

Play settings and social behaviours of young children

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to study the social behaviours of children in outdoor play, block play, pretend play and snack time. The sample consisted of 72 video-clippings of 10 minutes duration each in a natural play setting. The captured clippings were further keenly observed and coded for various social behaviours under three different heads viz., social conversations, social body language and acceptance strategies using the Observer Behaviour Software and further statistically analyzed using two way ANOVA. The results revealed that social conversations and social body language of children were found to be high in frequency and duration during Outdoor play and snack time, with a distinct pattern of conversation showing the decline of self talk, and pleasantries with the increase in age and increase in conversations of common interest topics and daily event with the increase in age. Acceptance strategies were more frequent in Snack time and pretend play but long duration of acceptance strategies were found in Outdoor play followed by block and pretend play. The study showed significant difference between social behaviours both in frequency as well as duration among both genders in outdoor play and Snack time. However, among boys, a significant difference was also observed between the social behaviours both in frequency and duration during block as well as pretend play.

KEY WORDS : Play setting, Social behaviour, Young children

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Social experiences with peers constitute an important developmental context for children. In these contexts, children acquire a wide range of behaviours, skills, attitudes and experiences that influence their adaptations during the life span. One of the major tasks of the early childhood years is to learn positive and socially acceptable ways of interacting with others. As much of this learning occurs within the context of the peer group, positive peer interactions make a substantial contribution to children's socio-emotional and cognitive development beyond the influences of family, school and neighbourhood. Relationships with peers have significant importance in the lives of even very young children by allowing them to experiment with roles and relationships and develop social cognitive and behavioural skills (Asher, 1990; Rubin and Asendorpf, 1993).

Parten (1932) described six social participation categories that purportedly unfolded as stages as children matured. In order of presumed maturity, these categories include: unoccupied behaviour, solitary play, associative play, co-operative play, socio-dramatic play and games with rules. The demonstration of elaborate forms of social pretence during the pre-school years is impressive. It

provides opportunities for developing communication skills, allows children to negotiate over roles, rules and play themes and to practice a variety of roles in particular play scripts.

Children's interactions with one another do, in many cases endure over a long period of time and are vital for normal social development. Children who do not play with age mates miss-out on important social experience and are at considerable risk of becoming socially inept and uncertain of themselves in the interpersonal situations later in life.

With increasing age, play partners become better able to agree with each other about the roles, rules and themes of their pretence. They are also better able to maintain their play interactions by adding new dimensions to their expressed ideas. These developments reflect the pre-schooler's capacity to take the perspective of the play partner and even more important, reflect the increasing sophistications of pre-schooler's notion "theory of mind" (Watson *et al.*, 1999). Hence, it provides the right context to understand social skills which can form foundations for future social competence.

Children learn from each other. They exchange