PROMOTING PEER INTERACTION IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH PLAY

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Abstract

According to Vygotsky's theory children develop in social matrix that is formed by their relationships and their interactions with other children. Peer interactions are important in preschool years because they lead to positive social and emotional development in children. Children, who can interact successfully with their peers, are more popular, have stronger friendships, and are included more often in classroom activities. Play takes a significant mean of promoting peer interaction in children. However, the attention given to such opportunities are declining at present due to increasing demands for more written exercises. Thus the study attempted to promote peer interactions among preschool children through play. The objectives were to examine how peer interactions are promoted through play and the role of the teacher in that process. The single-case study design was employed. The sample comprised with a group of 12 children selected purposively from 4-5 year olds in a preschool located in Nawala area, Colombo District. A socio-dramatic play intervention was implemented for 3 weeks collaboratively with the preschool teacher. The data gathered through the observation; interview and reflective journal were analysed based on descriptive analysis method under several sub themes. The data revealed that the majority of children were able to improve their peer interactions in the play intervention. Significant improvements in the abilities to cooperate with children recognise

needs of peers and responds positively, comfort friends and share ideas and objects with peers were identified. Boys showed better interactions than girls. The strategies such as giving prompts or cues, constructive feedback and giving play ideas used by the teacher created many opportunities for children to improve peer interactions in the play intervention. Therefore, the study concluded that more opportunities are created through socio-dramatic play intervention to improve better peer interactions in preschool children though these play activities are not encouraged in the preschool and the nature of the teacher's role is identified. Lack of generalisability was a limitation in the study. Thus the study recommends providing more emphasis on giving more opportunities to peer interactions through play in the preschool classroom by giving more guidance and training to teachers.

Keywords: *Peer interaction, Socio-dramatic play, Preschool education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Peer interaction is something that children commonly manage by themselves at an early age, and therefore are supposed to mange without too much involvement from adults. As soon as an adult is involved, it is pre definition no longer primarily a peer interaction (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). Peer interactions can be viewed as a platform for sharing of experiences and co-learning in adopting others perspectives, which is essential for both social and cognitive development (Williams, 2007). Positive experiences from peer interaction are a key to language as well as cognitive and social development in children. In peer interaction, it is identified and improves the awareness of both positive and negative emerging and developments. (Bruce & Hansson, 2011).

Vygotsky (1978) stressed that children develop in a social matrix that is formed by their relationships and interactions with other children. The social environment is a major contributor to the cognition of children because of the open area of communication that exists and allows them to express and negotiate ideas as well as contribute to each other's understanding. Vygotsky (1978) invoked the principle

of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) to explain the significance of social interaction. The ZPD represented the distance between what the child could do independently and what he or she could do with the collaboration or assistance of others.

Researchers such as Tudge (1992), Hogan & Tudge (1999) and Rogoff (1997) have argued that the child's peers can play the role of co-constructivist. Thus, pairing with a more competent, "expert" peer may assist the child's movement through the ZPD (Duran & Gauvain, 1993). Vygotsky theorised that when children scaffold each other, they modify a task and offer assistance to each other to help complete the task (Tharpre & Gallimore, 1998). When children model each other, they offer behaviours to each other for imitation, thereby helping each other to see the appropriate behaviours, understand the reasons for their use (Tharpre & Gallimore, 1998).

One important quality in peer interaction is to be able to take other's perspectives, to mentalize, which is essential in social interaction (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). During preschool years the most complex form of group interactive activity is socio-dramatic play (Goncu et al., 2002), which is referred to voluntary social role-taking involving two or more children (Levy, 1986).

