Social behavior and interpersonal skills of children ages 3-4 years old: a natura...

Social Behavior and Interpersonal Skills of Children ages 3-4 years old: A naturalistic observationIntroduction   One of the important developmental tasks of early childhood is acquiring the preliminary training and experience needed to become a member of a " gang" in late childhood. The foundations for socialization are laid as the number of contacts young children have with their peers increases with each passing year. Not only do they play more with other children but they also talk more with them (Murray, 1973). The kind of social contacts young children have is more important than the number of such contacts. If young children enjoy their contacts with others even if they are only occasional, their attitudes toward future social contacts will be more favorable than if they have more frequent social contacts of a less favorable kind.

The advantages young children take of the opportunities offered them for social contacts will be greatly influenced by how pleasurable their past social contacts have been. As a general rule, during the preschool years, children find social contacts with members of their own sex more pleasurable than those with members of the opposite sex (Langlois, 1973).   Bruner (1975) contends that play in childhood is " serious business" that makes important contributions to development during the early years of childhood. He further explains that play is the vehicle with which improvisation is learned, where the child comes across rule systems through which cultural norms are expressed. It can be observed that children who are popular with their peers want to play more with other children while those who lack social acceptance or enjoy only marginal acceptance are forced to play alone most of the time. The social behavior patterns of children at this age are made up

of imitation, rivalry, cooperation, sharing, social approval, aggressiveness and egocentrism.

All of these interactions occur during play, thus this study investigates whether a positive manifestation of behavior (smiling) will facilitate non-aggressive social interaction. BackgroundPlay is one of the most important aspects of the normal development of children. Play serves as the opportunity wherein children would learn how to interact with other people, where they can learn the value of sharing, friendship, and respect. Researches on the deprivation of human interaction have documented its negative effects on the personality of the child (Evans, 1995).

By doing this research, I attempted to test the prediction that smiling facilitates playing between children, that girls would smile more than boys, and that the absence of smiling would not lead to play. My predictions were based on the assumption that people in general welcomes a smile from other people and that children are more generous with their smiles (Endo, Endo, Kirita, & Maruyama, 1992; Kottoor, 1989; Sansone & Tiberghien, 1994.)Thus, since smiling is a positive behavior, it would lead to non-aggressive interaction like playing.

Studies have also found that children recognize facial expressions and that when smiled at, children do respond with a smile. Statement of the ProblemThis study attempts to determine whether smiling would lead to non-aggressive play in children 3-4 years old. Research QuestionDoes smiling facilitate social interaction in 3-4 years old children? Operational definition of

variablesIndependent variablesSmiling(Primary IV) – refers to the facial expression of friendliness directed towards other children in a natural environment such as the playground. Smiling should be spontaneous, not coerced and naturally occurring. Gender (Secondary IV) – refers to the sex of the children, whether boys or girls.

In this study, children whose appearance is not explicitly boy or girl were not included in the observations. Dependent VariableSocial interaction – refers to the act of interacting with other children in a non-aggressive manner, in this study it refers to friendly non-aggressive playing with other children. MethodsSubject SamplingRandom sampling was used in identifying the samples in this study; gender was controlled for, so that equal numbers of boys and girls were observed. The age range was inferred from a casual conversation with the baby sitter. However, the exact number of children based on their ages was not identified through the lack of measures to protect from influencing the observation process. Field SamplingThe observation was done in a public playground where babysitters usually brought young children to play, since it was a public park, I found an observation point directly facing the playground which was not too close but also not too far away to record the observations. In the first few days prior to the observation proper I went to the park at the same time and brought with me reading materials and a notebook and pen and pretended to be writing and reading, thus the children and the babysitters were comfortable with me and they did not see me as a dubious person. I have already the identified the behaviors that I was going to observe, thus I made an observation sheet

and took note of the behavior as it occurred and refrained from interpreting or analyzing the behavior of the children.

Situation SamplingIn this study I made use of random sampling, wherein the situations that I recorded were identified as it occurred, however usually it was after the babysitter allowed the children to wander in the playground and then they approached the children. Since it was difficult to observe all of them at the same time, I went to the park at about the same time and stayed there for an hour to observe the specific behaviors I needed for the study. I also took note of the children's gender as I recorded their behaviors. However, some of the children in the park did not conform to the schema of being boy or girl thus inferring their gender was difficult and had to be excluded from the observations. I was fortunate that the public park was one of the more popular ones and that the children who went there came day after day, thus I was able to observe them one at a time, although in some days a number of children did not came. This situation proved beneficial to the reliability of my observations because I was able to verify it. ResultsThe results of the observation showed that all of the observed children smiled frequently, around 80 percent during the time they were observed. Then, children who smiled prior to interacting with other children resulted to non-aggressive play 70 percent of the time.

Moreover, there was no difference in the rate of smiling between boys and girls, and that play often ended in crying and quarreling 30 percent of the time. ConclusionThe results of the study revealed that smiling do increase the chances of non-aggressive play between children but it does not

guarantee that a positive friendly gesture would lead to non-aggressive play. I also found that at this age, gender differences in smiling and patterns of social interaction are not that evident and that crying and quarreling seems to be a normal part of the interaction of the children, in which case those who quarreled the day before usually played afterwards. It can be concluded that most children do not attach any special meaning to smiling, in that the act itself does not solely facilitate social interaction.   The conclusions derived from this study has limitations because the observed sample was from a single place only and that the results may only be applicable to the locality in which the sample was derived, moreover the age range was only inferred and was not accurately determined. Play was also very difficult to qualify, even though it was delimited to non-aggressive and aggressive when in fact some of the non-aggressive play ended in aggressiveness. Which was an entirely new observation from the one that this research was set out to test.

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