A study & original material on peer relationships & concepts of friendship in very young children

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A Study & Original Material on Peer Relationships & Concepts of Friendship in Very Young Children

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ABSTRACT: A Study & Original Material on Peer Relationships & Concepts of Friendship in Very Young Children

This thesis explores theory, observation, and practice dealing with friendship issues among three to four year old preschoolers. It sketches a portrait of the age group, using general developmental and socio-cultural theories, and concludes that social emotional adjustment and relationships are crucial to young children’s development. Based on my detailed classroom observations of peer interactions, I describe several patterns of friendship behavior in this age group. These patterns represent a range of desire and readiness to interact successfully with peers and to form friendships. Among children who frequently interact with peers, recurrent issues mark an ongoing process of defining and realizing what it means to be a “friend.”

A narrative sequence reflects my own efforts as a teacher to understand and assist this process. It describes divergent practices of master teachers and the role of mentors in shaping my inquiry. My own attempts to open the topic of friendship with young children are described. These efforts inform development of an original classroom material in the form of a children’s book – which I offer as an appendix to the thesis. My experience suggests that very young children benefit from open discussion around issues of friendship. Using materials such as this, a simple curriculum may emerge for building community and facilitating peer relationships.

The thesis also includes a booklist and review of published children’s literature on friendship. Picture books selected present multiple avenues for children to explore their ideas and to reflect on their experiences with peers. This list may be useful to other teachers interested in incorporating this theme.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores theory, observations, and practice dealing with friendship issues among three to four year old preschoolers. In Part I, I first sketch a portrait of the age group, using general developmental and socio-cultural theories. This part concludes with an examination of social-emotional development and the importance of relationships. Drawing on this theoretical framework, Part II presents insights from my own teaching and learning about peer relationships of the age group. In my classroom experience, children’s ideas about friendship are complex; sometimes reflect but often diverge from adult concepts; and are often inconsistent with their actual behavior. I found that addressing ideas of friendship with students was a useful complement to action-based experiences necessary for their social-emotional growth. Part III offers tools and activities for discussing friendship with children. It begins with a list of children’s books on friendship and a critical review of some of these books. Then, I offer my own original materials for use in examining friendship with students in the classroom.
I. AGE LEVEL-PORTRAIT OF THE 2.5-4.5 YEAR OLD CHILD

In this Part, I will outline major theories of age-specific developments that I feel have complemented and informed my practice most in working with three to four year old children. I divide my discussion of theory into three major domains: physical growth and development; cognitive development; and social-emotional development. I follow this with a brief discussion of socio-cultural theory. While treated separately, these categories are inter-related, and my analysis will point out major interrelationships.

My analysis focuses on a typically developing population of this age group without intensive special needs. The population I worked with was made up of children of families from similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. These children were from different national and cultural origins; there was a significant amount of variation in attitudes and expectations, but all spoke some English.

A. Physical and Sensory-Motor Profile

When I watched children enter the classroom in the fall, certain characteristics and behavioral patterns and variations were apparent. All of the children are accompanied by caregivers, many of who remain in the classroom during the first weeks of school. Many of the children arrive at school in strollers, but most walk on their own down the fairly steep steps and navigate through a narrow hall into a busy
classroom.

The children may talk to adults or remain physically close to them, but at an individual pace they begin examine and manipulate objects and explore the space of the classroom. Initially this exploration is cautious, as if restrained by expectations for public social behavior, but typically over time becomes less restrained. They recognize and use objects intended for play, and use their play to test the physical characteristics of these objects as well as their symbolic significance. For example, in the block area, they will stack blocks and watch them fall or use them to represent a house.

The children have developed motor planning and respond to verbal directions, relating to their physical activity such as sitting at a table together. They are also able to verbalize requests based on their needs and to eat and drink without assistance. In this classroom, toilet training is not a requirement, though most children do not rely on diapers. Just beginning their third year, the majority require adult help in toileting and other self-care routines but are rapidly progressing toward independence.

After two weeks, children have daily access to an outdoor play area. Entering this area, they recognize and take advantage of the expanded physical setting and the implied freedom for more energetic movement. Energy levels on the playground are consistently higher than in the classroom, and concentration more sustained. When the outdoor period is over, however, they are often tired and ready to nap.

In understanding the physical dimensions of this age group, the classic child development theories of Erik Erikson (1964) and Jean Piaget (1972; 1993) are well worth considering. Piaget (1972, pp. 27-30) posits a stage-based continuum of child
development beginning a purely sensory-motor phase that is operative from birth to about 18 months of age. According to Wadsworth’s (1996, p. 57) summary, Piaget’s next stage occurs in children from 2-9 years old, therefore including the group I am describing. Piaget (1993, p. 27) defines this as a pre-operational phase. Children at this developmental level continue to rely predominantly on concrete objects and sensory motor input in developing ideas about the physical world and their responses to it (Piaget, 1993, p. 27). This process continues until about age 7, when the children can work with concepts in the absence of the objects from which those concepts are drawn.

Piaget’s (1993; 1972) theories have shaped my awareness of the patterns of behavior characteristic of children of this age and the significance of those patterns for learning. Piaget centers much of his consideration on physical and biological structures: learning requires the child’s repeated, self-activated encounters with the physical environment combined with biological maturation that allows ideas to be formed (1972, p. 17). This theory stresses the importance at this age of open-ended physical activity and the manipulation of concrete materials in conceptual development (1972, p. 17, pp. 26-27). Piaget (1972) defines the movement toward basic logical constructs as a complex and compound process occurring within the child of pre-school age (1972, pp. 23-25).

Erikson (1964, chap. 7) takes a different but complementary view of development, focusing on the broad influences of biological maturation. He identifies three physical circumstances of this age group and relates them to emotional and conceptual development. He frames his theory as tensions between
opposing states that are associated with physical maturation throughout the human life span (1964, pp. 219-234). The first tension, described as “trust vs. mistrust” (1964, pp. 219-224), addresses the infant’s connection to the primary caregiver based on her complete dependency for survival on the adult. The first developmental achievement is tolerating the caregiver’s temporary absence. In the preschool or other group care setting, the child still has a basic dependency but expands her ability to enjoy experiences without the presence of the caregiver. From her status in actual dependency, the young child successfully adapts by temporary transfer of trust to an alternative caregiver.

The second tension, “autonomy vs. shame and doubt,” (Erikson, 1964, pp. 222-224) deals with toileting behavior, which requires the child to monitor and take control of her elimination as an expectation of her social environment. This challenge requires conscious control of bodily functions, emphasizing individual choice or “autonomy” in Erickson’s (1964, p. 223-224) definition of the phrase. This new body awareness leads to awareness of the self as better or worse, depending whether the child’s choices meet external expectations. She understands her individual potential to act and also the constraints of doubt or judgment imposed (1964, p. 224). Many children of this age are deeply involved in this process as they transition from diapers.

Erikson (1964, chap. 7) also defines a third tension, “initiative vs. guilt” (1964, pp. 224-226), which I understand as gaining prominence as the toileting behavior is mastered and becomes less dominant. Initiative grows from new physical and mental capacities to explore and shape the environment. It expresses itself as a
will to mastery – to have, to keep, to make, or to do. Working with new materials and learning new movement and expression, as well as challenging the rules, are characteristic of this stage. This “exuberant enjoyment of new loco motor and mental power” (1964, p. 224) expands along with the emerging superego. The opposition between these exploratory and inhibitory functions is described by Erikson as a central tension for this age group (1964, pp. 225-226).

