Sheffield Hallam University

Navigating Young Children's Friendship Selection: Implications for Practice.

CARTER, Caron <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9280-6241>

This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

Navigating Young Children's Friendship Selection: Implications for Practice.

Caron Carter

Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, England

Corresponding author: Caron Carter, Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Charles Street, Sheffield. S1 2ND. England. Email: C.Carter@shu.ac.uk

ORCID ID: - 0000-0002-9280-6241.

Navigating Young Children's Friendship Selection: Implications for Practice.

Caron Carter

Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, England

Corresponding author: Caron Carter, Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Charles Street, Sheffield. S1 2ND. England. Email: C.Carter@shu.ac.uk

Abstract

Friendship is of great concern to young children (Unicef, 2011). Research also suggests the positive outcomes friendships have on children's development, learning and well-being (Daniels et al, 2010; Hedges & Cooper, 2017). This paper highlights how young children select their friends and how practitioners might use this data to support children's friendship choices. It draws upon on a phenomenological study of five, five and six year olds during which data were collected through small world play interviews. Findings provide new insights into how children select their friends, including pre-selection, using a selection criteria and putting selection into action. This paper argues for the need to listen to children's friendship selections and consider potential implications for practice.

Keywords

Young children, friendship selection, practice

Introduction

Research into young children's friendships has increasingly focused on how children make and keep their friendships and the subsequent positive benefits. For example, psychologists note the positive influence of friends during the first year of school (Ladd, 1990; Ladd, Kochenderfer and Coleman, 1996). More recently, the benefits of friendship emotionally and academically have also been noted (Peters, 2010; Nix et al, 2013; Coelho et al, 2019). While valuable, this research does not address how young children select friends and what could be learnt from this. The process of selection takes place before children form friendships and could greatly influence the success or failure of making friends. Therefore, the present study asks: How do young children select their friends?

The choice of the word 'navigate' has been used throughout this paper to suggest the complexity and confusion accompanying children's friendship decisions. The word 'practitioner' is also used to refer to all adults working with children during this phase of education.

Research Context

This data was collected in a four form entry (x4 classes of 30 children in each year group) school for children aged 4-7 years in the north of England, providing for approximately 350 children. The school is within an affluent area, is multi-cultural and has an average number of pupils speaking other languages as well as English.

When children start compulsory schooling in year one (five and six years), they are placed into a position of enforced socialisation. For many children this socialisation manifests itself into friendship. The experiences of friendship within this context will differ greatly. The National Curriculum (DFE, 2014) requires that all children are taught academic subjects regularly, but there is less focus on learning about socialisation and friendship. Personal, Social and Emotional learning is usually allotted an hour per week as a foundation subject. While important, it is insufficient to support the ongoing and every day nature of friendship. Therefore, many children need further assistance to navigate friendship.

Seven children were involved in this study aged five and six years (see figure one). This article reports on five children because one child left the school and another did not wish to participate. I wanted the sample to be more representative of the make-up of a typical class of children. For instance, having just school council representatives I did not feel would provide balanced view. Reponses were sought from two classes. Therefore seven names were picked out from four pots (that the Headteacher set up) to ensure the sample represented children of both genders, a range of academic abilities, personalities and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The children were told that the selection would be random and if they were not selected they could still participate in similar activities related to friendship in their PSHE sessions which were timetabled to be at the same time. (Carter, 2013). It is acknowledged that this is small sample and no claims are made for this data to be representative of all children, although there are indications from the literature that their experiences may chime with other studies.

Figure One: Thumbnail Sketches: Background and Context:

This article is organised as follows. First the literature review focuses on young children's friendships, including the current knowledge of how children make and keep friends. I then highlight a gap in the literature in relation to how children select their friends in key stage one (5-7 years). This is followed by an outline of the phenomenological methodology and methods. Finally, having examined the data about children's friendships, the paper suggests new implications for practice around young children's friendship selection.

Discourses of children and childhood: the need to listen to children's voices on friendship

The view of children and childhood affects the listening process. There are hundreds of years of constructions of children and childhood with nuanced cultural and social influences (Phillips et al, 2020). There is not the capacity to do this justice here but this brief summary will provide a framework for this research. Traditionally, the view of the child was equated with the idea of being 'seen and not heard'. Here children were seen through a deficit lens, requiring socialization in order to 'contribute to society appropriately' (Lancaster, 2010: 85). From this position children have less control within their lives and this can include over-protection (Wyness, 2000).

