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Children's Classroom Experiences in Building Peer Relationships

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Abstract
This study examines a child's personal experiences with peer relationship building in the classroom and is guided by Vygotsky's cultural historical concepts of the social situation of development and cultural tools and Hedegaard's (2012) model for learning and development. Hedegaard's (2012) dialectical—interactive approach was adopted to analyse the data for this study which was gathered using digital video observations of a grade one classroom within the western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia over a five week period. This paper explores the strategies used by children that enables them to balance their desire for peer relationships while remaining within what is considered acceptable behaviours by their teachers within the classroom. It is argued that it is important for schools to continue to strive to find the balance between institutional demands while creating social situations that foster peer relationships.

Keywords Belonging · Peer relationships · Peer interactions · Cultural-historical · Social situation of development · Cultural tools

Introduction

Studies have established that the period between birth and 8 years of age is significant in a child's life; it is a time for rapid learning where early experiences and relationships influence a child's long-term outcomes and life chances (Perdue et al., 2009). In addition, research shows that a child's early experiences can define whether their brain development offers a strong or weak basis for future learning, behaviour, and health (Currie, 2009). Furthermore, these early experiences are known to form the foundation for a child's self-awareness, social interaction, and personal identity formation (Tayler, 2015).

The realm of children and their friends has fascinated researchers for many decades because of the established importance of childhood peer relationships (Hartup, 1989). A common topic of interest for peer relationship research is deliberation on what is considered a "friend" (Policarpo, 2015). One of the earliest researchers into friendships, Willard Hartup (1977) defines friendship as involving children of similar chronological age. However, Hartup (1977) notes that it is not enough that children have access to peers of similar ages (born within 12 months of each other), instead stating that for optimal development, young children must be given opportunities to interact with peers whose cognitive and social skills are also similar to that of their own. Policarpo (2015) extends this definition by conceptualising the term "friend" in terms of the "level regarding closeness, self-disclosure, interdependence, instrumental and social support, shared interests, sharing of affection, among others" (p. 179). In Victoria, where this study took place, the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2018) defines the term friend as a label given to a peer whom a child enjoys spending time with, whom the child turns to for social support, and with whom they share common interests.

Wang et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of a child's ability to establish harmonious relationships with their peers and put forward that friendship does not only provide companionship, but also contributes to children's development of social skills. A study by Hartup (1977) demonstrated that "peer interaction is an essential component of a child's development" (p. 4) and put forward that normal social development can be hard to achieve in the absence of peer interactions. This is because a child's peer relationships become a key socialising agent throughout childhood, where these friendships can influence a child's behaviour,

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how they see themselves and their attitudes as early as the pre-school years (Lindsey, 2002). Crawford and Calabria (2018) further highlight the importance of childhood peer relationships, explaining that there is a relational shift where a child's social world begins to expand during early childhood. Research suggests that as children go through school, they begin to rely less on their early attachment figures, such as their parents or primary caregivers. Instead, children begin to hold their peer groups of higher importance in this phase in their life as they spend a lot more time with them at school (Scharf et al, 2016).

Researchers' understanding of childhood peer relationships continues to advance with the uncovering of various interesting insights. Of significance is the improved understanding between these peer relationships and a child's sense of belonging. Hartup (1977) argued that having peers of a similar age and being accepted by them is necessary for child development. A child's feelings of being personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by their peers in their social environment fulfils their sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Policarpo (2015) suggested that children with positive peer relationships are more likely to be engaged in school, feel confident in their ability to excel in school and are more likely to share their ideas and contribute within the classroom.

In contrast, studies shows that children who do not feel like they belong within their peer groups experienced certain difficulties in comparison to their peers who do have friends. For example, a study by Lindsey (2002) found that children with at least one mutual friend were more liked by their peers than those who did not have a mutual friend. Furthermore, (Sakyi et al., 2015) studied the long-term effects of having no friends. Their longitudinal study explored the impacts of childhood friendships on mental health in adolescence. They found that individuals with no childhood friends were more likely to experience psychological difficulties than those with at least one friend. They concluded that these early experiences might lead to consequences for psychological wellbeing in adulthood and suggested that factors that help foster childhood friendships, such as family and schools, should be supported. Hartup (1977) also supported this concept, noting that authorities should be given greater recognition to the role played by a child's peers in their development.