In socio-dramatic play with increasing age, play partners become better able to agree with each other about the roles, rules, and themes of their pretence and maintain their play interactions by adding new dimensions to their expressed ideas. These developments reflect the preschooler's capacity to take the perspective of the play partner (Watson, Nixon, Wilson, & Capage, 1999). According to Howes (1992) socio-dramatic play creates a context for mastering the communication of meaning, provides opportunities for children to learn to control and compromise and allows for a "safe" context in which children can explore and discuss issues of intimacy and trust.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the Early Childhood Education context in Sri Lanka, the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2004) has emphasised the significance of developing an effective program providing adequate opportunities for play and

creative activities for mental stimulation, development of language skills through interaction, communication and vocalization; social climate conducive for emotional security and socialisation, attitudes and values that will counter already conditioned inhibitions and stereotyped behaviours. To create a stimulating playful environment for holistic development of preschool children, peer interaction is significant as it leads to better socialisation. However, in the current context of preschool education the attention given to such play opportunities in which children learn to improve skills to interact with each other positively are distracted by the emerging trend of using more academic reading and writing activities. In this situation more often preschool teachers do not attempt create sufficient opportunities for peer interaction due to desk work. This weakness can be seen in the socialisation process in preschools. There is a need for emphasising more peer interaction and playful experiences in preschool classroom. Therefore this study attempted to fill the gap by identifying how peer interaction can be promoted through playful experiences.

3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Early childhood years are the most important period in any individual as it creates the foundation for life. Peer interaction in this period leads to so many advantages particularly in socialisation. Play is the leading source of development in the early years. It is essential to children's optimal development (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). Many countries emphasis and practise more playful activities in their programs and conduct researches on this aspect. However, in Sri Lanka, investigations on peer interactions and play are very limited. On the other hand mushrooming of preschools with many desk work activities diminishes interactive playful environments for children. Therefore, there is a gap in the pool of early childhood education literature on the applicability of play for the development of preschool children interactions. Therefore, the researcher undertook this research in order to fill the gap.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the purpose of this study the researcher attempted to investigate two research questions as follows,
(i)   How can peer interactions be improved in preschool children through

socio-dramatic play intervention?

(ii) What is the facilitative role of the teacher in promoting peer interactions in preschool children through socio-dramatic play intervention?

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine how peer interactions are improved during the socio-dramatic play intervention implemented in the preschool classroom.

2. To identify the facilitative role of the teacher in promoting peer interaction during the socio-dramatic play intervention implemented in the preschool classroom.

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The theoretical and empirical literature of this study provided lens to design and implement a sociodramatic play intervention in order to achieve the objectives. The following figure 1.1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.

The Vygotsky theory supports the theoretical framework for this study. According to Vygotsky's view, learning is a social process which occurs in the zone of proximal development. During this social process of learning peer interaction facilitates reach the ZPD. Secondly, providing play training, adequate time, space, play props and objects and establishing common experiences support to design Socio-dramatic play intervention. Thirdly, the teacher's scaffolding and providing
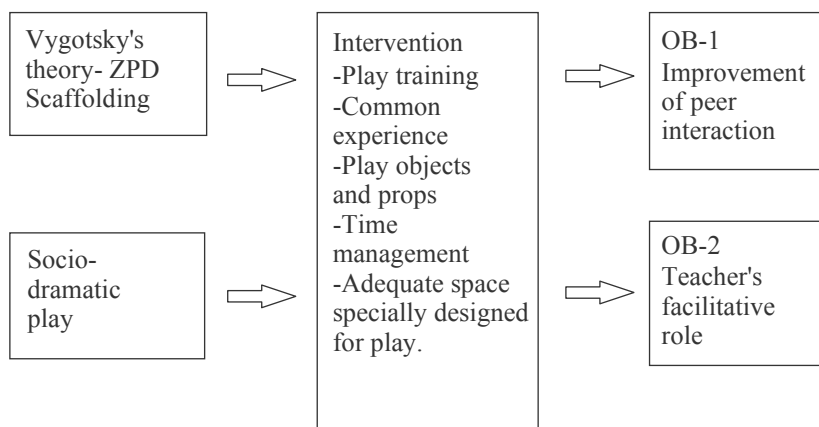
Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study

play props support the children's participation in play and taking the co player and play leader role in the play by the teacher and using questioning and commenting as strategies support to produce and promote peer interaction in Socio-dramatic play. Finally all of these provide the appropriate context for promoting peer interaction through play.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