The United Nations (1989) challenges this view of children as 'social becomings'. Here children are members of society have rights and can contribute. This discourse empowers children, viewing them as experts in areas that concern them. Children are competent and creative, able to create their own culture and influence decisions that affect them. They are "seen and heard" and are "socially active participants" (Lancaster, 2010: 89). In this study children are recognised as the experts in the field of children's friendships. Friendship is recognised as an area that preoccupies children and therefore it is valued not just for the development of social skills for adulthood but as an experience in childhood that should be celebrated in its own right.

Young Children's Friendships

Friendship is usually defined as 'mutual' or 'reciprocal'. Bukowski et al (1996,1) posit that, 'Friendship is closely tied to 'liking', that is, being attracted to someone who is attracted in return and taking pleasure in that person's company'. Definitions of friendship can vary across

disciplines (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016) and also depend on the stage of social learning that a child is at. Dunn (2004) argues that younger children's friendships can simply be about 'doing-things-together' like playing a certain game or using particular equipment. As children get older or more advanced in their level of social competence, features of friendship can shift to become, *'more elaborate as desires for mutual trust and reliance become more explicit and important'* (Woltering and Lewis, 2009, 52).

Making and Keeping Friends

The literature defines making friends as a process where 'two people have to agree to establish a friendship'. This reciprocity is also needed to maintain friendship. Keeping friends requires the resolution of 'differences in a mutually acceptable manner' (Laursen, 2017, 282). The significance and benefits of being able to make and keep friends have again been researched in psychology (Ladd, 1990; Ladd, Kochenderfer and Coleman, 1996; Peters 2010). Ladd's (1990) study found that the presence of friends during the first year of school greatly influenced a child's attitude to school attendance and performance. Nix et al (2013) also noted positive academic output from the presence of friends. Acquiring new friends throughout the school year has the same effect. In addition to this notion of friendship leading to enhanced attainment, Ladd found that if children sustain their friendships over the year this often led to a strong source of emotional support. This idea of emotional strength echoes the work of others who discuss the positive outcomes of prolonged close friendships (Hartup, 1989; Coelho et al, (2019)). Benefits of these friendships include higher self-esteem, reduced feelings of loneliness, depression and victimization by peers. However, in Ladd's study the benefits that were suggested from friendships were short lived if those friendships were not maintained. Consequently, careful consideration must be given to the role of the adult in the maintenance of children's friendships and the acquisition of new friends (Ladd, 1990).

In the field of Sociology, Corsaro's (2003, 2005) work has studied the routines and practices that go on within children's peer culture to include or exclude children and the emotional investment involved in making and keeping freinds. Similarly, in Early Childhood, Chesworth (2016), Fisher (2015) and Bath (2009) have examined how children's interests may contribute to relationships and the emotional investment required to make and keep friends.

Selecting Friends

The process of selecting a friend comes before making friends. This can be defined as a time of observation where an individual will be looking around the vicinity, deciding who to approach. Determining who to select can be influenced by a range of factors such as having shared interests (Fawcett and Markson, 2010). The discipline of psychology has researched children's friendship selection mainly within the adolescent phase of childhood. Friendship selection defined by Masters and Furman (1981, 344) 'refers to liking by a specific peer'. A focus upon friendship selection emerged due to the perception that friendship is crucial to children's social development (Ojanen et al, 2010; Dijkstra, Cillessen and Borch, 2013). Similarly, some studies have looked at selection and liking in younger children. However, to my knowledge, the identification of a selection process in young children's friendships is an area of little research apart from the following studies. Likewise Fawcett and Markson (2010) researched how similarity predicts liking in three year olds. Factors such as food preference, hair colour and toy preference were identified.

More recently,,. Wang (2019) researched friendship stability among preschool children. This study noted that children selected specific children to befriend instead of making random preferences. It argues for the creation of group activities to encourage children's friendship. This article adds to this literature by reporting specifically on young children's friendship choices and an original process of friendship selection as told by the children, starting with a scoping process, a selection criteria and then finally acting on selection.

Friendship remains an area which receives little attention in the literature specifically in Education. Other academic priorities make this challenging for schools to address. In the knowledge, that the selection of friends is so important in children's lives socially, emotionally and academically the aim of this research is to encourage discussion and action to empower children and adults to support the navigation of children's friendships.

