The Role of Teachers in Furthering the Development of Social Competence in Young Children

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Abstract

Establishing and maintaining positive social interaction with peers is important for young children because it will form a foundation for their later social adjustment and academic achievement. Social competence in this study means an increasing awareness and understanding of other human beings as part of the child's world. The purpose of the study was to help four-year-old children to accept other children in their mind. This study had three specific aims: To find the reasons for their difficulties; to examine their changing play behavior; and to observe teachers' roles in helping them to become involved in peer group play. Lack of communication skills and emotional instability were the main difficulties the children faced. Regarding the changing play pattern, they passed through five distinctive stages: Staying alone, showing strong interest in the peer group play, going voluntarily to friends, actively playing with one or two friends, and finally becoming an active member of the peer play group. In improving children's involvement in peer group play the teachers played several important roles: Making them feel safe, giving them an opportunity to experience familiar things, suggesting plays, creating opportunities to become acquainted with other children, and modeling how to play with other children.

Key words: social competence, developmental characteristics, teachers' intervention

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Introduction

“Social Competence of Young Children and Global Citizenship” is the title of the 7th PECERA conference in Seoul. No one can deny the importance of the subject, especially living in this period of confusion and conflict, and in our highly globalized modern society.

Establishing and maintaining positive social interaction with peers and adults outside the family is important for young children because it will form a foundation for their later social adjustment (Brown, Odom, & Buysse, 2002) and academic achievement (Ladd, 2006). Research done by early childhood education professionals and psychologists over the last two decades has proved that poor social skills and poor peer-related social competence in the early years can cause long-term developmental difficulties and impede social interaction with others (Barnes, 1971; Brown et al., 2002; Ramsey, 1998). However, the origin or the basis for social competence is young children's emotional stability. According to Suveg, Zeman, Flannery-Schroeder, & Cassano (2005), non clinical children and their mothers showed significantly more emotional expressiveness than did children with an anxiety disorder and their mothers. Normal children who can express their emotional situation positively and freely can cope with peers well, whereas children who engage in frequent displays of negative emotion are likely to be viewed unfavorably by the peer group (Lemerise, Gregory, & Fredstrom, 2005).

Bohlin, Hagekull, and Anderson (2005) found that behavioral inhibition at the age of four was a significant predictor of the social competence of 8-year-old school children. According to researchers social competence is defined variously: Ability to regulate emotional stress when children interact, having good manners, having pro-social behaviors, etc. This research accepted Schiller's definition. Schiller, who was the most respected principal and superintendent in the United Kingdom in the 1970's, described social growth as follows:

For me, ‘social growth’ means that part of the growth of each young child
which gives her an increasing awareness and understanding of other human beings as part of her world. The awareness comes from exploration of a widening field of persons, which gives greater and greater experience of more and more living beings. The understanding comes from an increasing power of identification with other living beings. (Christopher, 2005. p. 38)

According to Schiller, the awareness and understanding of babies towards living beings starts with their mother, father and siblings. After that it extends to other children and adults outside the family. Therefore accepting other people is the first step in the development of social competence. The social development of a young child starts from the moment it is born. Children who are optimally regulated exhibit the most positive, adaptive behavior. These children are seen as sociable, relatively popular, and socially competent (Blair, Denham, Kochanoff, & Whipple, 2004).

If we early childhood educators have children who are raised by their family to have a higher level of acceptance of others, it will be easier to increase their social competence level, but if the children are afraid of other people they will need special help. It will be more effective to apply various kinds of social competence programs after the basic level of their awareness and understanding of other people is increased.

Parten (1932) was the first one to study a developmental pattern in free-play time in the nursery school. Free-play time is when young children show their social competence and is a very suitable opportunity for observing children's social interaction. The results of the study showed that there are six patterns: Unoccupied, solitary, onlooker, parallel, associative, and cooperative play patterns. These have had an extremely strong impact on child-development literature.

Barnes (1971) attempted to illustrate that Parten's normative play findings were seriously outdated by the 1970's. However, he found that the six play-behavior patterns Parten described were the same, but the number of children who fit each pattern was different. More children in the Barnes study showed unoccupied, solitary, and onlooker play behavior, and fewer showed associative and cooperative play
behavior than in Parten's study.

Barnes thought of four possible reasons for the statistical differences between his subjects and Parten's. First, young children in modern society spend more time with mass media and therefore spend much less time in play with friends. Second, modern toys are more conducive to solitary play activity than the less elaborate toys of the past. Third, young children in modern society receive reinforcement from their parents when they play by themselves since parents have a tendency to think that playing alone will be the basis of studying alone hard at home. Fourth, opportunities to have sibling relationships are reduced because of the smaller families in modern society.