Under the qualitative approach the study employed a single case study research design. According to Yin (2009) a case study research design is an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a "case"), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Thus case study research assumes that examining the context and other complex conditions related to the case being studied are integral to understand the case. A "case" is generally a bounded entity; a person, organisation, behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomen which serves as the main unit of analysis of the study (Yin, 2009). A case study consists of a single case or multiple cases. In this research the purpose was to promote peer interaction of a group of children through play not multiple groups of children in different preschools. Therefore the research utilised the single case study research design. Further the researcher didn't intend to generalise the results in this study.

7.2 Population and Sample

According to National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2004) preschool children belong to the age category of 3-5. The researcher selected the sample from this age category. Therefore the total population of this study was the children under the age category of 3 to 4 years in Sri Lankan setting. Since, the purpose was to study a group of children's peer interactions in a socio-dramatic play intervention, a target population was selected.

7.3 Target Population

As the target population, 50 preschool children and one teacher from the preschool in the Nawala area in the Colombo District were selected. The preschool children were belonged to the age category of 3 to 5 years.

7.4 Sample and the Setting

In purposive sampling, researchers hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample based on the judgement of their typicality, thus the sample is chosen for a specific purpose satisfactorily to the specific needs of the study (Cohen et al., 2003). The researcher in this study selected 12 children, six girls and six boys who showed less interaction with their peers during the pilot study which conducted using purposive sampling technique in order to be in line with the purpose of the study. In the teacher's sample the class teacher from the lower class was selected. The setting of this study was a preschool situated in the Nawala area in the Colombo district. The following table 1 further describes the details of the sample.

Table 1 Details of the Sample

Child's name code	Completed Age 4 and 5	Sex
MN	4 yrs	Boy
ML	4 yrs	Boy
HK	4 yrs	Boy
NT	4 yrs	Girl
KV	4 yrs	Girl
TU	4 yrs	Girl
HR	5 yrs	Boy
SV	5 yrs	Boy
RN	5 yrs	Boy
SS	5 yrs	Girl
SN	5 yrs	Girl
ST	5 Yrs	Girl

7.5 Observation

According to Lekamge (2006) in the non participant observation the researcher engages in direct observation without making an interaction with the environment observed. Since the researcher aimed to observe without an interaction, the researcher acted as a non participant in the intervention.

An observation schedule was prepared adopting the Starting Light: Early Childhood Development Standards for Sri Lankan Children from 3-5 years in 2014 developed by the Child Secretariat of the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs and UNICEF in line with the National Policy on ECCD in Sri Lanka. This provides the standards that each child from 3-5 years of age attains in the main domains of total development. Relationship with peers is a specific aspect of the social emotional domain. Thus the observations were focused on four subcategories namely; ability to cooperate with peers, ability to comfort friends, ability to develop close friendships, ability to recognise needs of others and respond positively.

The researcher attempted to observe the intervention without being noticed by the children even though this has informed overt observation. According to the researcher focus is mainly on observing through video recording during the intervention and documenting the modes of interactions between the participants and the teacher (Patton, 2002) in the field notes after each session.

7.6 Reflective Journal

As a supplementary to the researcher's field notes, the teacher was asked to keep a reflective journal which is a kind of annotated chronological record or a log of experiences and events (Wellington, 2000). The reflective journal of the teacher helped to add more richness and reliability to the data gathered (Steenberg, 2007).

7.7 Semi Structured Interview

Miller & Glassner (2004), Patton (2002) and Steenberg (2007) emphasised, interviews allow the researcher to enter into other people's perspectives and to understand of the things which the researcher could not directly observe. A

qualitative interview can be regarded as an interaction between the researcher and the research participant, during which the researcher has a general plan of inquiry for the interview, but not a detailed set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order (Babbie & Mouton, 2001 and McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Since the researcher intended to use the interview as a meaning-making process to explore more on teacher's views on children's peer interactions in the socio-dramatic play intervention, her role in the intervention as a facilitator a semi structured interview schedule was used.