B. Cognitive/Intellectual Development

Wadsworth (1996, chap. 4) clarifies an important component of Piaget’s perspective on the genesis of thought in infancy. This view defines the first mental concept as an image of the caregiver whom the child brings to mind in the caregiver’s physical absence. This marks the end of the sensory motor phase often around age two. In the next year, children also develop oral language; when my students first arrive at school, I notice patterns of language reflecting the language of adults in most ways. Wadsworth (1996) comments on Piaget’s significant proposition that language acts to speed up the rate at which experience can take place. “[T]hinking can begin to occur through representation of actions rather than actions alone” (Wadsworth, p. 61). This facilitates a revolution in cognitive growth, but Piaget (1964, pp. 16-19) also emphasizes the limits of the child’s thought processes at this stage. The child’s ability to manipulate ideas – to reason – does not yet approximate adult logic. Hence, the child’s thinking remains bound in important ways to immediate perception and action (Piaget, 1964, pp. 17-27).
Vygotsky (1978, chap. 7) emphasizes the role of symbolic play in the development of thought. He posits that until about age 3, the child’s thought is bound by her physical circumstances. After that, in symbolic play a child is able to assert an idea separate from her actual surroundings. Vygotsky defines symbolic play as a process by which the child reverses her “relation to the real, immediate, concrete situation (p. 97)” and imposes her ideas on her own actions and objects in her environment. As posited by Piaget (1993, p. 29), the child’s thinking remains linked to the concrete by her dependence on direct perception of an object, but this process allows her to develop ideas that go far beyond that object. Meaning is projected upon the play object, and is attributed according to the child’s mental associations. This process contributes to the child’s ability to engage in abstract reasoning without use of any concrete elements, which fully develops around age seven.

The socio-cultural context is a primary consideration for Vygotsky (1978, pp. 37-39), whereas Piaget (1972, 1993) focuses on learning as an individual process of interacting with the external world. In Vygotsky’s (1978, p. 39-40) view, language rather than actions or objects is the main source of new knowledge. In this view, the acquisition of oral language, which occurs at the threshold of this age group, marks a very significant milestone in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 97). Language is not only a tool by which a child can make its feelings and desires known, it is also system of understanding through which ideas are transmitted to and from the child (Vygotsky, pp. 97-99). All understanding is constructed through communicative activities in a social setting. Although Vygotsky (1978, p. 39) also emphasizes that young children use private speech in learning, that speech itself is
internalized from dialogue with others, particularly those whom the child sees as having greater knowledge.

In sum, both Vygotsky (1978, chap.7) and Piaget (1993, p. 27) recognize the influence of verbal interactions on learning and also agree that learning is contingent on direct experiences and biological maturation. They differ in the relative weight they place on the contribution of language and interpersonal experience versus individual experience in cognitive development. Play has a major role in both theories in constructing understanding at this stage, but each theorist focuses on different aspects of play. Piaget examines play as a self-initiated exploration of materials (1993, p. 27), whereas Vygotsky (1978, chap.7) recognizes play as a symbolic exploration of the social world and its cultural systems.

C. Social-Emotional Development

The prior discussion of Piaget (1993), Erikson (1964), and Vygotsky (1978) provides a background for consideration of contemporary theorists on socialization, relationships, and emotional development. Among modern theorists, there is general agreement with Vygotsky that learning is a process of socialization and that relationships and cultural factors shape development. Theories diverge, however, on questions relating to the strength of biological influences and the existence of universal, biologically determined patterns of development.

Socio-cultural theorists, Linda Levine (2000) and Jonathan Silin (1993, 2000), use the methods of anthropology to develop Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of learning as
socialization. They focus on the variations in childhood characteristics among different cultural groups and societies. They also doubt the validity of developmental psychology, a construct Silin (1993, pp. 226-228) evaluates as culturally contingent rather than scientifically objective. The child is seen in relationship to the larger social environment including family, school, community, and larger scale institutions. Understanding and changing these cultural domains is the key to better outcomes for many children.

Unlike many socio-cultural theorists, developmental psychologists Greenspan (1997) and Koplow (1996) believe in a biological pattern of healthy development. This pattern is a function of both biological structures and external factors interacting with those structures. Greenspan (Greenspan & Wieder, 1998) and Koplow (1996) borrow from the traditions of play therapy focused on interaction, relationships, and the emotional reality of the child. They also include strong consideration of socio-cultural context. These psychologists deal with special needs populations but also provide an essential developmental sequence that is helpful in understanding all children. Greenspan (Greenspan & Weider, 1998) deals with children with biological challenges in the form of genetic disorders; Koplow (1996) deals with children whose developmental progress has been disrupted by extreme environmental factors including poverty, violence, and neglect. Both Koplow (1996) and Greenspan (1997) have designed therapies to establish the conditions for “basic trust” as described by Erikson (1978). In these therapies, the bond of trust and mutual interest between child and caregiver is seen as a requirement for further healthy progression.

Both Greenspan (1997) and Koplow (1996) stress the integration of the three
factors I have introduced separately. Greenspan begins with the physical-emotional progression of feeling and awareness toward a conscious form of cognition and communication in infancy. The infant learns to integrate sensory-motor and affective states and to group affective and sensory perceptions into categories. These categories are the first “ideas” which the child uses in responding to sensations and controlling her actions.

**Conclusion to Part I.**

These theorists offer a range of perspectives on children that are well known among educators. Their views are diverse, cover different topics, and are sometimes complementary but are also potentially contradictory. Although I am still at an early stage of understanding these theorists, I have found them useful in my work with children. Their views have influenced my ability to observe children, interpret what I observed, and convert those observations into active inquiry and practice. In Part II, I focus on my specific inquiry into social relationships in the early childhood classroom with a particular emphasis on peer relationships and their meaning.
PART II: AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

In Part II, I divide my experience of relationships in the classroom into three groups: relationships with caregivers and families; relationships of children with classmates; and the role of the teacher in fostering those relationships. Throughout, I will discuss the influence of colleagues and their primary role in shaping my own professional development and my specific inquiry into friendship.

A. Relationships with Caregivers

Each theorist I have discussed acknowledges the importance of social context in the children’s learning including the influence of community and family. This aspect of theory, combined with my own experience, has shaped my orientation toward my work as a teacher. As I taught, I found that working with families was a larger part than I had expected of working with children in an educational setting.

Initially, although at some level I understood the importance of family relationships, I was reluctant to accept their central role in children’s classroom experience. At the same time, I had become a central participant in the process of separating children from caregivers. My fieldwork advisor, Jonathan Sillin, became an important influence. Using the process he often modeled, I began to look at my own reactions to the teaching situation on a personal level. From this perspective, I recognized that the school year begins with sadness as well as excitement. Children
must say good-bye to their caregivers in a new situation (and caregivers must leave the children to a new experience apart from them). My first feelings were of discomfort, ambivalence toward my own role in this process of separation, and uncertainty about what to do.