Human beings are becoming more and more alienated within their societies. Young Korean children are also experiencing more alienation within their family and community for the four reasons Barnes mentioned. Korean kindergarten and child care center teachers observe that quite a number of young children have difficulties getting along with other children. It is time to intervene in the kindergartens or child care centers to help young children to develop social competence.

Method

The ultimate purpose of the study was to find the best ways of helping non-sociable children to become involved in peer group play. Three specific aims were established. The first aim was to find the reasons for their difficulties in interacting with other children. The second aim was to examine children's changing play behaviors. The third aim was to observe their teachers' intervention roles.

For this purpose I supervised two series of observations for two years; Kim observed and interacted with a 4-year-old boy in 2004, and Son did the same with a 4-year-old girl in 2005. These children had difficulties in playing freely in their kindergarten classrooms. Both of them were selected because they showed non-social behavior at the beginning of the school year and did not show any sign of willingness to play with other children. The observations were meta-analyzed.
Monitoring Observation of the Children and the Teachers' Intervention

It was not easy to assess a young child's social competence because social competence itself is only a sign of social growth at a certain point and is an ongoing process. We could only comprehend children's social competence as a sort of vague pattern that is not like a fixed pattern on a carpet, but is changing continuously in time and space. However, as Brown et al. (2002) recommended, the four-year-old children were observed directly during free-play periods three times a week for a year. Brown and his colleagues reported three strategies to assess children's social competence: Developmental or curriculum-based assessment, direct observation and appraisal of peer relations and friendships. For this study direct observation of a four-year-old boy 'D' and a girl 'S' was applied in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Children's classroom teachers were interviewed to improve our understanding of the children's behavior and family records provided by their parents were analyzed.

Results

Observation records were meta-analyzed to find the reasons why the children could not participate, the process of their changing play pattern and the role of the teachers. The results are as follows.

The Reasons for Difficulties

Both children faced two kinds of difficulties at the beginning of the school year: Lack of communication skills and emotional instability. With their teachers' continuous intervention, both children overcame the difficulties and were able to participate in the peer plays. Below are situations where they showed their lack of communication skill.

D was making a car with blocks in a block area. Even though two other boys were cooperating making roads and cars nearby and the area was busy and filled with joyful noise, D stayed alone, making a car by himself. No interaction occurred. (Field note of March 27, 2004)
In the art area S drew a picture alone. When she colored the hair black and brown a boy asked: “Why are you coloring the hair two different colors?”

S : ....
Child A : (Walked away).
Child B : (A child who was playing in the role-play area and could not find a patient walked over to S and asked). “S, will you play a patient?”
S : ....
Child B : (She walked to another girl and asked her).

(Field note of May 28, 2005)

In the art area S was making something alone. Child A came and talked to her.

Child A : “What are you doing?”
S : (Answered in a very small voice so that no one could hear it).
Child A : (Walked away). In the art area S was drawing a picture.
Child C: who needed a friend to play ‘mom and baby’ walked to S and asked, “Will you play with me?” S answered in a small voice, “Uh...”

(Field note of May 28, 2005)

The subjects of both observations had difficulties because of their lack of communication skills. They did not respond to friends properly and talked in a small voice so that no one could hear them. S even rejected friends' suggestions to play. The researchers found that all these phenomena originated from their emotional instability. Other situations where they showed emotional instability are given below.

Not only could D not play with other friends but he wet his pants often because of emotional nervousness. (Interview with his teacher, March 5, 2004)

The teacher was introducing making a tree book to a small group of children. Children had to cut out a tree and glue it on a piece of paper, then write the name under the tree with color pencils and staple the tree pictures together to make a book. S was sitting alone, apart from the group, and doing something but all of a
sudden she burst into tears. Whenever she had to do a new thing she felt uneasy and restless and she cried.

Teacher: S, is it too hard to do?
S: ...(cries)
Teacher: Do you want me to help you?
S: ...(nods)
Teacher: “Next time will you tell me instead of crying? It is quite all right to say ‘It is hard to do. Please help me.’ Would you tell me when you need my help? Just say ‘Help me, please,’ would you?”

(Field note of April 25, 2005)

She never asked questions even in a situation where an adult's help was necessary. Her face turned red when a child said, “It does not belong here” in the art area. She had a hard time accepting any kind of ‘No’ even when it simply meant that it was not possible to be with her at that moment. S was unstable, lacking self-confidence, afraid of making mistakes, and focusing only on finding the right answers. So she could not express her feelings and thoughts openly and freely. It seemed that her emotional insecurity was a cause of her lack of communication skill and vice versa. Table 1 is a summary of the reasons discovered in the study.

