety or preoccupation that can deflect from holistic learning in the classroom.

### Pedagogy of Friendship': Feature 2 - Making and Maintaining Friendship

Practitioners should have insights into children's friendship experience, but it is also important to value and appreciate the significance of friendship to children. Bath (2009, 70) argues that practitioners 'can have an important role in guiding children's emotional understanding and can actively help children to build new friendships, suggesting that when children talk about their home interests in school this enables them to make connections with peers and establish friendships through shared pleasures. Theobald et al (2014, 11) demonstrated that practitioners have, "a particular role in young children's lives, and that is to understand the value of children's friendships, and to support them to make friends..." a view echoed by Davis and Degotardi (2015).

This feature asks practitioners to appreciate the emotional labour involved in making and maintaining friendships. Zack spoke of having a toy to fall back on if he was unsuccessful in making and accessing friends at playtime. Elsa showed how the loss of her friendship deeply affected her and Nancy spoke of the challenges involved in trying to maintain friendships. All of these examples showed that the children use a great deal of energy and effort whilst making and maintaining friendships. This needs to be recognised by teachers so that they can respond appropriately and sensitively in practice.

### Pedagogy of Friendship': Feature 3 - Time and Space for Friendship

Time and space for children to share their experiences and to establish and nurture their friendships are imperative because children form friendships through shared activities and interactions overtime (Hinde 1992). The move to a National Curriculum (DfE 2014) in England has emphasised raising standards and pupil achievement resulting in a play-based approach being abandoned for many children in favour of a more formal academic approach. Roberts-Holmes (2014) argues that the climate of data collection and target setting is even evident in practice in the Foundation Stage, and lack of time for play and collaborative work means less time to develop emotional and social aspects of friendship. Playtimes may be the only opportunity for friendship and free play and the introduction of structured activities at lunchtime, such as singing or gymnastics clubs, further erodes time for play and friendship.

Children harboured a desire to maintain and preserve their private play space, confirming previous studies (Skanfors et al. 2009; Markstrom and Hallden 2009) on how children protected a shared space in the same way to try to preserve precious time to continue playing their own selected activities. The children in the study reported here could express their everyday lived experience of friendship. They were the experts in their own lives, knowing what friendship means to them. They had agency (James and James 2008), yet despite their ability to act independently and as Article 12 of the UNCRC states, use their right to express their own views on all matters affecting, them they are often unheard and marginalised (Mayall 2002), with children's agency often acknowledged by adults (James and James 2008).

This can also be the case in schools where children are encouraged to be empowered in their intellectual development but their social and emotional development is a secondary consideration (Devine 2003) which can inhibit children's intellectual or academic progress due to fragile learning foundations. Children's agency, which can contribute to social change (James and James 2008), needs to be recognised and acknowledged in schools where they are viewed as co-participants in their learning with a valuable contribution to make, particularly in relation to their friendships. (Devine 2003). Friendships are of great concern to children and Kalnins et al. (2002, 223) called for a rethink of children's position in society and the roles placed upon them before 'their valuable potential' is lost.

## **Conclusion**

This article has asked two questions:

- 1) What does friendship mean to this group of five to six year olds?
- 2) How can schools use this data to support the making and maintaining of children's friendships?

We suggest that an answer to this question lies in educators adopting and applying the three features of the 'Pedagogy of Friendship': *i. Building practitioner/teacher knowledge* so that specific rules, routines, concerns and practices within children's peer culture are made apparent, such as, spending time observing and listening to friendship experience; *ii. Valuing and appreciating children's friendship* because of its significance to children and the possible impact on children's social and emotional development and ultimately their cognitive development; *iii. Recognition of children's agency in friendship*, where children are provided with the opportunity for time and space to establish and nurture their friendships without adult intervention wherever this is safe to do so. A 'Pedagogy of Friendship' can stimulate discourse on children's friendships in educational contexts.

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