Working with an expert teacher who had also been a parent in the school, Paula Doerfel, I developed a different attitude toward families and children and insight into the family’s integral role in the child’s reality, even in the family’s absence from the classroom. She modeled an approach that was non-judgmental, inclusive of parents and respectful of their feelings, while conveying a sense of confidence and effectiveness that reassured the parents and children. Gradually, observing and discussing her approach with her, I became more comfortable with the parent-child interface with a better understanding of its developmental significance, as well as a better ability to manage its manifestations in the classroom including the various patterns of the separation process. As my comfort increased, I began to get to know and relate to parents as individuals. I was lucky to find parents who made an effort to share common interests and feelings that allowed me to identify with them more fully as people and caretakers.

B. Relationships with Peers

In her account of friendship and teaching, Vivian Paley (1992) describes a common question among preschoolers: “‘Are you my friend?’ the little ones ask in nursery school, not knowing. The responses are also questions. ‘If yes, then what?’” (p.3).
In this section, I will focus on how I came to see the classroom as community. This process for me began with my fieldwork year and extended into my work as an assistant teacher in a 3-4 year old classroom. This process was simultaneously one of losing self-consciousness in the classroom and gaining a true sense of the importance of social behavior among the children. This redefined my own concepts and actions as a teacher. It also led me to question the popular idea, with connections to Piaget’s work, that children of this age are egocentric – too young to make friends. I increasingly saw significant social interactions among the children although many of those interactions seemed unique to the age group.

My first fieldwork semester was in a pre-k class of 4-5 year olds. I noted the children were often highly involved in cooperative play for an extended time. They constructed activities that were highly communicative and did not depend on adult supervision. They had strong and enduring preferences for particular playmates and defined these preferred playmates as their “friends.” “Friends” were virtually always of the same gender. Other factors appeared to influence friend selection including appearance, physical ability, language and communication styles, and interests and preferences. Despite an active anti-bias curriculum, socio-economic and ethnic status also seemed to influence the formation of friendships. The desire to have “friends” was strong.

Children not participating in friendship circles showed discomfort with their unaffiliated status and sometimes discussed their concerns with me. In the most obvious case, when a child was directly excluded, she might complain, “They won’t let me play.” In such a case, I often intervened to require inclusion in the play
activity, as suggested by Paley (1996). Children also sensed less overt forms of exclusion or comparatively low preference among peers. For example, a child might note about a favored activity, “No one ever wants to do this with me.” A child might note extra-curricular events in which she has not participated. For example, “X said she was going to have a play date with Y. No one asks me for a play date.” Although I tried to suppress the discussion of outside plans at school, preventing this discomfort was difficult given general knowledge about these events.

The second semester of my fieldwork year introduced me to the world of 3-4 year olds. As distinct from the older children, the children in this age group often played in solitary or parallel mode although they sometimes played cooperatively. Collaboration within this group often depended upon adult structuring, as in a group activity organized and facilitated by the teacher. Most children did develop friendly relationships with each other as the semester progressed, but typically these were situational, dependent on a particular object or activity, and did not continue from day to day. In some cases, however, these relationships did continue and had the elements of stable and enduring friendship. Children of this age were more varied in their friendship behaviors than the older group and did not differentiate among others in the same way.

One classroom experience helped me understand the extent and importance of socialization and the learning influence of peers in this younger age group. On this occasion I was scheduled to lead circle time and to be observed by my advisor, Jonathan Silin. I did not have a natural feeling for this teaching activity and was particularly nervous and self-conscious. As I often did, I planned to secure the
children’s interest and stimulate discussion by passing around an object from nature (on this day, a moss-covered branch in a dish). Expecting them to sit quietly, I made my rounds with the container, allowing each student to have a look. While I was doing this, giggles broke out behind. I turned see one of the children, with whom I had good rapport, on his feet miming my actions, extending cupped hands as if to show the specimen. The other children were enthralled by this performance, and regaining their focus on the planned activity proved impossible.

I was mortified by my perceived failure and discussed my feelings about it at my advisory meeting afterwards. In a supportive way, Jonathan (Silin, personal communication, 2004) asked me to consider an alternative understanding of the event. He offered me *Rethinking Resistance in Schools: Power, Politics, and Illicit Pleasures* (2005, Silin, Schultz, et al., &... Bank Street Coll. of Education) a collection of essays that he had recently edited for Bank Street’s *Occasional Paper* series. The essays focused on the roots of political resistance and included observations of peer solidarity in early childhood (2005). The lead essay by Steven Schultz (pp. 6-15), examines instances of collective challenges to authority as an important social development in young children. Schultz (p. 13) asserts that strong identification with peers lays the basis for future cooperation and joint action that may support activism in democratic society.

Considering both this essay and its introduction by Jonathan (Silin, Schultz, et al., 2005) allowed me to see the circle time event as evidence of an emerging group identity and recognition of a shared experience as students in a structured classroom setting. Each child who was laughing at the instigator (as all were) was expressing a
learned awareness of shared status and mutual reality. This new perspective let me understand that the power of group experience was the lesson, for both the children and for me. The status of being together took significance over my planned initiative and, I understood now, was more important for the children. Gradually, I revised my planning of circle time to try to take advantage of the natural curriculum of interaction between and among children.

1. The Capacity for Friendship: Sonny, From Age 3.5 to 4 Years.

The Bank Street course I took on “Observing and Recording the Behavior of Young Children” (Balaban, Cohen, Gropper & Stern, 2008) changed my teaching, as the text of this title has continued to inform my thinking. The child study project completed for this course further encouraged me to become a better teacher indirectly by becoming more aware of children as they were. From “Sonny,” at age 3.5, I learned the immense potential for friendship in children of this age. In the running records I kept, Sonny always engaged with peers. Sonny was the child of a visiting Korean family and spoke English as a second language. Despite this cultural difference, he was an active and vibrant social presence in the classroom.

My observations of Sonny recorded many expressions of friendship behavior and a code of ethics that included deep consideration of other children as well as conflicts typical of his age level. His interactions with other children were both verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal expressions of friendship included physical games and facial and body language communication. Especially during times when he was expected to sit or stand still, Sonny invented physical amusements and engaged other
students in his behavior. For example, in circle time he abandoned the required cross-legged stance, extended his legs, wiggled his feet, and stuck his tongue out. His friend reciprocated. In addition, while standing in line, he and a friend began moving in a bobbing motion, squatting and rising faster and faster. On another occasion, he inspired the whole class to join the “bobbing” game. These acts of mutual resistance to expected behavior expressed solidarity similar to the circle time “misrule” I have discussed.

Sonny enjoyed physical activity and often related to other children through that activity. He also related verbally to peers, although relatively new to English. His conceptual ability and drive to communicate enabled him to overcome speech differences. In outdoor play he used language to initiate and enter symbolic scenarios. In one typical activity period, he used language to generate or extend numerous play scenarios: monster chase (shouting “Monster! Monster!” while riding bicycles); sleeping in a house (pulling fabric over himself and feigning sleep “like this”); ice cream stand (asking “Who wants some ice cream?”); riding in a taxi (“Take me over there.”); and organizing a party (announcing “We are eating cake.”) In experimenting with written language, Sonny created letters expressing affection to his classmates.

Sonny’s play also extended to less improvisational block play, which involved planning structures and working collaboratively with a friend over an extended period (thirty to forty minutes). For example, he joined with a friend to plan and make a multi-level car garage using blocks and toy vehicles. This complex form of play required advanced communications skills and commitment to working with peers
through negotiation and adjustment.