The literature demonstrates that a child's early experiences, specifically with friendships, has a large impact on their sense of belonging and social development. Despite this, there is research to suggest that the emphasis on peer relationships is underutilised in formal education (Hartup, 1977). Furthermore, while most studies discuss the effects of these friendships on later life, such as in adolescence and adulthood, little is known about a child's perspective with building peer relationships during the early years. With Cappella et al. (2013) reporting that classrooms are the primary contexts for these relationships to develop in elementary school, this study aims to explore the child's perspective in building peer relationships by answering the research question: "What conditions do the children create for themselves to support their peer relationship building within the early primary school setting?".

This paper next outlines the theoretical concepts used to guide this study. This is followed by an overview of the study design and a discussion of the findings. To conclude, this paper gives a new insight into a child's experiences in making friends within a classroom setting within the early years.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory provides a theoretical platform that suggests the social environment influences a child's development. This theory views development as a "path along which the social becomes the individual" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 198.) and is reflected in the general genetic law of development: "every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 106).

Here Vygotsky discusses that higher mental functions do not simply appear in social relations, but as social relations. Veresov and Fleer (2016) stated that "development is a complex dialectical process of how the social becomes the individual" (p. 5). In line with this thinking, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the social situation of development (1998) where he noted that the child's personality and environment are directly related to each other (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008). This concept is used in this study as it highlights the role of the environment on a child's development where we do not only view the child as an individual but instead, we need to view the child who is in unity with their social relations and their attitudes and affective relations towards their environment (Karabanova, 2010). It is not only the child that changes, nor is it only the environment that changes, rather what changes is the child's relations to their environment (Vygotsky, 1994).

The conversion of social processes into individual ones through the mediation of cultural tools is central to the cultural historical theory (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996) and describes how a child's higher mental processes depend on the presence of mediating agents in their interaction with their environment (Kozulin, 2003). Cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1993), such as language and other symbol systems, are described as a form of mediation that help individuals to communicate when the traditional way of communicating is not available to them (van der Veer, 2007). Kozulin (2003)

explains further that cultural tools can take shape as signs, texts, symbols, formulae, and graphic organisers and that when individuals internalize these tools, it helps them to master their own "natural psychological functions of perception, memory, attention, and so on" (p. 16). This concept is used in this study as it demonstrates how children are able to adopt other ways of building peer relationships through the use of cultural tools when their activity settings do not allow the traditional method of verbal communication to occur. This key concept of the cultural historical theory is also of importance because it highlights the idea that classrooms can be viewed as a setting of different systems of cultural tools.

Hedegaard's Model of Child Learning and Development

Marianne Hedegaard has contributed extensively to the field of early childhood development and her model for children's learning and development (2012) also helps guide this research. This model extended the cultural historical theory's approach to children's learning and development with the concept of institutional practices and activity settings. Hedegaard (2012) stated "A child's life always involves participating in concrete institutional practices realized by activities and interactions among multiple participants, in recurrent everyday settings; at the same time the child's activity in a concrete practice" can be understood" (p. 129) from different planes. These different planes are depicted in Fig. 1 below.

Societal Plane

This plane involves "historically evolved traditions in a society that are formalised into laws and regulations as conditions for the existence of an institution" (Hedegaard, 2012, p. 129). In the context of a school, this plane considers societal regulations, values and cultural traditions.

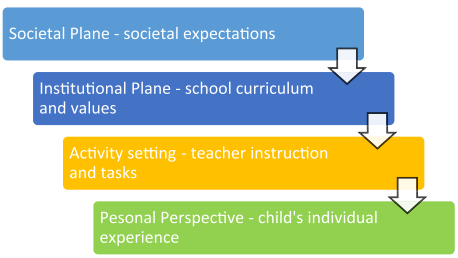


Fig. 1 Hedegaard's (2012) four planes of analysis that influence a child's experiences

Institutional Plane

This plane considers the demands and "informal conventional traditions" (Hedegaard, 2012, p. 130) that take form as practices (e.g. school daily routines and school values and demands on students).

Activity Setting

The activity setting plane places emphasis on a child's social situation which can be embodied in things such as recess, free play time or tasks such as writing or mathematics. Interpreting the activity setting allows for the understanding of the social conditions that are created within the classroom for peer interactions.