7.8 Intervention with Children

Before the intervention the researcher observed the peer interactions of children during their ordinary classroom activities which created less room for peer interactions since they were more toward seat work. However, before implementing the intervention a pilot session was conducted under the shop theme. During the piloting it was observed that, these types of classroom play activities are new to them even though they engage in such play in their free play time. Further, more play materials and varieties of themes are necessary to encourage pear interactions. The socio-dramatic play intervention was developed by the researcher aiming to improve peer interaction. It was implemented for 3 weeks collaboratively by the lower class head teacher. Prior to the intervention the teacher was instructed by the researcher on her role as a facilitator. The intervention was conducted in Sinhala language. Three themes, The Market, The Dispensary and The School Classroom were selected for the intervention based on the year plan of the preschool. 12 sessions were conducted for 30 minutes each (Steenberg, 2007) in the morning in the preschool classroom. The physical setting for each theme was prepared with suitable play materials. Due to the ethical consideration informed consent was taken from all parents of the participants.

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The process of data analysis was started at the beginning of the study. The data analysis was carried out under several stages. In order to analyse the data the descriptive analysis method was employed. Initially, as Bluiett (2009) mentioned, the video tapes were viewed over and over again focusing on each child in relation to the objectives. While the videotapes were viewed the conversations were noted

down. As Agbenyega (2007) said, reading the data collected several times helped to get familiarised with the data.

Therefore, the researcher went through the entire field notes, observation schedules, teacher's reflective journal and interview data in order to become familiarised with the data. In order to establish the trustworthiness of the data, data triangulation was used. Triangulation involved using multiple sources of data collection with the hope that they will all converge to support a particular hypothesis or theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Thus, the triangulation was done focusing all the data into specific objectives under several themes. Finally, according to the sub themes developed based on the literature, the data were analysed and interpreted.

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the results and the discussion are presented under two main sub themes; Improvement of peer interaction among children during the sociodramatic play intervention and Teacher's facilitative role in promoting peer interaction during the intervention

9.1 Improvements of Peer Interaction among Children during the Sociodramatic Play Intervention

The data on the above objective were analysed and presented according to the following sub-themes.

9.1.1 Ability to cooperate with peers

At the beginning of the intervention the Market theme was played in which children imitated the roles of sellers of clothes, shoes, accessories and teddy bears and customers. According to the observations carried out during the socio-dramatic play intervention, it was identified that children showed less cooperativeness with their peers at the beginning since the socio-dramatic play activity was a new experience for them. This appeared during the first two sessions. However, it was observed that they gradually started to co-operate with each other in selling and buying clothes. The following conversation that emerged during the

first session shows the less cooperativeness of peers.

During the first theme the teacher became the mother, ML was the shop owner and KV the helper.

Teacher: "Mudalali we came to buy some clothes for my sons and daughters. Can you help us?"
ML: "OK "
Teacher: "Let's see a frock for my daughter (SS)."
ML: "Take this" (giving a frock)

Teacher put the frock on SS

Teacher: "Mudalali, this is too small."
KV: "Ok try this one" (shows a skirt)
ML: "try a skirt"

According to the above conversation it could be identified that the considerable involvement of the teacher has reduced the opportunity for peers to cooperate with each other.

During the second theme a gradual increment of the children's ability to cooperate with each other was demonstrated. The following field note further explains the improvement of children's cooperativeness in the play.