Sonny displayed an excellent perception of the social environment and empathy with individuals whom he perceived to be socially excluded or facing other difficulties. During a dance activity, he reached out to a child who was not participating and invited her into the dance. When she refused, he was perplexed, asking her “Why?” At snack, he offered to help another child pour juice from a pitcher that he described as “scary and heavy.” Noticing the absence of a child from class, he expressed concern about whether the child was sick. He was quick to respond to his teacher’s corrections of behavior that might offend his friends, although he was not so quick to respond to commands that would limit his play with other children.

Sonny’s behavior also at times included aggressive, defiant, and angry reactions to his peers. Instances of this behavior were situation-specific, for example, when another child knocked over a building project or interfered with his work at clean up time. Physical reactions to conflicts sometimes occurred over access to favored play objects or to desired classroom spaces. Overall, however, Sonny was highly motivated to maintain and build successful relationships with his peers as well as teachers and highly successful in managing his behavior to do so.


In the classical developmental theory, the ability to take a non-egocentric perspective and to engage in reciprocal communication does not occur consistently at this age. As demonstrated in the case of Sonny, some children of this age do exhibit
sophisticated communication and relationship skills and altruistic impulses. However, many students who share a similar desire for friendship are less successful. Struggles in connecting with peers are part of the expected progression of this age group but it can also be characteristic of ongoing developmental issues. Distinguishing the range of normal social development is difficult, because at this age the range is so broad and social development can proceed rapidly, with abrupt shifts in behavior from day to day.

As I have mentioned, all children of this age are still developing and refining the basic capacity for forming friendships and skills for interacting successfully with their peers. This capacity requires coordination of several complex functions, as well as the prerequisite environmental supports defined by both Koplow (1996, pp. 3-16) and Greenspan (1997, chap. 1). Greenspan and Weider (1998, chap. 1) specify these functions, which include the ability to: understand basic social expectations; observe customary social routines; perceive and respond to verbal and non-verbal social cues; and engage in productive play and sustained joint attention. A child who lacked one or more of these functions or who had significant sensory difficulties, such as hyper- or hyposensitivity to stimuli, would qualify as special needs (Greenspan & Wieder, 1998, pp. 19-34).


The first pattern was of children who were avoidant of other children but verbal and connected to adults. J. and S. were three year-old students enrolled in different school years in the classroom where I taught. At the first parent-teacher
conference in the late fall, their families both worried that their children were not making connections with their peers. My co-teachers and I agreed.

Expert co-workers assured me that J. and S. were within the normal range of development. They had no known biological or psychosocial issues. Both were first children in families that had recently experienced the birth of a second child; the parents believed that they had adjusted well to their new siblings. Like many other children in the classroom, they sometimes had difficulty during separation but were coping appropriately. Although their play was solitary, it was often sophisticated and included symbolic representations that they explained to nearby adults. Both were especially adept with language in conversations with adults, were highly perceptive, and discussed complex concepts. In these conversations they made eye contact; showed interest in the adult; and were relaxed and responsive.

J. and S. stood out in their classes as intentionally avoiding interaction with peers. Both regarded other children’s activity from an onlooker’s perspective, sometimes sharing their observations with adults. They did not initiate interactions with other children and avoided physical contact with them. Both were particularly reluctant to observe the customs of the classroom related to sharing workplaces and materials; however, they understood and complied with other customs and routines.

In contrast to their talkativeness with adults, J. and S. would either offer no response to the overtures of other children or convey rejection with a brief answer. Neither was generally aggressive, although J. often mimed a monster-like, menacing swiping gesture—when approached by another child. Both vigilantly guarded their personal space and reacted defensively when other children threatened it. Although
open, tolerant, and often affectionate with adults, they did not seem comfortable with other children. If a conflict with another child arose, they were more prone than other children to become emotionally upset and to request adult intervention.

Consistently avoidant responses of J. and S. set them apart from their peers, but I came to recognize that all children experience apprehension and avoidance to some extent. While overtly less eager than other children to form relationships, J. and S. nevertheless showed interest in other children and were particularly curious about other children’s cooperative behavior. In addition, during the period of my observation (from fall to late spring), both showed transition in attitudes and behavior toward other children. For example, J. developed a preference for a younger female classmate. With support from teachers and parents, the two became fast friends by year’s end. S. also made advances in social awareness that I discuss in more detail in the next section. The progression by J. and S. in relating to others reflected their own pathways toward social realization. Witnessing their transition increased my awareness of the range of possibilities for social and emotional growth within group settings.

The second pattern was that of a child who, unlike J. and S. at the beginning of the year, had active pro-social behavior, but whose aggressive impulses prevented him from having friends. Aggression is a normal element of human relationships, but in K.’s case, that aggression often took a physical form and was self-defeating. His physical attacks on other children indicated a lack of a well-developed impulse control, and the lack of that control made it difficult to maintain connections with other children. K. clearly valued those connections and expressed regret over the
K. seemed to require a substantial amount of extra attention, which our regular teaching team planned for and provided. Initially, I was unsure whether we could provide adequate support and considered the possibility that K. might require special services. However, senior staff members and Banks Street instructors persuaded me that his profile suggested normal development. K. was born slightly premature and had retained toddler-like proportions. More significantly, he was the only child of a bi-cultural, bi-lingual family. Mandarin was his first language, and he visited China for extended periods including a summer before school began.

These factors made it more likely that K. would have trouble communicating with children in this setting. Unfamiliarity with the language and customs prevailing in the classroom created challenges to interacting successfully with other children. His physical reactions suggested his frustration with these special challenges. At the same time, he had good relationships with teachers, sought connections with other children, and was deeply upset when his behavior (usually hitting) broke those connections.

K’s own strong initiative and emotional engagement allowed him to progress with the support our team was able to provide. By the end of the year, he had improved a great deal in regulating his behavior and was generally accepted by the group although he still lacked continuous friendships. Gradually he was able to extend productive co-play with other children especially when supported by a teacher. As he learned to control his physical aggression, other children were more likely to consider him with the same positive regard that he offered them. At the end of the
year, he expressed his deep emotional ties to the group by weeping when he understood that he would part from his classmates.


I observed children who had or were developing friendships that were also the source of conflicts and classroom issues. Among these children, friendship behavior marked a positive progression in social and emotional maturity. However, significant tensions seemed inherent in this progression: these included highly charged disputes (often physical) and social exclusivity or stifling dependence. I understood that these tensions coincided with positive development and represented an ongoing learning process, yet my own response to them was often uneasiness and uncertainty. Often my question was how and when to respond to these different social expressions when they seemed harmful to the children involved or disruptive to the class. In exploring this question, I searched for a support role that balances respect for children as autonomous individuals and as participants in a shared experience.

As the year progresses imitation and parallel play among many children are supplemented by the early phases of co-operative play. This beginning shared activity is often exploratory and entails experimentation with other children’s reactions. Children at this stage often are unconcerned with defining friendship or analyzing the social significance of their interactions. I observed that disputes often erupt around immediate concerns such as the use or control of materials and space. In their analysis of early peer interactions and friendship development, Laursen and Hartup (2002) label these concrete elements as the first point of connection, often, for
young children with peers. They suggest that young children reflect a largely instrumental view of relationships to other children and define friends within the context of the moment and what may be literally shared (Laursen & Hartup). Although a young child may return repeatedly to the same playmate, she may not use the designation “friend” or express particular investment in the relationship.