Individual Plane

This plane takes into consideration a child's personal perspective such as their intentions, needs, motives, and relations. This plane also helps us unpack their individual relations to the demands from their school and peers.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) begins to discuss how a child's everyday life lies in institutional contexts that are etched in society but could not provide an understanding as to how children contribute to these contexts. Hedegaard (2012) addresses this gap by highlighting the relationship between the child's social situation and the activity setting of the institutional practices. With this in mind, we are guided by the understanding that children can influence the settings they participate in through their actions and thus contributing to the conditions for their own development.

Together with the concept of the social situation of development and cultural tools, using Hedegaard's four planes of analysis will help us conceptualise how children interact with their peers depending on the demands they encounter within the classroom setting, thus assisting us in answering the research question: "What conditions do the children create for themselves to support their peer relationship building within the early primary school setting?".

Study Design

This study forms part of a larger research project that explores the conditions that are created by the children themselves and their teachers in supporting a child's peer interactions and positive peer relationships. Strict confidentiality and anonymity measures were employed to the participants of this study, which comprised of two primary school teachers and four primary school children from the western and north western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. This study pays particular focus on one focus child from one of the schools. This will be discussed further below.

Participants

Selection of Target Regions

The identification and selection of schools to participate in this study was informed by extensive scoping of target regions. With the established connection between peer relationships, early school disengagement, and youth delinquency, this study first sought to identify areas of increased youth crime recorded incidents. This data was then compared to the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) where the domain of social competence was of particular focus. Identifying areas where children appeared to be most vulnerable in the social competency domain was considered of significance for this research as this domain aligned most to the aims of this study by delving into areas such as children's ability to get along with others, following teacher's instructions and showing respect among peers. After close inspection of both data sets, the north western and western suburbs of Melbourne were identified as a suitable target region to recruit schools to participate in this study.

Ethical Considerations and Recruitment

Ethical approval was granted for this study from the researcher's University Ethics Committee (#19099) and the Department of Education and Training (# 2019_004049). Approximately 50 school principals within the identified target regions were sent invitations to participate in this research. The first two schools who responded to this invitation and agreed to participate in this research were recruited as the participating schools. This research pursued grade 1 classrooms as according to the (Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework [VEYLDF], 2016), the early years is a period of rapid learning where a child's early experiences and relationships has the ability to influence their long term outcomes and life chances. Furthermore, Dickson and colleagues (2018) noted that "Grade 1 is pivotal in a child's social world" (p. 217). The school principals from the participating schools were requested to select one grade 1 class and their decision was based on factors such as what they perceived to be a challenging classroom (e.g., multiple children with behavioural issues) and how welcoming they believed that classroom would be of a researcher. Once identified, explanatory statements and consent forms were sent to the classroom teacher and the parents of the students within that classroom. After gaining their consent, student assent was obtained before any data collection commenced.

This study involves focus children as it aims to give the children a voice on this topic by examining their own personal perspective. Selection of focus children commenced with the researcher observing the entire classroom for the initial two weeks of data collection. This whole room observation allowed the researcher to view the classroom dynamics and identify children who appeared to have difficulty with getting along with their peers. This was exhibited through a child's difficulty with things such as joining in on conversation or activities with their fellow classmates. The researcher's initial findings were discussed with the classroom teacher and the focus child was subsequently selected based on the consistent observations between the researcher and classroom teacher. The parents of this focus child were given a secondary consent form explaining their children's participation in the second phase of this study as a focus child. Once consent was obtained from the parents, assent was again sought from the focus child before continuing further data collection.

Data Collection

This research was guided by the cultural—historical theory and Hedegaard's (2012) model for children's learning and development to form a methodology that helps us understand the children's experiences with peer relationships in the classroom. Hedegaard and colleagues (2008) noted that, "It is important to include the child's perspective in a research methodology as this will enable researchers to investigate how children contribute to their own developmental conditions. At the same time it is also important to include other perspectives that can illuminate the societal and the institutional conditions that create a child's social situation. It is children's intentional activities and the interactions in which they take part in their everyday social situations—and how other participants contribute to these situations through their interactions—that should be studied" (p.5). To pursue this holistic view, this study was required to adopt data collection strategies that enabled the researcher to capture the perspectives of both the teacher and the children to obtain glimpses into a child's social situation. While this holistic view frames the methodology of this research project, this study pays particular attention to the children's perspectives in creating the conditions to support peer interactions and relationships.