A Phenomenological Approach to Research

This paper uses data from a qualitative phenomenological study. A phenomenological approach seeks to gain deeper understanding of the friendship phenomenon for children (Carter, 2013). Firstly, a picture of the 'everyday lived experience' is sought from individuals (Creswell, 2007). The intention of seeking to gain 'everyday lived experience' in this study means looking for the ordinary, regular events, experiences, routines, rules and rituals of children's peer culture. This recognises that children's perspectives are likely to differ from adults due to the different world and time period they live in (Papadopoulou, 2016). This is

echoed by Hedges and Cooper (2017, 398) who argue that it is important to make space for 'adults' meaning-making efforts' to improve children's friendship experiences. Then a further examination looks for a 'collective essence' from the group (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1997). Therefore this approach is coherent with the notion of being attentive to children's concerns. This is empowering for children but also can alter the way adults respond to children's friendship experiences (Danaher and Briod, 2005).

Traditionally, phenomenology uses interviews but this study was modified to use appropriate methods for young children. The United Nations (1989) Article 13 states that children should be able to express their views using appropriate means. In response to Article 13 this research design explored ways that children could express themselves about their friendships, be acknowledged, and take action where appropriate. This approach builds on others (Clark and Moss, 2005; Clark 2017).

 (i) Methods

Small World Play Interviews

The data is drawn from small world play interviews. Two interviews were conducted with children across two terms. Each interview was audio recorded and field notes taken. Interviews lasted between twenty to forty-five minutes depending on the wishes of individual children. A 'Playmobil' playground set was the stimulus (see appendix one). The children were introduced to the characters/figures and allowed to play freely with them. Some children chose to name the characters. Then I began to ask them questions. I prepared a set of prompts to stimulate interaction (see appendix two). The rationale for the prompts were to specifically ask the children how they selected their friendship choices during playground interaction.

Reflecting on my own positionality as a former early years teacher and a deputy headteacher of an infant school and now as a researcher and mother, I am always keen to use methods of data collection which will be familiar, appropriate and inviting for children. Therefore a child centred philosophy permeates my research and is particularly evidence in this method selection of the small world play interviews.

(ii) Ethics

Ethical approval was gained through University procedures. Ethical considerations and actions were ongoing throughout the study (Carter, 2013). Initially a number of visits took place to develop a rapport with the children (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2016). Informed consent was gained from gatekeepers/guardians/parents, before getting 'assent' from the children at the beginning of every session (Roberts-Holmes 2011). Each week I went to the classroom and asked the children if they wished to participate. Sometimes children were absorbed in activities and I specifically recall one week when they were making puppets in the classroom. If children were busy, they were given the option to opt out, join later or join the following week. It was made clear to the children that they had the choice and the sessions were not compulsory school activities (Heath et al, 2007).

During the interviews I was aware of the power imbalance between the children and I. Therefore, at the start of each session the children were given free time to play. I listened and observed whilst they played. Some children involved me from the beginning. For one or two I entered the play with one or two questions to test the water and see if the children wanted me to participate. One child said very little and her body language told me I could not continue with the interview and her data was not used. Gatekeepers, guardians, parents and children were told about strategies to maintain confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw. Pseudonyms were used for all child participants, including any names of other children referred to during data collection.

(iii) Framework for Analysis

This study consisted of two layers of analysis:

First Layer of Analysis

I aimed to capture the 'universal essence' of friendship for a specific group of children (Van Manen, 1997: 177). This started by listening to individual children's friendship experiences and recording individual profiles to capture the concept of 'multiple realities' (Moustakas, 1994). Then a common composite description was compiled to produce a collective 'essence'. Data themes are described as 'units of meaning' within phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Additional details of this first stage of analysis can be accessed in Carter, 2013; Carter and Nutbrown, 2016 (see appendix three).

Second Layer of Analysis

This article focuses upon the second layer of analysis that involved further analysis of the unit of meaning, 'selecting friends'. This second layer of examination involved a deeper analysis. This process identified three key units of meaning. These are: 1) Pre-selection, 2) Selection Criteria, and 3) Selection in action. The three themes and subsequent sub-themes are presented below. Selected extracts have been used to illustrate the types of responses categorised under each sub-theme.

Findings

Unit of Meaning 1: Pre-Selection

This theme has two sub-units of meaning, namely 1) scoping, and 2) preserving playtime.

Sub-Unit of Meaning 1: Scoping

The children in this study shared several examples of how they pre-select friends. Several children described an initial process or strategy of scoping the children in the vicinity. This process selected or eliminated playmates. Henry shared his novel way of elevating his playmobil figure so he could demonstrate this.