When disputes arise at this stage, they may result in emotional upset and physical aggression but rejection is typically temporary and limited to the situation: for example, “If you do that, I won’t play with you.” Usually these disputes do not cause a permanent change in attitude though physical offenses may be linked momentarily with being a non-friend: for example, “You are not my friend. You hit.” (This is often the case even when the complainant has also engaged in physical aggression.)

6. Pre-Established Friendships.

In other cases, children entered the classroom with established relationships with one or more of their fellow students. Parents typically sponsor these relationships with children of adult friends, either as incidental to family interactions or as strategically desirable. Particularly in situations where the families have strategized these relationships, “friend” has been introduced as an important categorization. For example, a parent might say, “Joyce will be your friend at school,” which both fixes the concept of friendship as a status and attaches that concept to a particular individual.

Like all of the social experience that children bring to the classroom, these
pre-existing friendships can be beneficial, providing stability and companionship for the children involved. Having a friend already can make the adjustment to the unfamiliar classroom setting easier. However, strong attachments of this type can be exclusive and develop strong dependency between the friends. This can isolate these students from the group and inhibit their responsiveness to others. In addition, it can cause a power imbalance in the relationship in which there is conflict between a more reliant and a more independent partner. Unlike their classmates, children with these pre-existing relationships had a clear idea of “friend” but one that was confined to their established companion.

7. Advancing patterns of friendship.

Laursen and Hartup (2002) have observed a much more sophisticated and consistent pattern of friendship in older children. I assert that slightly older preschoolers, and many that are very young, have begun to hold a steady, stable concept of friends’ identities over time. This pattern of thinking is more peer-focused, involves a more permanent and distinct concept of friendship than the situational phase discussed above, and may begin to motivate many of the child’s choices in school. The emergence of this pattern of friendship may cause difficulty in school routines. For example, at snack a child may suddenly demand to sit next to a particular child – her “friend” – and may become extremely upset if she can not. This behavior reflects a transition from the less differentiated, situational sense of friend to the more permanent, less conditional concept. The role of “friend” becomes persistent as it develops abstract importance, but remains rigidly tied to the immediate
situation that frames the experiences of young children (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 96).

This pattern reaches its most advanced expression in larger groups of children that have a consistent mutual and exclusive identity as “friends.” These groups are engaged in a self-conscious and active effort to define “friend” and to test the strength and durability of the role. They want to know what to expect and not to expect of friends and under what circumstances. They want to understand whether others they prefer are their friends, and how friendship is maintained. They may begin to use the designation of “friend” self-consciously to produce effects on other children. “You are my friend” typically brings a reciprocally accepting response. “You are not my friend” may be delivered neutrally, as a matter of fact, or may also be used more aggressively to punish another child.

This kind of behavior surrounding the new, more durable status of “friend” is likely to attract the attention of children outside the group and may raise questions for them about their relationships with others, including awareness of whether they are more or less preferred by peers. When a child says, “I don’t want to dance with you, I only want to dance with my friend X,” the other child is left to wonder about her acceptability to others and her own social identity and, in the worst case, may sense painful rejection. This potential for rejection and creation of insider-outsider status can have observable impacts on the tone and relationships within the group. Personally, it was difficult for me to accept this behavior and led me to want to impose my own (“correct”) ideals of community among the children.
C. Role of the Teacher

The range of social behaviors described above, and my personal response to them, raised important questions about the role of the teacher in establishing social values and maintaining a positive atmosphere for all children. In my classroom observations, I came to understand that supporting social-emotional development and building community were the main objectives of teachers I admired. The practices by which they supported these objectives infused every aspect of their teaching.

They began with establishing authentic relationships with both children and their families and working to address individualized needs. Space, time, and activities were organized to meet those individualized needs and to build both group and individual identity. Curriculum agendas and routines were planned to enhance children’s communications and cooperation, guide successful conflict resolution, allow for participation in community decision making, and build awareness of and respect for differences of all kinds. These practices created an accepting, equitable, inclusive and open classroom environment that comprehensively supported children’s social adjustment and emotional wellbeing, without which friendship cannot flourish. It was within this environment that my specific inquiry developed.

My interests led me to focus specifically on friendship and issues of community building in classroom practice. Vivian Paley (1992) describes her choice of pro-active inclusion in her kindergarten class. In adopting a policy of “You can’t say you can’t play,” she seeks to make inclusivity a required norm (1992). She takes
responsibility for establishing that norm, with overwhelmingly positive results. However, her success was with five to six year old children, and therefore it was unclear as to whether it would be effective for pre-school classes.

These considerations were prompted by a workshop for preschool educators on Paley’s *You Can’t Say You Can’t Play* (1992) held by Lorraine Harner and Nancy Balaban (2008). Participants held contrasting reactions to the policy described by Paley (1992). Many thought that the social development of the preschool child warranted a different approach. The workshop (Balaban & Harner, 2008) developed my focus on the issues of friendship in the classroom and what role I could play to help children deal with those issues. I determined to explore further ways in which a teacher could promote greater social-emotional and cognitive connection among students, and to direct that inquiry to discussions of friendship and the diverse meanings of “friend.”

This exploration included observing the techniques and planning of experienced teachers in supporting social connections. The teachers in both 3-4s classrooms in my school shared many similarities in approach. Both were gifted, master practitioners that I wished to emulate and I became confounded when I noticed a small difference in how each teacher incorporated the word “friend” in her classroom language. Ms. C. used the word frequently in addressing the group. For example, she would remark, “We are all friends here.” “Friend” applied to all people in her classroom and was accompanied by a universal expectation of friendly consideration. Ms. C. explained to me (2008, personal communication) that she consciously choose to use this term in the classroom to emphasize the value of
collective identity, strong interpersonal connections, and unbiased, unconditional acceptance of each individual.

I had the opportunity also to work with Paula Doerfel for a placement that lasted several years and from whom I drew much, if not most, of my current approach and understanding of early childhood practice. Ms. Doerfel (personal communication, 2008), in contrast to Ms. C, rarely used the term “friend.” When I asked her why, she described her view of the individual child as a unique and complex person who should be allowed to make use of the term as it became relevant. In the meantime, she believed that the rules and opportunities for interaction would offer a safe place to join a mutually respectful and genuinely connected community.

I discussed these differences in approach with the two teachers, both of whom I respected and of admired, and I sought Lorraine Harner’s input. We agreed that the current academic literature was beginning to realize the centrality of socialization and peer relationships to long-term learning outcomes and that the field would be a fruitful area for further work (Harner, L., personal communication, 2009). She supported my further inquiry into children’s views on the topic of friendship and the development of teaching approaches to friendship.

I asked for Ms. Harner’s (personal communication, 2004 -2010) input on developing a better working understanding of ideas children held around the term “friend”, as already discussed in the preceding section, and the potential and limitations of the term as a shared focus for classroom discussion. She suggested that I explore how children define friendship and what they think about it. In collaboration with her, I planned several formats to conduct this exploration: large
group discussion and interactive storytelling with large and small groups. We developed scenarios that seemed typical, common, and frequent in my observations of issues of friendship in the classroom. These scenarios were incorporated into storytelling activities, to which I added discussion prompts. I also conducted direct group discussions and individual interviews with children about friendship concepts.