Digital Video Observations

Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) highlight the importance of including a child's personal perspective in a research methodology as it permits the researcher to explore how the children themselves contribute to their own developmental conditions. Guided by Hedegaard's (2012) various perspectives of child development, this research used the visual methodologies to examine the conditions that are created by the children that supports positive peer relationships and

peer belonging. The visual methodology was chosen for this research as it supports a holistic and connected view of research where the participants remain part of a "dynamic ecosystem of interactions" (Fleer, 2014, p. 4). By emphasising the perspectives of the children while still including the perspectives of those that surround them, we are able to gain an insight into the societal and institutional conditions that create a child's social situation (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008).

The overall research used two digital video recording devices that were positioned strategically to capture the interactions within the entire classroom. Careful placement of these cameras was sought because researchers who follow a cultural–historical tradition for studying children's development do not simply aim to capture everything they see through digital video technology. "Rather, they aim to record the dynamic and evolving nature of the social situations in which children are located across institutions (family, community groups, and preschool) with a special focus on the child's perspective within those institutions (Fleer, 2008, p. 106). Therefore, one camera focused on the teacher's interactions and directions while the other focused on the interactions of the children. Setting up the digital video recording devices in this way allowed the researcher to zoom in and capture the children's interactions with their peers within the entire situational context (Li, 2014). Furthermore, emphasising and including a child's personal perspective in the methodology of this research paper allows us to investigate how children themselves contribute to their own developmental conditions (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008). Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) noted that "it is children's intentional activities and the interactions in which they take part in their everyday social situations –and how other participants contribute to these situations through their interactions – that should be studied" (p. 5).

While the larger research project included two schools and two classrooms, this paper will specifically focus on one focus child from one school where a total of 10 h of video observation was collected over a five-week period. These video observations included audio and captured activities such as classroom instruction, completing work tasks and snack times. The initial two weeks of data collection were spent observing the interactions of the whole classroom, while the final three weeks were dedicated to following the focus child. The researcher presented to the classroom consistently over the five weeks to allow the researcher, the students and teachers to familiarise themselves with one another.

Field Notes

Field notes were taken throughout the entire data collection process. Field notes were jotted down in a notebook by the researcher during and after video recording sessions of classroom activities This was done to supplement the video footage and audio recordings with the researchers own interpretations to provide additional depth and meaning to the activity settings being observed.

Three Levels of Data Analysis

Figure 2 below summarises Hedegaard's (2008) dialectical—interactive approach which was used to examine the children's interactions within the classroom.

These three levels of data analysis are interrelated as a whole and enable the researcher to capture the dynamic relations among children and those that surround them such as their teacher and their peers. This allows us to better understand children's social situation of development.

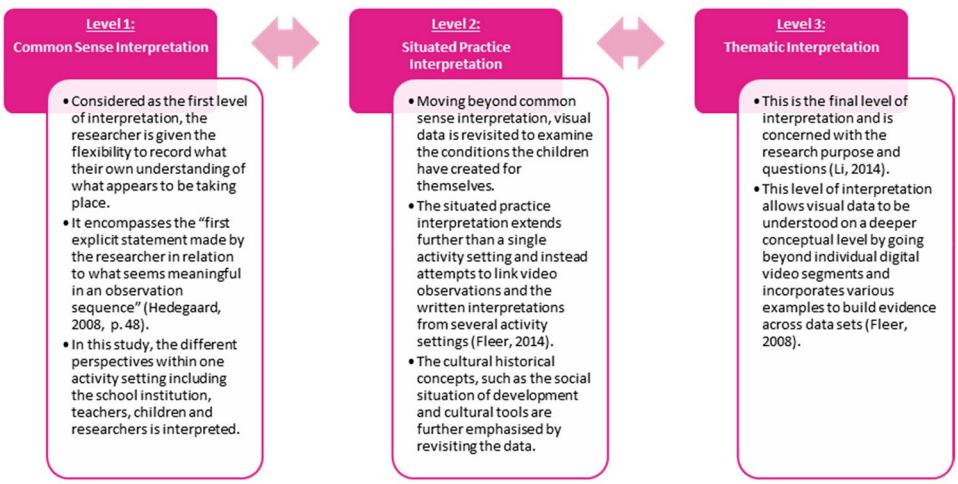


Fig. 2 Data analysis procedure using Hedegaard's (2008) dialectical—interactive approach

Findings

The ways in which children interpreted their social situations during times of peer interactions was witnessed during classroom activities. To take a closer look at these conditions, this study pays particular attention to one focus child, Wendy. Wendy is 7 years of age and in grade 1. Her classroom teacher describes her as very quiet and a student who does not have many friends. Throughout the five weeks of observations, Wendy was observed to spend most of her time by herself. She was observed to be physically "with" the group, but not "in" the group as regularly demonstrated by her positioning herself to be sitting behind her peers, instead of alongside them during carpet time. Furthermore, Wendy did not have a seat mate on her table, which she did not seem to be fazed about.