I think now the children are more used to the socio-dramatic play than at the beginning. So now they are cooperating more and helping each other. So the interaction has improved. I saw a very good improvement in ML, SS, NT, HR and KV in their role as Nurse. All of them liked to help the doctor and the patients. (Field note, 01. 12. 2014)

During the teacher's interview the teacher revealed that the children were more supportive to each other when they were familiarised with the play. Further she said that the older children volunteered to co-operate the younger ones more often. The following views of the teacher further illustrate the gradual improvement of children's ability to cooperation.

"I saw at the beginning children were shy to interact with each other"
"But when they entered to the play later they were more supportive to each other."
"During Dispensary theme I saw that those who acted as patients waited till their turn came and Nurses helped to prepare medicines"

Thus it could be identified that the children were able to improve their ability to cooperate with peers to a satisfactory level.

9.1.2. Ability to Comfort Friends

It was observed during the intervention that the majority of older children showed a significant improvement in the ability to comfort friends than younger ones. Benenson, Markovits, Roy, & Denko (2003) mentioned that older children direct pro-social behaviour such as caring, sharing, and helping behaviours to their peers more often than 3-year olds. This was apparently seen during the intervention. The following are some of the conversations that emerged with regard to comforting friends.

Example 1 – The Market Theme

SV: "I like this hat" (Showing a brown coloured hat)
ML: "OK. You take it"
KV: "No it is my hat, Give me that" (with an angry mood)
SV: "Oh! I'm Sorry, you take it"

Example 2: The Dispensary Theme

Teacher: Who likes to be the Doctor next?"
HR: "Me"
NT: "No! I want to be the Doctor"
Teacher: "HR, Shall we give the chance to NT?"
HR became upset. He started thinking for a while and then said,
HR: "OK. You be the Doctor this time."
Teacher: "Thank you HR. You can take the next turn."

Example 3- The School Classroom

KV was the teacher. She first drew a picture of a child on the board and asked others to draw by looking at it.

ML: "Hey, look at your picture. The girl has no legs." (Laughed)
Others also started laughing. KV became angry.
KV: "I will give a sad face."
HR: "Okay.. Okay Sorry"

In the above three examples HR and SV were older than others. According to the observations it could be identified that the majority of children specially who had completed age 5 were able to develop the ability to comfort others.

The following reflective note of the teacher further illustrates the children's improvement of the ability to comfort peers.

I think children are more caring to their friends now in the play. It was surprised to see that some boys who were little aggressive in the classroom said sorry to their friends (Teacher's Reflective Journal, 08.12.2014).

Accordingly an improvement in children's ability to comfort friends was identified in the socio-dramatic play intervention. But with regard to the younger children, those who had completed age 4 showed less improvement in this ability compared to older ones.

9.1.3. Ability to Develop Close Friendships

According to Rubin, Bukowski & Parker (2007) in preschoolers the similarities in age and sex draw young children together. Furthermore, preschoolers appear to be attracted to, and become friends with peers whose behavioural tendencies are similar to their own (Kandel, 1978 & Ryan, 2001).

This was apparent in the intervention. In the observation it was demonstrated that younger children were able to develop close friendships with same age peers than older children. Similarly, it was noticed with regard to sex as mentioned by Rubin et al., (2007), which was both 4 year old and five 5 old of the same sex showed more close friendships than with the opposite sex. However, this was mostly appeared in

girls than in boys.

The following field note further explains the children's improvement of the ability to develop close friendships.

I noticed that SS who is from upper class became close friends with NT and KV who are younger to her. Three of them always liked to be together and imitate the same role. (Field note, 02.12.2014)

This shows that when making friendship children considered the sex and the similarity of their behaviours.

When the teacher was questioned at the interview about this, she indicated that the majority of children obtained more opportunities to make friends with others who were not friends before the intervention.

The following are some of her sentiments with regard to the improvement in the ability to develop close friendship.

"I saw that they are very friendly with each other in the activity."
"It was a good chance for them to make friends within the upper class sisters and brothers"
"HK and TU were very close friends and didn't make friendship with others earlier. But in this activity I saw that HK was trying to be friendly with others."