In one storytelling activity with a large group, I told a brief felt board story about wanting to have a friend but being unsure about what this meant and how to go about it. In the story, a child, Geraldine, begins school with advice from her mother not to “forget to make a friend.” She finds children at play with the materials and activities familiar in our own classroom and struggles through various obstacles to make a friend. These obstacles included not finding an obvious match (someone who looked like her), becoming shy when approaching another child and not being heard, and bumping the prospective friend when he does not respond to her.

I animated the story with simple felt board pieces representing children, parent, and teachers. Many children were responsive to this presentation and offered comments in response to my questions about what Geraldine should do in response to her difficulties in finding a friend; other children were attentive but declined to comment. After the story, the pieces were offered for play during which I observed two students interacting around the materials.

Each of these students fit the pattern discussed in the previous section of anxiously avoiding interacting with other children. In this instance, one child used one of the felt figures to develop his own narrative, the other, child B., expressed interest to him in knowing his story, and a conversation ensued. Their interest and
interaction suggested that this activity had value in promoting communications around friendship.

I also used a variation of this activity with a small group. I began with a similar presentation involving the difficulties of entering a group and making friends. In the variation, however, I invited the children to experiment with their own telling and manipulation of the figures. Two children decided to perform their own story, using the felt board characters to depict a dialogue leading to their joint play. I had never before observed one of the children participating involved in any similar interactions with actual peers. Through this activity, however, he became able to explore the possibility of entering these situations through symbolic play.

In my assessment, these activities contributed to children’s thinking about friendship and promoted at least tentative connections among children who had not previously developed friendships. These results did not provide dramatic breakthroughs but suggested modest gains in awareness and social skills. The experience also added immensely to my own understanding of how friendship is conceptualized. It is important to stress that the techniques I tried were not a substitute for the fundamental supports already in place in the classroom for positive social experiences and skills. Indeed, my experiments depended for their effectiveness on the success of those existing practices.

The modest success of these classroom activities encouraged me to think of variations that might be more easily and effectively used to promote reflections on friendship. This thinking led to the book project, which I describe and present in Part III below. I chose the book format because it was easier to implement and could
serve not only for a teacher presentation but also could be available for children to view independently or to share with a peer. In my experience, picture books with stories in words are a particularly effective way of sharing ideas, setting the tone, and conveying to children what is valued in the classroom. Sharing books and the ideas in them often create a common focus and recognition of mutual interests that can be explored.
PART III: DISCUSSION OF CURRICULAR MATERIALS

In this Part, I offer two resources that I have created in order to support my classroom practice around the problem of friendship. The first of these resources is a review of relevant children’s books on friendship in which I consider the various definitions and treatments of friendship incorporated by these different authors. I consider the applicability and pedagogical value of these works for the age group, and follow with an itemized list of suggested titles for classroom use.

Second, I offer my own original materials that I hope will provide a useful addendum to teaching friendship in the classroom. I include some notes on simple class activities that I have created in order to facilitate discussion of friendship. I also include my own original book that seeks to address some of the limitations of existing literature on friendship. These materials can have a direct impact on teacher understanding of the problem of friendship and an indirect impact on actual children learning about friendship.
A. Review of Books on Friends for the Preschool Classroom

Children want to know about friends. They are interested in books about friends, both in the context of teacher reading activities and in independent selections of their own. No single book, however, discusses friends definitively or completely, from what I have come to understand. The following list seeks to collate a representative range of depictions of friends and friendships providing a resource for educators to expose children to a variety of ideas about the term.

My own teacher learning has benefited from surveying and comparing these authors’ differing views of friendship and the various techniques they use to represent them. In both their storytelling and their presentation of concepts, authors construct the term differently; it is precisely this disagreement or variation between authors, however, that makes these books so useful in classroom practice. The idea of “friendship” always contains implicit value judgments and is contingent on complex cultural and personal values. Thus, having a wide range of works is necessary to explore the potentials and limits of each particular definition and to facilitate student thinking about the term.

I have selected these books as appropriate to the age group because they are likely to connect to children’s previous knowledge and experience. In my own practice, I have seen books serve as concrete objects with strong visual content. This makes them ideal as an intermediary between activities and concepts. These objects allow students both to return to teacher lessons and to reinterpret and personalize
them.

I have discovered many excellent books for children on friendship, while I also feel that it is a theme commonly mishandled in adult presentation. It is easy to miss the mark set by good intentions here, overshooting the age characteristics of children in pointing to what a friend must or should be. Much of children's literature on friendship is instructional in nature—revealing a tendency (I share with other adults) to tell children how to make friends or what not to do. In both the material I have made and the books that I have included, there is both moral and informational content. I have selected models of its better handling, both more subtly and respectfully, within the literature presented here. In the review that follows, I have organized books in two categories: Anticipating Friendship and Negotiating Friendship.

1) Anticipating Friendship.

These are stories that look at simple constructs of friendship from initial stages or basic views of peer relationships. In ways that are explorative and non-technical, these titles frame hypothetical values of friendship. Children who do or do not yet have friendships are drawn in by these often-playful stories that relate to being with others, locating connections and belonging. The important appreciation of affinities, similarities, and individual differences is also a theme.

Margaret Wise Brown’s *The Friendly Book* (1954) presents a very literal way for young children to reflect on shared interests. Rather than a didactic story about the idea of friendship, this book allows children to sit together and peruse its lists of
popular categories. The subjects of these, such as dogs or cars, are likely to elicit shared enthusiasm. In a very gentle way, the Friendly book suggests that such shared affinities extend in multiple directions, and can lead to appreciation of other people.

In Eric Carle’s *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* (1971) a small and powerless mouse asks various animals if they would be friends. Its central visual structure—in which the mouse constantly mistakes the tails of animals for entire animals, only to be surprised on the following page—depicts the challenge of connecting perceptions of the larger world with actual objects or people in it. The book’s central message is that we are all small, powerless creatures in a much larger world. The answer to the title’s question is nonverbal—instead, the resolution of the plot is a silent meeting of a similar figure (another small mouse) and their discovery of a safe haven. This book is almost exclusively pictorial; making it very useful for toddlers and special needs students.

Another selection by Eric Carle (2001), *Where Are You Going?: To See My Friend*, has a similar appeal in its graphic focus. The text, in two languages, celebrates both differences and unity in plot and structure. The book actually represents a collaborative effort between Carle and illustrator Kazuo Iwamura, who has illustrated the Japanese-language text that reads from right to left opposite the pages in English. Each story follows an animal character on the way to meet a human friend. One by one, he encounters other animals, invites them to come along, and brings them to the side of a young child ready with a musical instrument. A central foldout brings the characters of both stories to a celebratory ending of dance and song (score included).
In Marie Hall Etts’ *Will You Play With Me?* (1955) the main character is a young child captivated by the animals around her. The animals, however, carry on their own activity in spite of her interest. The main character shows a strong interest in connection, without the means of entering into that connection immediately. This book illustrates the vital difference between interest and interaction. The temporal delay between her verbal play prompts and her eventual success in interaction suggests a model in which friendship requires a mutual interest that requires time to achieve. Like the animals, preschool classmates do not know how to respond to the interest shown by their peers; over time, however, growing familiarity makes mutual interest and interaction possible.