Wendy was chosen to be a focus child for this study as her observed interactions within the classroom, or lack thereof, provided insights into the conditions that children create for themselves to be accepted by their peers and how they attempt to build peer relationships. Fragments of Wendy's classroom experiences are described in the following table 1.

Sharing the Eraser

It is just after midday and the children are completing a mathematics task before lunch. The children sit in their designated seats and independently complete their tasks that are written on the white board into their own workbooks. The children are using pencils and reach out to use an eraser when they make a mistake. Wendy is at a table designated for four children. She does not have a seat mate but has two classmates sitting next to each other directly in front of her. There is another table of four, directly adjacent to hers and all 7 children have access to a sole eraser that is sitting on Wendy's table (See Fig. 3). The children all take turns using the eraser as needed. The children either reach for the eraser if it was within their reach, or silently communicate with their peers through hand motions and silently mouthing words. At one point, they are told to be quiet by the teacher. Those on the table adjacent to Wendy ask her to pass it to them when needed and they return it back to her when they are finished. During one of these exchanges, the eraser falls on the ground which Wendy quickly picks up and passes to her classmate on the adjacent table. He quietly thanks her, and they continue with their mathematics task. The Fig. 3 below depicts the journey of the eraser within the span of 10 min, where the blue arrows show the direction of the eraser's movements, while the numbers indicate the number of times it has been passed around.

This scene shows how the children navigate their relationships with their peers while remaining quiet to meet their teacher's expectations of them while completing their mathematics task. Through the passing of the eraser, the children are still able to maintain their relationships with their peers while not being perceived by their teacher as misbehaving. Despite spending most of her time on her own, Wendy is included by her peers in this social situation and participates in the sharing of the eraser with ease. The eraser has become a mediating tool to enable her to communicate with her peers in a non-verbal manner. The role of eraser promotes the peer interaction within the classroom setting. Despite participating in an independent task, the eraser was passed among peers 22 times within 10 min, thus being the vehicle that united the children during this activity.

Discussion

The findings of this study will be discussed through the lens of Hedegaard's (2012) four planes of analysis (societal, institutional, activity setting, and personal perspectives) and their

Table 1 A snapshot of Wendy's classroom experiences and the strategies she uses to interact with her peers

Activity setting	Classroom experience	Wendy's strategies
Incursion	Children are sitting down listening to the presenter of their incursion about light	Wendy **whispers** something to her classmate nearest to her who whispers something back
Carpet time	The children are left sitting on the carpet while the teacher takes a few students into a dark room to discuss the impacts of light and darkness	Wendy **taps** her classmate on the shoulder and pulls a funny face who smiles at her
Discussing the incursion	The children are sitting down on the carpet discussing the incursion	Wendy attempts to get her classmates attention by **touching** their hair and **clapping** loudly
Mathematics task	The children are independently completing their mathematics task and are instructed to do so quietly by their teacher	Wendy and her classmates complete their task quietly while **passing** around an **eraser** to each other
Going to the toilet	The children are required to go to the toilet in pairs	Wendy volunteers to **escort** her classmate to the toilet

The following vignette was selected to exhibit a strategy used by Wendy and her peers to communicate and interact with one another while still adhering to the demands of the classroom and their teacher