The emotional instability was interrelated with the lack of communication skills and the social competence, as Colewell and Hart (2006) found in their research.

Table 1. Reasons for non-participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Specified behaviors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of communication skills</td>
<td>No response, small voice, rejection of friend's play invitation, and inability to understand the meaning of children's conversation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional insecurity</td>
<td>Emotional withdrawal, crying, inability to do anything independently, and inability to express feeling and thought.</td>
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<td>Lack of social skill</td>
<td>Inability to yield, compromise and cooperate</td>
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The Process of Participating in Peer-Group Play

The two children showed all six play patterns that Parten found. In Parten's research, however, the solitary and parallel play appeared in children rather younger than the subjects, D and S. As Parten explained, solitary play at a later age is a sign of social immaturity, even though solitary play is a normal developmental characteristic in two or three-year-old children. D and S stayed all alone at the beginning of the school year and again for a short time right after the summer.

FIGURE 1. The process of participating in peer group play (Case of S)

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<tr>
<th>Play pattern</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Mar</th>
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<td>Staying Alone</td>
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<td>• Imitating children's play they have observed</td>
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vacation. Then they watched the other children playing and showed a solitary and a parallel play pattern at the same time. However, there were differences in the time duration each child passed through. For example, D spent six months at the staying alone stage whereas S stayed alone only for two months. S's solitary play pattern appeared again and again even after she began to play with one or two friends, but D played with friends well once he started to interact. D's playing patterns changed radically once he accepted his friends and played actively. It took him only about one and a half months to be an active play group member after he left the staying alone stage whereas S needed 5 months to be an active member once she came out of the staying alone stage. Even though all the stages they showed were the same in sequence and patterns, the duration was different. In this report only S's process is shown in figure 1 since D's process from 'showing interest in other friends’ to ‘participating actively in the peer group play’ was so fast.

**Staying Alone**

‘Staying Alone’ play pattern is similar with Parten's ‘unoccupied and solitary’. In the beginning D and S stayed alone, which included unoccupied and solitary play pattern, apart from other children, without any interaction at all. D stayed alone most of the time in the art area or block area and S always chose to stay in the art area or in the role-play area doing things all by herself. However, she showed two different patterns here; continuously looking at other children's play, and solitary play. D showed a rather different pattern from S. D kept following his teacher. D's interaction with his teacher gave him gradual emotional stability.

**Looking at other children's play.** Both children spent some time looking at other children's play. At first D stayed at a spot rather far from the place where the other children were playing but gradually he came closer.

S also stayed alone in a certain area such as the art or role play area but her eyes
were always on the other children's play nearby, a sort of passive solitary and onlooker pattern. This continued for a month from March to April, 2005.

S came in and hung up her coat but her eyes were on the block area where two children were playing, while two other children were coloring in the art area. She walked to the middle of the classroom but her eyes were still on the children in the block area. She went to the art area which was empty now because the two children who had been playing there had moved to the block area to play. She touched two toilet paper rollers and put them up to her eyes like a pair of binoculars. (Field note of April 18, 2005)

S seldom talked or smiled, even when the teacher went closer to her and talked. If her teacher kept talking or suggesting an activity she could do, she stayed silent or even rejected it in a small voice. When she had to reply to the teacher she responded with a short 'yes' or 'no', and she kept her distance, staying alone while other children organized and changed play groups easily.

**Solitary play.** D's solitary play appeared at the beginning of the second semester, but S's solitary play appeared in April, which was five months earlier than D. Her solitary play had changed into an active solitary play pattern from a passive one. She put together all the pieces of a puzzle and finished making something she started. Once in a while she looked at other children playing or went closer to the area where children were playing but mostly she played alone in the free play time.

D was pushing his toy truck around the sand area where other friends were playing, without any words or interaction. The other children ignored D's presence. (Field note of September 2, 2004)

S went to the block area, touched a block and looked at the children playing for 10 minutes. She also looked at the children playing in the role play area which is beside the block area. Finally she returned to the art area where there were no children playing and started decorating a yogurt bottle with colored paper. (Field note of April 22, 2005)

**Showing Strong Interest in the Peer Group Play**

About six months after March, 2004, D began to show interest in the peer group play. He walked around the areas where other children were playing. He remained
alone without any interaction, but he did go closer to his friends.

S took a much shorter time than D to go closer to her friends. Two months after the observation started, S began showing strong interest in the other children's play. She went closer to the activity area and observed their play seriously. This type of play pattern was repeated more and more. It became distinctive at the beginning of May.

**Wandering around the children's play area.** The more active their solitary play became, the more often D and S visited other children's playing areas to observe in detail. This was different behavior from observing at a distance. If they thought that other children's play was really interesting they went closer to that area even though there was no interaction between them. In this stage the patterns both children showed were different. D didn't interact with other friends but did ask the teacher while S did not interact either with a friend or her teacher.