H: I would think he should get on his skateboard and try it going on his skateboard.

R: Will that make it easier for him?

H: Yes it might. Clip him onto his skateboard.

R: So if you had a skateboard how would it make it easier to make a friend if you're on a skateboard?

H: Because you can see everybody if you're on a skateboard can't you.

R: Ah and you're at the top there. So why does he need to see everybody?

H: So he knows who he might like.

Henry placed the figure on top of the banking on his skateboard. That way he could use his heightened position to look around the children in the playground to decide who he might select to play with.

Sub-Unit of Meaning 2: Preserving Playtime

Another pre-selection strategy was the need to escape the classroom for playtime promptly. Elsa also talked about scoping the children in the area but stressed the need to: *Go out quickly at playtime'* to be able to do this, before play gets into full swing.

Can you only ask those who have not started playing?
If people are already playing you can ask 'Can I join in please?'
Sometimes say no or pretend they can't hear you.
If they don't like girls they pretend.
Kind or lonely person might say yes.

Elsa suggests that the opportunity for being selected will be greater if you get straight onto the playground before play is established.

Unit of Meaning 2: Selection Criteria

This theme has three sub-themes, namely 1) being nice and kind, 2) being good at something [e.g. football], 3) Wearing the right clothes, 4) the use of toys and objects.

Sub-Unit of Meaning 1: Being Nice and Kind

All the children suggested that being kind and not hurting others was important for being selected. Nancy suggested that children have criteria to help them decide who to select. She explained that she would specifically look for children who were 'playing nicely'.

R: Scott [playmobil figure] wants to play with somebody here but he's not sure, how will he decide who to play with?

N: Who looks nice.

R: Who looks nice?

N: And who he thinks might be a good friend.

R: If he looks nice, what do you look for when somebody looks nice, how do you know?

N: They might be playing with another person nicely.

Nancy went on to say that being kind will get you lots of friends too.

R: How do you make that many friends?

N: By being kind and, because if you're nice to somebody they all want to be your friend because if somebody thinks you're nicer than another person they'll want to be your friend and then another person will and then another person and then you've got lots.

The children felt that being nice, kind and gentle were high important for being selected.

Sub-Unit of Meaning 2: Being Good at Something

Nancy also gave being 'a good footballer' as a reason why children might want to play with a child, suggesting this would make them more popular. When Nancy was asked 'Why would someone want to play with this figure?' this was her response.

N: Because he might be a good footballer.

Nancy seems to suggest that being good at something such as a sport raised your status and therefore the opportunity to be selected as a potential friend. Then Nancy continued to state that what a child was wearing would also influence her selection of who to befriend.

Sub-theme 3: Wearing the Right Clothes

Because he might look a bit babyish and wants to play babyish things. Because he doesn't look very good.

R: He doesn't look very good, what do you mean?

N: I mean like he doesn't look, they might not like his clothes.

Sub-theme 4: The Use of Toys and Objects

Like Nancy, Isla made a selection and knew that she would pick out a particular child to play with if they had a toy or object.

I: He prefers her.

R: He prefers her, why does he prefer to play with her do you think?

I: Because she's a bit better.

R: If someone said best friend and they're better than all the others, what are they like? What makes her better than him?

I: Because she's a girl and she's got a kite and he can play with it.

Similarly, Theo expresses his criteria for friendship selection: a willing-ness to play and using toys or objects.

R: Ice Skater,[playmobil figure] now he's got no-one to play with what should he do to make a friend here?

T: Play with people. He might show his new skateboard.

R: Ah so he's going to show that skateboard to him and that'll help him to make a friend. Will that be easy for him?

T: I think he's already a big boy and he already learned how to do that.

R: Already learned to do what, make friends or ride a skateboard?

T: Ride a skateboard.

All the examples presented in this section show the children were using specific criterion to help them select who to play and befriend.

Unit of Meaning 3: Selection in Action

This unit of meaning demonstrates how children feel hesitant about putting their selection into action. Children know they will be welcomed or rebuffed. This extract shows Henry's reticence and how demanding it is to act on a selection and establish a connection with a new child.

R: Ah you don't know them, do you have to know them? Can you not get to know them?

H: You could but that's really hard.

Henry then goes on to give an example from his own experience of trying to strike up a friendship with somebody that he did not know.

H: Because I tried to make friends with a guy I didn't even know, and he didn't even come from Sheffield. He wasn't even a Christian and I tried to make friends with him.