Accordingly it could be revealed that the majority of children were able to develop close friendship with their same age, same sex peers and with peers who have similar behavioural tendencies.

9.1.4. Ability to Recognise Needs of Others and Responds Positively.

Hay, Payne, & Chadwick (2004) explained that preschoolers' conversations reflect numerous interpersonal goals (e.g., negotiating roles and rules in play; arguing and agreeing). Levin & Rubin, (1983) note that older preschool-age children direct more speech to their peers than do their younger counterparts.

During the observations this was further demonstrated that older children were able to develop the ability to recognise the needs of the others and respond

positively than younger children. However it was further observed that some of the younger children too were able to develop this ability while playing with older children.

The following conversation further explains the improvement of their ability to recognise needs of others and respond positively.

MN: "What do you want?"
SS: "I need a frock."
MN: "Take this." (gives a blue colour frock)
SS: "How much is this?"
MN: "Rs 5."

She pretends giving money to him and takes the frock.

SN: "Please come to buy shoes."
NT: "I want a pair of shoes"
SN: "Okay, try this."

NT puts on a pair of shoes.

SN: "That is good. You take it."
KV: "Give me a necklace."
TU: "Take a look at this."
KV starts to choose necklaces

SS: "Mudalali, Do you have bangles? This colour" (Showing a red bangle)
HK: "Yes."

The above conversations show how children obtained opportunities in the socio-dramatic play intervention to develop their ability to recognise others needs and respond positively. The following reflective notes from the teacher further explain the children's improvement of the ability to recognise the needs of others and respond positively.

Today children were more interested in the play activity. Since they had more play materials their interactions were increased. Most of them engaged in rich

conversations. Those who were little backward to talk, also responded to their peers well (Teacher's Reflective Journal, 09.12.2014).

Accordingly, it could be identified that during the intervention majority of children regardless of their age developed the ability to recognise the needs of others and respond positively.

With regard to the objective of promoting peer interaction through socio-dramatic play it could be identified that majority of children were able to improve their abilities to develop positive peer interaction.

9.1.5. Teacher's Facilitative Role in Promoting Peer Interaction During the Intervention

As Christie & Enz (1993) highlight in socio-dramatic play, teachers can assume either a play-leader role or co-player role. The difference between the co-player role and the play-leader role is the degree of control over the course of the play. In the play-leader role, the teacher indirectly directs and redirects the children's play still using pretend talk. In the co-player role, teachers take a minimal play role.

According to Vygotsky (1978) adult interactions can facilitate children's development within their zone of proximal development. Stantan-Chapman (2014) mentioned that preschool teachers are the key to orchestrating successful peer interactions for all children within the early childhood program including typical, inclusive, and at-risk classrooms. Further, the teacher can involve by careful planning and preparation, creativity, reflection, and providing opportunities for peer interactions to happen.

Accordingly, it was observed during the intervention that the teacher's influence in promoting peer interaction was identified to a certain extent. However, as it was identified during the observation, the teacher's role in promoting peer interaction was low during the first theme compared to the other themes.

During the second theme, it was observed that this situation changed slightly when the teacher shifted her role from play-leader to co-player role. It was noticed that this gradual shift in the teacher's role created much opportunities to children to

interact with their peers.

Grosmann et al. (1999) claims that preschool children who view their teachers as secure bases for play and interactions are more willing to participate in play episodes with peers as they feel comfortable navigating the unfamiliar territory of peer play with adult assistance. This assistance was seen when the intervention reached the second and third themes.

In addition, Kontos (1999) and McWilliam and Casey (2008) state that a teacher can support peer interaction in the socio-dramatic play by providing materials for play and giving suggestions for use of materials. This was further established in the intervention as it was identified that the suggestions given by the teacher to use different play props increased their participation in the play as well as in their interaction with each other.

The following conversation in the third theme describes how the teacher supported peer interaction by giving ideas to use the play props.