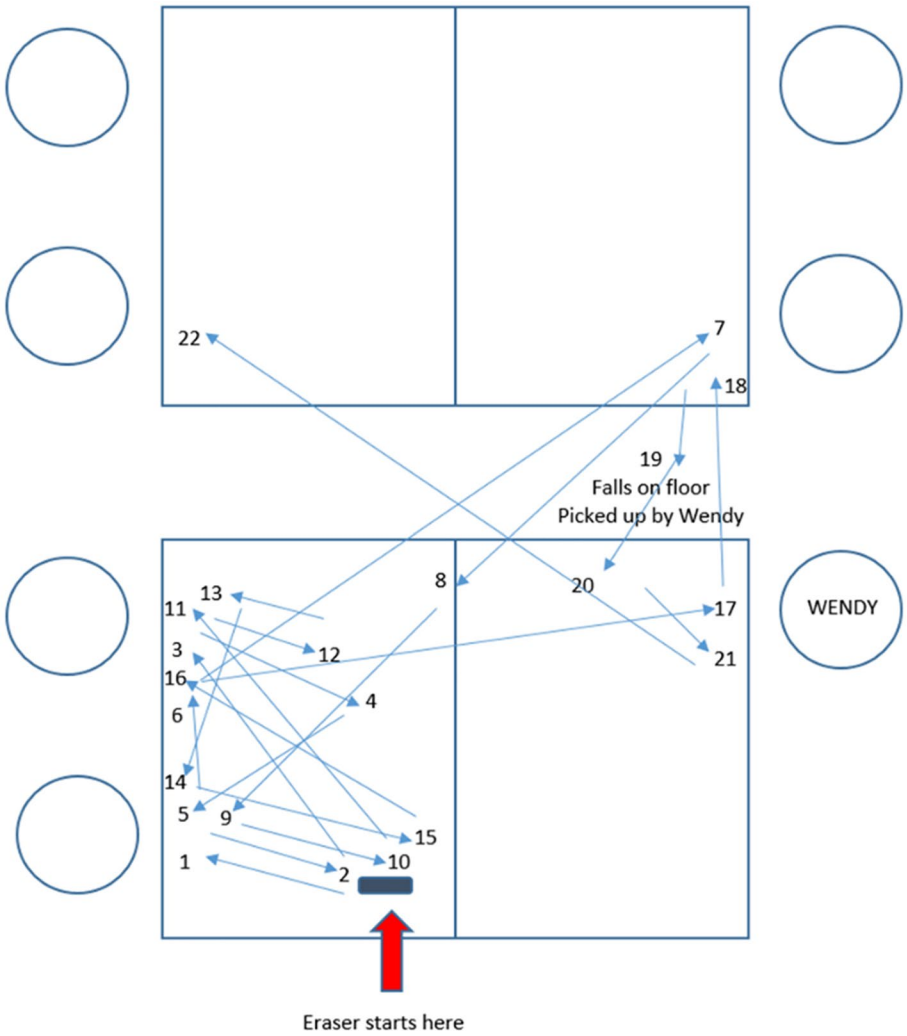


Fig. 3 A map of the eraser's movements within 10 min

role in influencing the conditions the children were able to create for themselves that promoted peer interactions and peer belonging. Specifically it will be demonstrated how the child's experiences (personal perspective) within the classroom are influenced by the demands society imposes on their school (institution) such as their school values and curriculum, which in turn determines the activity setting that is created by their teacher.

Upon reviewing the values of Wendy's school, we see that there is a strong focus on both student wellbeing and on the assessment of individual outcomes such as numeracy. This provides us with an initial insight into the teacher's motivation to emphasize the completion of the mathematics task independently and the children's requirement for non-verbal communication. A study by Neri Tejada et al. (2021) found that while teachers understand the importance of peer relationships, they are inevitably bound by the institutional demands that society imposes on them and the children within their classrooms. This meant that teachers were consequently made to prioritise completion of tasks that produced measurable outcomes (e.g., mathematics) and manage the classroom in a way that left very little room for social interactions and for peer relationships to develop and flourish. Brennan (2008) stated that children need to be motivated to be affiliated, to fit in and be part of a group. Similarly, Hedegaard (2012) noted that children during the first years of their schooling life have a motive to learn which is later replaced by the desire to be accepted by their friends. But how can children fulfil this sense of belonging amongst their peers when the institution does not create the spaces nor the conditions that allow for it? The results of this study indicate that children might create their own social conditions in order to achieve this.

In taking a child's personal perspective, the vignette above demonstrated how the activity setting experienced by the children required them to create their own pathways to communicate and interact with one another to fulfil their needs of peer interactions and acceptance. While some studies on peers show that children tend to exclude others from shared activities in order to protect

the activity from disruption (Skånfors et al., 2009), this study shows that the constraints of the activity setting, and the demands placed on them as students, motivated them to unite through the sharing of the eraser. Despite the distance needed to be travelled by the eraser, we observe that each child is included in this social situation where each child plays an active role in building peer relationships.