R: You tried to make friends with him?

H: And it did work but it was a bit hard.

R: How did you know he wasn't even a Christian?

H: He told me.

R: Did he?

H: He told me he was a Muslim.

R: So you know when you make friends, that's interesting, so how did it go?

H: In the end I did end up becoming friends with him but the first few things was, he ran off.

R: He ran off, oh dear. The first few things? Tell me more.

H: The first few things didn't go too well and I couldn't sit next to him at lunchtime because there weren't many spaces left in the canteen.

R: Oh dear, so that didn't go well, what else didn't go well? Where's it gone, hang on is it under the table somewhere, ah here it is, it's here. So what else didn't go well when you tried to make friends?

H: That was the only thing and then the next day things were all fine.

Henry shows that selecting an unknown child to befriend is much more challenging and involves greater emotional labour. Now he has made that selection he wishes to gain agreement from the other child to make a friendship. He also talks of the practical logistics of the school day getting in the way such as the availability of places to sit in the canteen at lunchtime.

Analysis and Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine how children select their friends and this section reports on the strategies identified by the children. Three themes 1) pre-selection, 2) selection criteria, and 3) selection in action were identified.

1) Pre-Selection

When the children spoke about friendship selection they recounted an individual process of pre-selection before the actual selection of a peer. Henry appeared to describe a scoping of the playground from an elevated position on his skateboard illustrating how some children spend a period of time pre-selecting a potential friend by observing the playground. Once they have undergone the pre-selection period they can then select. This might be something children do before they select friends at the start of playtime. Children need time and space to reflect on who to play with as it is a huge emotional investment.

Likewise, Elsa expressed a need to get out onto the playground quickly: if children were held up this could potentially threaten their chances of selection. Elsa came to England from Turkey to start school at the beginning of the reception year. It may be that she has learnt through experience the challenges of being selected after arriving in the playground later. If children are asked by the teachers to go to the toilet or to eat fruit before going out this could inhibit friendship opportunities. There could also be a suggestion here about being strategically placed in order to have the optimum potential for selection. This seems to suggest that once play is established it is much harder to access. This chimes with the work of Corsaro (2005: 141) where he observed children's defensiveness of their established play and the only way to potentially gain admission to the play was through building up "a complex set of access strategies' over time.

Elsa and Henry expressed how there is a significant process that many children require space and time to conduct. This process of pre-selecting a friend or being selected is important for them before they can even consider approaching a child. Children being permitted to have time, space and agency to do this is important (Hinde, 1992; Markstrom and Hallden 2009; Skanfors, Lofdahl and Hagglund, 2009). Similarly, the children in this study seemed to suggest that they required time to be on the periphery, looking and observing other children and their interactions before committing to a selection.

2) Selection Criteria

Nancy gave several examples of selection criteria. Nancy has secondary aged siblings and may be influenced by them in terms of her selection choices. One reason she gave for selection was clothing. She states: *I mean like he doesn't look, they might not like his clothes.* Her older teenage siblings who value clothing may be of influence here. The second reason,

relates again to physical appearance. She states, '*he might look a bit babyish*'. This could mean a rather young, baby faced child might not be selected. There is also an implication that a child who looks younger will want to play games that are babyish. Nancy seemed to imply that playing with younger children was frowned upon. Again Nancy's preference for more mature friendship selection could be because she is used to this from home. This also seems to suggest within the micro-politics of the playground there is an intersection between age and power. Younger children could potentially be overlooked. This links to the work of Bath (2009) where children use certain aspects to gain power like who gets invited to birthday parties. This also resonates with Corsaro (2003) claiming that children have their own rules and routines that they have socially constructed to suit their needs and help them to make sense of the world and adult models (Corsaro, 2003).

Isla also had criteria. Isla's social circle encounter fall outs and bickering. She states that she prefers a particular child/figure. She used the word 'prefers', however, it does not convey specifically why she made this selection. Isla struggled to explain what it means to be a 'nice' or 'good' friend. This might suggest that sometimes children may be not consciously aware of why they have made a selection. The last sentence is nevertheless quite telling. She eventually claimed that the child she has chosen was a girl and had a kite. This may show her preference for playing with girls and the highlighting of an object again reiterates how objects are used or are desired within the friendship selection process. Isla feels that when someone is good to you then they relinquish power or allow the other child to take the lead.