*Yo! Yes?* (Raschka, 1988) explores the anticipation of friendship and first connections by staging a repeated two-word introductory dialogue between two young boys. This book shows how language is actually secondary to basic interactions. “Yo” and “Yes” are truly simple terms that effectively manage to show mutual interest and to invite interaction. The punctuation of the text suggests different inflections representing the important modifiers of body language, tone, and physical orientation. The two words change in important ways as the two boys literally come closer to one another by interacting with these two words.

2) **Negotiating Friendship.**

*Making Friends*, the non-fiction sample by Fred Rogers and Jim Judkis (1987) was recommended by colleagues as the best example in my search for a good content book on this topic. In fact, this text comes close to the type of material on friends I
had been hoping to introduce in our classroom. As is typical of Fred Rogers, the text addresses children in a comforting and respectful way. It introduces the range of experiences likely to occur in the social and emotional lives of children as they begin to encounter one another in the group setting, accompanied by natural-looking photographs of young children in such situations.

Russell Hoban often uses animal characters but depicts realistic situations that are likely to resonate with children’s current concerns and experiences in the home and community. *A Bargain for Frances* (Hoban, 1970) centers on a friendship based around a shared object interest. The two characters identify with one another by sharing use, and serious appreciation of their toy tea set. The plot explores the tension between ownership, object interest, and equitable interaction. This book is notable for its honest acknowledgement of the central importance of objects to young children, and its realistic depiction of the difficulty of arriving at an equitable sharing relationship. Both objects and relationships remain important, and Frances and her friend negotiate their own process of prioritization. *A Best Friend for Frances* (Hoban, 1969) is a similar narrative, but instead of objects, the characters negotiate the sharing of activities and time. This title explores social inclusion and exclusion and the problematic concept of “best friends” as well as gender constructs.

In Leo Lionni’s *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (Leonni, 1963) the author uses abstract color spots to explore the ways that friendships both shape and threaten to erode identity boundaries between the two friends and their respective family members. The simplicity of the visual design seems especially arresting to children; the abstract symbols seem to allow children from a range of social levels to draw their
own significance from the plot. (The importance of both friends and family relationships is meaningful for young children). Lionni’s *Swimmy* (1963) also visually captivating, explores identity and friendship as well—specifically, concerns about group belonging. In her book *The Big Blue Spot* (2003) Holwitz pays tribute to this influential work, demonstrating an appreciation of Lionni’s visual construction of friendship.

Cooperation and community are also major concerns of *Balancing Act* (2010) by Ellen Stoll Walsh. Walsh explores give and take in a community. In creating physical balance together on a balance beam, the book’s community of mice enacts a metaphorical social balance. Because this book relates to a concrete and commonly shared playground experience, many children will find this an intriguing association. This body-based experience of social cooperation will resonate with children who have played on a balance beam.

Two classic book series—*George and Martha* (Marshall, 1997) and *Frog and Toad are Friends* (Lobel, 1970)—are uniquely valuable picture books that strongly appeal to young children, new readers, and older readers such as myself. These series show anecdotes in a long-term friendship between familiar characters. When read over time as a series, the reader begins to recognize distinctive traits and personality patterns in the characters. By establishing these patterns, the authors are able to represent both the tensions and comforts of long-term friendships. The impact of particular situations on personality and on the dynamics of relationships are integrated in otherwise eventful plots. In doing so the authors are able to represent friendship as an ongoing process showing that reciprocity in friendships grows to be
more indirect over time, and that rhythms of relationship are both steady and are contingent upon events as well as the identity of participants.

Some notable titles depicting friend interactions within a preschool setting include Cohen’s *Will I Have a Friend?* (1967) and Havill’s *Jamaica and Brianna* (1993). Cohen’s book reflects on the anticipation of interactions in the classroom and also shows specific participatory activities that allow these interactions, modeling ways of participating in the classroom that bring children together. Havill’s book represents tensions between friends that crop up over a pair of boots. This book explores the things that can go wrong in classroom friendship interactions. In it, the pair develops a problem, recognizes it, and comes up with their own conversation for solving it.

*Farfallina and Marcel* (2002) portrays changes that can affect friends. Children will recognize and identify with the issue of major transformations in friendship. Farfallina’s physical metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly recognizes human concerns about change and continuity in relationships. Mo Willems’ *City Dog and Country Frog* (2010), similarly, uses the absence of one character to think about the impact of life changes and separation on friendships. Though adults will recognize the implication that the frog has died, the story is in fact open-ended and could apply to any departure. A happier problem is described in *Chester’s Way* (1988), in which a new arrival interrupts the habits of an exclusive pair of “best friends”.

B. List of Books on Friends for the Preschool Classroom


C. Rationale for Original Classroom Material

My purpose in making an original classroom material was to create a story presenting an elemental description of friendship. In selecting content, I sought elements that young children could match with what they already understood, while validating the normal presence of unknowns. I hoped to validate the presence of ambiguities, subtleties, and mysteries that are conditions in building these first peer connections between very young people. My experience is mostly with children ages two and a half to four and a half years old that I have envisioned as the primary audience for this book. For this audience, I feel nuances and uncertainties, as well as conflicts and contradictions, are generally underrepresented in the literature on friendship for children.

I offer this picture book as a bridge between what is most complicated, abstract, and uncontainable in human relationships and the very concrete, measurable, and physical elements that initially and continually co-define the psychological and emotional structures that are built between contemporaries with special affinities. Coming from a visual arts background, I often communicate and build relationships using object-relationships, physical materials, and communicative metaphors that rely on manipulating or arranging forms in space. This connects me to the time-space-event continuum that is the stage for children’s meaningful encounters with one another. In their examination, Niffenegger and Willer (1998) underscore the significance of the immediate environment, the role of object play, co-operative
manual tasks, or other types of shared sensory-motor experience in young children’s friendship development. Importantly, the open-ended and contradictory dimensions of relationship in my story exist in a framework of concrete elements and connections to daily experiences common to young preschoolers.

I hoped to create a resource for inclusion that might benefit all children of preschool age in negotiating their interactions with each other. My feeling is, at this age and beyond, people remain curious and also become foggy and forgetful about the basic things that happen and can be done to increase the odds of building good feelings and friendly relationships from new encounters with others. For this reason, I have experimented with creating a work of fiction that also includes some elements of a Social Story™, a type of support first introduced by Carol Gray in 1991 (Gray, 1994). As individualized interventions, Social Stories™ use specific procedures and elements for those with special needs in communication and other areas. In both borrowing from and breaking with standards of that structure, what I offer instead is an explorative material for adding to the preschooler’s social studies. This material is designed to elicit children’s thoughts and feelings about their own social experiences with peers.

Both typically and differently developing children often lack experience and success in meeting and getting to know one another. They hesitate for many reasons, and are concerned with both the basic procedures and deeper significances related to making social connections with peers. Around the classroom, I overheard children’s expressing abstract ideals about what friendship should be. These comments included expectations about sharing, helping, and “being nice”. They sometimes did, and other
times did not correspond, with their actual experiences of reality. These experiences included issues of ownership, space, aggression, and argument over activities and agendas. My goal in this analysis is to bring the students’ concepts of friendship more closely into line with their realities. This realignment can help reality inform concept, and concept inform reality in a way that can help children build friendships.