Teacher: "Doctor can check the patient using the stethoscope."
ST starts to check HR.
ST: "Breathe fast."
ST writes a prescription and gives RN who is the mother.
Teacher: "Nurse aunty, you can check the pressure of the patient."

NT is the nurse. She starts to check HR's pressure.

According to the above conversation it could be identified that the teacher's suggestions given for children to make use of the play props influenced them to interact with their peers better.

It was identified that when children have prior experiences of the theme they seemed to interact in the play freely. The teacher could easily promote their peer interaction. This was further identified in the teacher's reflection as follows,

I noticed that if the children who had experiences of going to market early showed better interaction with other children. It was easier for me to provide support for

them than in the other themes. (Teacher's reflective journal, 09.12.2014)

Statnan-Chapman (2014) states that the teacher can use different teacher talks to facilitate peer interaction, which would help to promote language development in socio-dramatic play. According to Sharpe (2008), teacher talk can take five different formats as follows; Recasting, Repeating, Expanding, Questioning, and Prompting.

Among the above five types of teacher talks, it was observed that during the intervention the teacher used questioning and prompting frequently. The following dialogue of the teacher during the second and third themes illustrates the teacher's use of questioning talk.
Second theme:

Teacher: "Don't you want to buy something from shoe shop?"

Third theme:
Teacher: "Doctor, don't you want to check the patient more?"

Fourth theme:
Teacher: "What do you do when the teacher comes to the class?"

It was identified that when the teacher used the above questioning talk in the play more opportunities were created for children to interact with each other. The following dialog from the third theme of School classroom describes the use by the teacher of prompting talk in the play intervention.

Fourth theme:
Teacher:" I think we need to tell what you are going to teach before writing. Right?, I think KV can give him a happy face."

It was observed that when the teacher used this type of prompting talk with children they received support from the teacher to engage in more peer interaction as children responded positively. Therefore the teacher talk was helpful to create more opportunities for peer interaction in the play intervention.

interact with their peers.

Grosmann et al. (1999) claims that preschool children who view their teachers as secure bases for play and interactions are more willing to participate in play episodes with peers as they feel comfortable navigating the unfamiliar territory of

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on promoting peer interaction of preschool children through play. In order to achieve the research objectives the researcher developed and implemented a socio-dramatic play intervention. The intervention on the socio-dramatic play led to significant conclusions in the study. The intervention concluded that children showed a greater interest to interact with their peers in the socio-dramatic play intervention when compared with the other usual classroom activities irrespective of their ages and gender. Further the intervention created greater opportunities to the majority of children to develop their abilities to cooperate with peers, comfort friends, build up friendships and identify others needs and respond them positively by taking up different roles under different themes and imitating those roles and building up stories. The socio-dramatic play created greater opportunities for children to improve their abilities to peer interaction.

Further, with regard to the teacher's facilitative role the intervention concluded that the play leader and co-player roles are facilitative roles in the socio-dramatic play which promote both play and peer interactions among children. Moreover, the intervention explicated concrete pedagogic strategies from which the teacher can promote peer interactions while encouraging the children in the socio-dramatic play.

The study recognised that the children are free, enchanted and lively and they create opportunities within a playful context. It presented reliable evidences that children's socio-dramatic play is both a medium and context for developing peer interactions in children.

However, the conclusions of the study cannot be generalised since this study was qualitative and it is an inherent characteristic of qualitative research. Further, the

limited time duration of the intervention could hinder the reveal of actual improvements since it takes longer period to shape the behaviours of children. These aspects are identified as limitations of the study.

Thus the study recommends putting greater emphasis on incorporating socio-dramatic play into the preschool curriculum and time table to encourage peer interactions among preschool children. Further, the study recommends teachers encourage children to cooperate with each other, make close friendships, identify others' needs and respond them positively and comfort friends in the play by using various play materials, different themes which are familiar to children, including different age groups and gender into play activity, reducing teacher involvement, use pretend talk, questioning, prompting, feedback and giving ideas on play.

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