Theo also talked about how to be selected. Theo lives with his mum, sister and cousin. Theo's first language is Chinese. He is a popular child and is happy to play with others. The first factor he states is actually playing with children. It is interesting that he is aware of this. Theo implies that he needs to be confident and play with others in order to be selected. Like Elsa he is new to the country and school and seems to have to overcompensate for this. This links to Corsaro's (2005) work on access strategies. If children are not allowed to access play scenarios, then ultimately they will be denied friendship opportunities. Secondly, Theo discusses how the skateboard, or an object, will be used to help gain entry to the play. He says, '*He might show his new skateboard*'. It is as if the skateboard will be used to impress and lure others into selecting him.

3) Selection in Action

All the children hesitated about acting upon their selections and approaching children. At this stage, they know once they have selected someone they need to get mutual agreement to make a friendship. The stakes are high and as Bath (2009: 62) states these relationships are 'newer, less secure and more slippery liaisons in the classroom' in comparison with those within the home environment. Henry, was described, as being from a warm and loving family that had a strong Christian faith (see thumbnail sketches - figure one). The fact that Henry is surprised that he selected a child of Muslim faith to befriend gives an example of how children's background experiences can become determinant factors or influences in the shaping of friendships. Usually children gravitate to what they know and have learnt through their own background experience and here Henry seems to surprise himself with his friendship selection. He states: *Because I tried to make friends with a guy I didn't even know, and he didn't even come from Sheffield. He wasn't even a Christian and I tried to make friends with him.*

Implications for Practice

This section discusses why it is important to listen and reflect on what children say about the selection process and considers what can be learnt by tuning into this.

The children in this study shared insights into their routines and practices around friendship selection. In the first instance by just listening and acknowledging what goes on will allow practitioners to acknowledge and respond appropriately to children's emotions. However, this is not sufficient and by reflecting and acting on this data practitioners could support children to navigate their friendships. This could be in the form of planned PSHE sessions or just an enabling response to a friendship scenario. Key messages derived from the data are:

> **Permit children to go out promptly at playtimes and to avoid encroaching on children's allocated free time**
> Tuning into children's friendship selection means practitioners can make changes to practice. The first thing children seemed to suggest they needed help with was being able to go out to play promptly to pre-select friends or be selected to play with. Elsa demonstrated this saying: *Go out quickly at playtime*. A simple tweak to practice

could achieve this. The children also discussed time to look around and scope the area in relation to who to play with. *H: Because you can see everybody if you're on a skateboard can't you.* Finally, there needed to be some time to build up the courage to act on your selection and approach a child or children that had been chosen. These messages show the need for time and sensitivity to these processes.

Be instrumental in sharing and publically celebrating interests to raise status and opportunities for selection

The children also talked about other factors that they considered when selecting a friend, including football, clothes, being kind. Research suggests that children with common preferences will select one another to be friends (Fawcett and Markson, 2010; Chesworth, 2015). Practitioners can be instrumental in sharing and publically celebrating children's interests and in doing so can often raise the status of children and ultimately their chances of being chosen. As Nancy states: *Because he might be a good footballer.* There can also be opportunities for addressing prejudice e.g. not selecting a child because of what they are wearing. Again Nancy shares: *...I mean he doesn't look, they might not like his clothes.* Teachers could pick up on this in whole class Personal, Social, Health and Emotional aspects of learning (PSHE) sessions.

Allow Time for targeted teaching on specific areas and for spontaneous bespoke support of individuals and groups

Friendship naturally involves navigating spontaneous emotional feelings. Nowadays, 'an environment promoting targets, outcomes and goals' particularly at the start of formal schooling and can take precedence over providing an emotional environment (Fisher, 2016, 54). Henry talks about his reticence to approach someone new. *H: You could but that's really hard.* Children need to be provided with the opportunity to express these feelings with the support of a calm and responsive practitioner. There needs to be time to feel and acknowledge these feelings rather than ignore or move on quickly. Some children can still feel mithered by a friendship issue even when it has been resolved. Just the thought of the feelings surrounding a particular scenario can make children feel anxious and upset. When this happens children may welcome suggestions or strategies to manage these overwhelming feelings or just be allowed to feel and reflect on scenarios. The emotional investment involved in friendship is

echoed by the work of Corsaro (2003). Practice that tunes into children can support children to navigate their friendship choices through creating whole class taught sessions or through spontaneous bespoke support.