The eraser, which is an accepted piece of equipment to use during their mathematics task, allowed the children to operate within what their institution considered acceptable and non-disruptive behaviour within the classroom. We see the eraser becoming a mediating tool or the glue that brings the children together. Vygotsky (1993) described cultural tools as methods used to communicate amongst society and first introduced this concept when discussing his experiences with children with special needs. He gave the example of visually impaired children and argued that despite not being able to read and write like typically developing children, these children are still able to participate in society and develop intellectually through the use of Braille. In providing this example, Vygotsky (1993) put forward that when traditional methods are not fit for purpose, the adoption of another cultural tool is needed to remove the mismatch that is getting in the way of their learning. In line with the concept of cultural tools, Wendy and her peers adopted a method that deviated from traditional strategies (verbal communication) that still enabled them to interact with one another. With this, the demands of both the classroom (institution) and those of the children (personal) were both accommodated. Therefore, we argue that the role of the eraser served as a cultural tool that mediated the children's social interaction and connection, thus building their peer relationship within the activity setting. This echoes Vygotsky's (1997) argument, that the intervention and the use of cultural tools (e.g., the role of eraser in this case) serves as a stimulated device for solving the situated problem to communicate and develop children's peer relationship.

Combining these findings with the cultural historical theory, we are reminded that children are social creatures and that higher psychological functions appears twice in development, first as interactions between people then secondly, within the child as an intramental category (Vygotsky, 1997). In the context of this study, we see that the sharing of the eraser becomes more than simply an exchange of an acceptable piece of equipment within the activity setting. Instead, the cultural historical concepts used in this study enable us to conceptualise it as being used as a cultural tool that enabled the children to create the conditions that supported their social situation of development and peer relationship building.

Conclusion

There is a large body of research that suggests that childhood friendships facilitate development (Crosnoe, 2000; Hartup, 1977; Lindsey, 2002). Traditionally, research in this area have mostly relied on peer, self, and teacher reports to understand the impacts of these early childhood friendships on later life, such as its impact on academic success, potential criminal justice involvement and psychological wellbeing. However, since the early 2000's, research in this area has shifted to include the children's perspectives regarding their peers (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005) where research has aimed to get a better sense of how children think, feel, and interact with their peers and interpret social situations (Adams & Quinones, 2020). Through the vignette above, we are able to explore Wendy's social situation and her interactions with peers by drawing upon Vygotsky's cultural historical theory, specifically the concepts of the social situation of development and cultural tools and Hedegaard's (2012) four planes of analysis: societal, institutional, activity setting (e.g. teacher's instructions) and a child's personal perspective. We not only see some of the opportunities or the activity settings that society has enabled Wendy's institution to create for her on a daily basis, but we also get a glance into the different ways the children created their own conditions for peer relationships.

The main goal of children is to connect and fit in with their peers and to be understood (Brennan, 2008). Through the analysis of a child's classroom experiences, this study argues that when the institution did not create the conditions for peer relationships to develop and thrive, the children are able to take their initiative to create their own social situations to fulfil their sense of belonging. It was found that the ways in which children do this must be inconspicuous and in a way that does not disrupt institutional demands (e.g., set tasks). In other words, children might find non-traditional ways that supports their relationships to develop while ensuring that these do not go against the demands of the institution as this might place them at risk of being labelled as misbehaving or disruptive. The children were able to do this by using cultural tools, such as through the sharing of an eraser. The results of this study remind us that there is a need for schools to continue working on finding the balance between institutional demands while recognising what is important to the children. That is, schools must continually seek ways that fosters a child's social situation of development during a phase in their lives where peer acceptance and friendships are of paramount importance.

Limitations

The present study has certain limitations that need to be taken into consideration in the examination of the conditions children create for themselves in the context of peer relationship building and a sense of belonging within the classroom. Firstly, this is a small scale study that involved only one school and one focus child. A second limitation of this study was the short duration of digital video observations from the single grade 1 classroom. A way to cope with these limitations would be to include more grade 1 classrooms and focus children. In addition, it is recommended for future research in this area to also increase the length of digital video observations past the five weeks that were included in this study. By doing so, this will provide richer data and a broader understanding of the conditions children create for themselves for positive peer relationships within the classroom. Nevertheless, the goal of this study was not to generalise but rather to add to the existing knowledge surrounding children's peer relationships and their sense of belonging.

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