In suggesting that friendship be discussed at the word and idea level, I assume that a focus on interpersonal reality has been set within the preschool classroom. The sample included here represents an approach to exploring the social perspective of children. I recommend use of this material as far as it may increase or improve conversations about interdependence. This, or any other viable approach, can use communications around the notion of “friendship” to improve awareness and quality of life within the preschool classroom and community. Opportunities to hear what children and other adults have to say about friends has expanded my conceptual understanding, and suggests the value of asking questions about children’s social realities.
REFERENCES


Are Pencil and Paper Friends?

By Maia A. Cannon

An Original Picture Book

Are Pencil and Paper Friends?
to my previous co-teachers, who showed me how to teach and remind me to live.

To my previous co-teachers,

in friendship

with gratitude to my original teaching team for their extended collaboration and to other co-workers contributing to this project, which included generous administrative support.

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Paper was new at school; in fact this was the first night he had been out of the package on his own. He fluttered around on the desktop in the night breeze that came through the window, left just a little bit open. Through it Paper could see the light of the moon.
A gust of breeze lifted paper just then and carried him to the edge of the desk. "Wow-ee!" he said. Just then as he landed against the edge of something else, he said: "You bumped into me." said that something else. "I'm very sorry," said Paper. "I did not know that there was anything else here. What something are you?" "I am a pencil," said Pencil. "What something are you?" "I'm a paper," said Paper. "I did not know that there was anything else here. What something are you?" "I am a pencil," said Pencil.
“It is hard to stay still because tomorrow will be the first day of school. Are you new here too?”

“I have sat for a long time up on the shelf,” said Pencil, “and I have seen many things, but I have not really started yet. I just got sharpened.”

“But you still must know lots about what happens at school. While the teachers were here getting things ready, I heard them talk about many things that children will be doing at school. There is a picture on the schedule for ‘making friends,’ I wonder how they do that. Do you know everything except making friends.”

“Are you new here too?”

“But I have not really started yet. I just got sharpened.”

“I have sat for a long time up on the shelf,” said Pencil, “and I have seen...”
Pencil shook her head from side to side, "I just don't know" she sighed.

"Well," asked paper, "What do you have to start with to make one?"

"It is a very hard thing to see, exactly."

Children will be making them at school but there is no picture on the schedule and I don't know much about friends," said Pencil. "I do not have one yet. The
Making friends starts when there are at least two together.

"Right!" said Pencil. "I do not know and you do not know, that makes two.

"I don't get it," said Paper. "All I said was 'two don't know'."

With that, Pencil jumped straight to her point. "That is what you need to start with. You've just said it," she remembered.

Paper was disappointed. "Now there are two of us who don't know," he said.
“Where do the two have to be? Is there a special place to start making friends?” asked Paper.

“I think it could be lots of places,” maybe, said Pencil.

“Even the moon?” asked Paper. They moved across the table to take a look.

“Probably not,” said Pencil. “Too far away and cold.”
"I think somewhere comfortable is best," she added.

"Paper jumped into his very best twirl. He was so excited. "Then it could happen right here! Our classroom is especially comfy and cozy!"

"Yes," said Pencil. "I have heard that many friends have their very first meeting in a classroom."

"I think somewhere comfortable is best," she added.
"Which friend gets to keep their first meeting?" asked Paper. "Can one of them take it home or does it always have to stay in the classroom?"

"A first meeting is not really a thing that way. It is just something that happens when children meet for the first time and might start to be friends."

Those are the kind of times when children meet for the first time and might start to be friends. "Yes," said Pencil, looking up at the pictures of children doing many things when could it happen? Paper wanted to find out. "Can you see the pictures on the wall of the classroom schedule?" asked him. "When could it happen?" Paper wanted to find out.

"Yes, I see the pictures on the wall of the classroom schedule," explained Pencil. "A first meeting is not really a thing that way. It is just something that happens when children take it home or does it always have to stay in the classroom?"

"Which friend gets to keep their first meeting?" asked Paper.
Pencil moved closer. "Close enough to notice a face and to hear a voice that is not too loud."

"How close?" asked Paper. "Show me."

"Enough together," Pencil said.

"Two can meet and start to be friends anywhere, as long as they are close enough."

"So friends first meet when they are eating snack or playing in the sandbox."
Or, they can use their hands to meet. Pencil explained. "You can reach out your hand for a handshake or a high five, or just give a wave."

Paper's questions made Pencil remember the things she had seen and heard in the classroom last year when she was up on a high shelf towards the back.

"Or, they can use their hands to meet. Pencil explained. "You can reach out your hand for a handshake or a high five, or just give a wave."
What part of the face do friends notice first?

Paper asked.

"A lot of times they like to make their mouth into a smile," said Pencil. "Sometimes they ask if it's all right to touch each other's faces."

"Sometimes they both like to make their mouth into a smile," said Pencil. "Sometimes they like to meet first with their eyes and also sometimes what part of the face do friends notice first?" Paper asked.
It's good to know someone's name. I think names are important. "Maybe not," said Pencil. "But you can point to yourself and say your name."

"Two cannot talk for long if they don't know the same language," said Paper.

"They are sometimes called greetings and are a good way to tell someone you are first meeting," I notice you and I am interested in knowing more about you."

"Or you can just say "hello" with words or a motion. Even if the words are in a different language, usually these kinds of words can be understood."
We have talked together for a long time. Are we starting to be friends?

wondered Paper.

I do not know," said Pencil. "I have had a good time talking to you but

"I can take a little rest. The first day of school is going to be very busy!

your questions have also made me tired. I am going to be by myself now, where

Paper watched as Pencil moved away, out of his sight.
Paper went back to the place where he could see out the window. He watched the end of the night for a long time, with the bright moon and the dark sky.
He sat by himself, watching, until the sky started to change from black to dark blue. The moon looked pale instead of shiny now, and he started to see the edges of all the buildings in the city.
They sat there together and looked at the changing colors in the sky.

"Oh, yes!" said Pencil. "I can sit for a very long time without even talking.

"I have come back," said Pencil. "May I sit quietly with you and watch the sunrise?"

"Yes!" said Paper. "I like to be with you and to see the sun starting the day."
Then Paper asked Pencil, "Do you have patience for just one more question?"

"That is already one question," answered Pencil, "and it is very early in the morning. Still, O.K. you can ask me another one. I like talking with you."

"I have been wondering," said Paper, "Do you think that we will be friends someday?"

"I still do not know," Pencil told him. Then the two, together, went back to watching the sunrise. After pencil had a few minutes to think, she said, "But I hope that we will be."
Paper felt happy and said, "I hope that we will be friends too, very soon!"

The day was coming in many colors and starting to feel warm.

"Let us just keep watching for now," said Pencil.

And that is just what they did, together.
THE END
To Whom it May Concern:

I have given permission to Maia Cannon to include my full name in the text of this Bank Street Independent Master’s project. This mention represents my professional contribution, in part only, to Maia Cannon’s Independent Study on friendship and young children.

I understand that the text prepared for this project will be shared as a PDF with the Bank Street community in a password-protected searchable database and may also be submitted as a PDF to the Bank Street Library where it would be catalogued as part of the Library collection and entered into an international database for wider circulation.

I have read the relevant material that presents her comments and thinking and give my permission to include her name in the study as indicated by my signature below.

4-8-2013

Paula Doerfel

Date Paula Doerfel
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3/21/13

Date

Lorraine Harner

Lorraine Harner
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[Signature]

Date: [April 1, 2013]

Jonathan Silin
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4/6/13

Date

Nancy Balaban