<u>**Conclusion**</u>

As this research was carried out using a small sample, with a specific group of children, the findings cannot be generalised to other settings. However, the data does provide important insights into how children say they select their friends, including a pre-selection scoping period, friendship selection criteria and once they have selected a friend how they approach individuals to gain agreement to go on to make a friendship. These essential insights may chime with other educational contexts. Interestingly, while the children shared the practices and challenges of selecting friends, none explicitly stated whether they wanted support with these experiences from adults or peers. Therefore, future research could explore whether and how children would like support with specific aspects of friendship navigation. It would be interesting to recognise and respect the fact that some children may not want help. If they do, what format do children feel support might take?

My aim was to examine how children select their friends. Small world play interviews were used, which enabled children to share their views and on friendship in a manner that was comfortable and familiar to them. The data revealed the challenges of navigating friendships including time for pre-selection, applying a criteria for selection and the emotional time and space needed for putting selection into action. This study adds to the limited knowledge on how young children select their friends within an educational context. Although there is an increasing body of research considering friendship, the topic is not discussed enough in schools. I therefore offer practical implications for school practice and further discourse around children's friendships.

Acknowledgements

References

Atherton, Frances, & Nutbrown, Cathy. 2016. "Schematic pedagogy: supporting one child's learning at home and in a group." *International Journal of Early Years Education 24* (1): 63–79. doi.10.1080/09669760.2015.1119671.

Bukowski, William. M., Andrew. F. Newcomb, and Willard. W. Hartup. 1996. "Friendship and its Significance in Childhood and Adolescence: Introduction and Comment." In *The Company they Keep,* edited by William.M. Bukowski., Andrew. F. Newcomb., and Willard. W. Hartup. 1-15. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carter, Caron. 2013. "*Children's Views and Perceptions of their Friendship Experience."* PhD diss., University of Sheffield.

Carter, Caron, and Cathy Nutbrown. 2016. "A Pedagogy of Friendship: Young Children's Friendships and how Schools can Support them." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 24 (4): 395–413. doi:10.1080/09669760.2016.118981.

Chesworth, Liz. 2016. "A Funds of Knowledge Approach to Examining Play Interests: Listening to Children's and Parents' Perspectives." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 24 (3): 294–308. doi:10.1080/09669760.2016.1188370.

Clark, Alison. 2017. *Listening to Young Children: A Guide to Understanding and Using the Mosaic Approach.* 3rd ed. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Clark, Alison, and Peter Moss, and Anne Trine Kjørholt. 2005. *Beyond Listening: Children's Perspectives on Early Childhood Services.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Coelho, Leandra, Torres, Nuno, Fernandes, Carla and Santos, António J. 2017. "Quality of Play, Social Acceptance and Reciprocal Friendship in Preschool Children". *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 25 (6): 812-823. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2017.1380879.

Corsaro, William. A. 2003. *We're Friends, Right? Inside Kids' Culture.* Washington, DC: Joesph Henry.

Creswell, John. W. 2007. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Danahar, Tom, and Marc Briod. 2005. "Phenomenological Approaches to Research with Children." In *Researching Children's Experience: Approaches and Method,* edited by Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan. 217-235. London: Sage.

Daniels, Tina, Quigley, Danielle, Menard, Lisa, and Linda Spence. 2010. "My Best Friend always did and Still does Betray me Constantly: Examining Relational and Physical Victimization within a Dyadic Friendship Context." *Canadian Journal of School Psychology* 25 (1): 70-83.

Department for Education. (DFE). 2014. "The National Curriculum." Accessed October 18th 2019. https:www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum.

Dijkstra, Jan Kornelis., Cillessen, Antonius, H. N., and Casey Borch. 2013."Popularity and Adolescent Friendship Networks: Selection and Influence Dynamics." *Developmental Psychology* 49 (7): 1242–1252. doi:10.1037/a0030098.

Dunn, Judy. 2004. *Children's Friendships: The Beginnings of Intimacy.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Fawcett, Christine, A., and Lori Markson. L. 2010. "Similarity predicts liking in 3-year-old children." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 105 (4): 345–358. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2009.12.002.

Fisher, J. 2016. *Interacting or Interfering: Improving Interactions in the Early Years.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hartup, William. W. 1989. "Social Relationships and their Developmental Significance." *The American Psychologist* 44 (2): 120-126. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.44.2.120.

Heath, Sue, Charles, Vikki, Crow, Graham, and Rose Wiles. 2007. "Informed Consent, Gatekeepers and Go-Betweens: Negotiating Consent in Child and Youth-Orientated Institutions." *British Educational Research Journal* 33 (3): 403-417. doi:10.1080/01411920701243651.

Hedges, Helen, and Maria Cooper. 2017. "Collaborative Meaning-Making using Video Footage: Teachers and Researchers Analyse Children's Working Theories about Friendship." *European Early Childhood Educational Research Journal* 25 (3): 398-411.

Ladd, Gary. W. 1990. "Having Friends, Keeping Friends, Making Friends, and Being Liked by Peers in the Classroom: Predictors of Children's Early School Adjustment?" *Child Development* 61: 1081-1100. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.1990.tb02843.x.

Ladd, Gary. W., Kochenderfer, Becky. J., and Cynthia. C. Coleman. 1996. "Friendship Quality as a Predictor of Young Children's Early School Adjustment." *Child Development* 67 (3): 1103-1118. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.1996.tb01785.x.

Lancaster, Penny. Y. 2010. "Listening to Young Children: Enabling Children to be Seen and Heard". *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education,* edited by Gillian Pugh. and Bernadette Duffy. 79-94. London: Sage.

Laursen, Brett. "Making and Keeping Friends: The Importance of Being Similar." *Child development perspectives* 11, no. 4: 282–289. doi: 10.1111/cdep.1224.

Livingstone, Tina. 2005. *Child Of Our Time.* London, Bantam Press.

Markström, Ann-Marie, and Gunilla Halldén. 2009. "Children's Strategies for Agency in Preschool." *Children and Society* 23: 112-122. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00161.x.

Moustakas, Clark. 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods.* London: Sage.

Nix,Robert, L Biermen, Karen, L Domitrovich, Celene, E, and Gill, Sukhdeep. (2010). "Promoting Children's Social-Emotional Skills in PreschoolCan Enhance Academic and Bahavioral Functioning in Kindergarten: Findings from Head Start REDI". *Early Education and Development* 24 (7): 1000-1019. doi: 10.1080/10409289.2013.825565

Ojanen, Tiina, Sijtsema, Jolle. H., Hawley, Patricia. H., and Todd. D. Little. 2010. "Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in early adolescents' friendship development: Friendship selection,

influence, and prospective friendship quality." *Journal of Adolescence* 33 (6): 837–851. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.08.004.

Papadopoulou, Marianna. 2016. "The "Space" of Friendship: Young Children's Understandings and Expressions of Friendship in a Reception Class." *Early Child Development and Care 186* (10): 1544–1558. doi:10.1080/03004430.2015.1111879.

Peters, Sally. (2010). *Transition from Early Childhood Education to School: Literature Review.* Ministry of Education. http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/98894?.

Phillips, Louise Gwenneth. Ritchie, Jenny. & Adair, Jennifer Kay. 2020. "Young children's citizenship membership and participation: comparing discourses in early childhood curricula of Australia, New Zealand and the United States". *Compare 50*(4): 592–614. doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1543578.

Roberts-Holmes, Guy. 2011. *Doing Your Early Years Research Project: A Step-By-Step Guide.* 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R., Nelson, L. J., Cheah, C.S.L., and Lagace-Seguin, D.G. 1992. Peer Relationships in Childhood. In Marc. H. Borastein., & Michael. E. Lamb. (Eds.), *Developmental Psychology: An Advanced Textbook* 3rd ed. 451-502. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Skånfors, Lovisa, Löfdahl, Annica, and Solveig Hägglund. 2009. "Hidden Spaces and Places in the Preschool: Withdrawal Strategies in Preschool Children's Peer Cultures." *Journal Of Early Childhood Research* 7 (1): 94-109. doi:10.1177/1476718X08098356.

Unicef, 2011. *The State of the World's Children.* New York: United Nations Children's Fund.

United Nations. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org.uk/publications/pub_detail.asp?pub_id=133.

Van Manen, Max. 1997. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy.* 2nd ed. Canada: The Althouse Press.

Wang, Yili, Palonen, Tuire, Hurme, Tarja-Ritta and Kinos, Jarmo. 2019. "Do you Want to Play With me Today?". *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 27 (2) 170-184. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2019.1579545.

Woltering, Steven, and Marc. D. Lewis. 2009. "Developmental Pathways of Emotion Regulation in Childhood: A Neuropsychological Perspective." *Mind, Brain and Education* 3 (3): 160-169. doi: 10.1111/j.1751-228X.2009.01066.x.

Wyness, Michael, G. 2002. *Contesting Childhood.* London: Falmer Press.