D was walking around the sand area where other friends were playing without any words. The other children ignored D's presence. (Field note of September 2, 2004)

In the morning S put her clothes in her locker, and walked around several activity areas in the classroom and observed what the other children were doing. She walked around the language area where three boys were reading. Then she stood at the edge of the area and read a book herself. After skimming through the book, she looked at the role play area where several girls were singing the birthday song. Then she walked to the art area and looked at other children's pictures on the wall there. She touched some art material for a while but put it back and went to the role play area to observe the children. (Field note of April 29, 2005)

Her behavior changed from looking at children from a distance to staying closer to an activity area to observe children's play in detail, even though there was no interaction. S extended her observation area further.

**Imitating children's play they have observed.** After D and S observed other
children's play they went back to the play area where they stayed alone. They seriously imitated other children's play they observed when there was no one around. They really concentrated on their play and created their own way of playing, by omitting some things and adding other ideas of their own. And with the teacher's intervention they could even play in the same way right beside other children. To get to this point D took four months and S took two months.

Child H : The railroad is supposed to be long enough to go to Busan.
Child J : Here are a lot of boxes. Do you want these?
Child H : Please bring them quickly and put them right behind the block here

While children were busy making the railroad, D was sitting on a chair right beside the area where the children were playing. After a few minutes D made a railroad with different kind of blocks.

Teacher : What is this?
D : Choo choo train is going to Busan.

(Field note of September 7, 2004)

As soon as S entered the classroom she went to the art area and drew a picture alone for about 20 minutes, then stopped and looked at the children playing in the block area crossing a bridge they had made. "S, do you want to play the same play? I can help you." Teacher suggested. S followed her teacher without any resistance and put the blocks together by herself and crossed the bridge like the other children.

(Field note of April 28, 2005)

This was the first time S accepted her teacher's suggestion and imitated other children's play. After several times she followed her teacher's suggestion which stimulated her parallel play, she went to the area where other children were playing. She did this by herself without her teacher's assistance.

**Going Voluntarily to Friends**

D and S showed sincere interest in friends instead of only looking at the other children playing. However, they did not try to talk or interact with the friends at first.
They just went closer and stayed there. In this stage D and S showed different patterns. D didn't show any specific friends that he wanted to play, but S had certain friends in her mind with whom she wanted to play. The play patterns both children showed in the middle of this stage were different in two ways. First, while D didn't need any close friend to belong to the peer play group, one close friend was a necessity for S. Second, D rejected another friend's suggestion for three months before he accepted the other friend completely, while S did not show any rejection toward other friends.

It was arrival time. S arrived a little earlier and stayed in the art area. Then B and J came in. S came out of the art area and went to B and J. B ignored her and moved to the other friends. S followed her and looked at B who was playing with other friends. S came back to the art area. B and J came in there and drew and made things. S stayed there and looked at them.

(Field note of May 2, 2005)

For a while S went to a chosen friend and kept moving to a different child without any attempt to talk or to suggest playing. Finally she found a quiet girl whose name was Y and who had a similar disposition to herself. Y went to kindergarten on the same bus and their play preference for the art area was similar. At first, the two girls played side by side, a parallel pattern play. They did not talk about the play or cooperate. However, as time passed their interaction time and frequencies gradually increased. Y initiated conversation and S listened to her. S responded eagerly to Y.

As soon as S entered the classroom she found Y standing in front of a shelf in the art area. Y talked about the art materials she was touching and talked to S.
Y: It's beautiful; isn't it?
Without responding to Y, S looked at Y who was putting things together with glue. Y showed them to S and made them turn round.
Y: Hey, let's make the tail like this. Hey, now it is time to put it together.

(Field note of June 2, 2005)

S played with Y continuously but had no interaction with other children.
Whenever Y was absent from kindergarten, S played alone in the art area or wandered around the activity areas as before where the other children were playing. The more S became close to Y, the more she tried to go closer to other children. This happened after three months of observation and intervention by the teacher. Around this time S not only looked at others playing, but also said what she wanted to say or suggested a more efficient way, and even helped others. The interaction time became a little longer.

When S walked into the classroom the children were putting together new puzzles. She walked over and looked at them putting pieces together. She took out another puzzle, finished it and put it back on the shelf. As soon as she returned it, child C took it out.

Child C : Oh! It is a new puzzle, but looks difficult.

S : I put that difficult one together already.

Child C : This one?

S : Yes.

She stayed there looking at child C putting the pieces back and helped him when he hesitated.

(Field note of June 29, 2005)

Even though she tried to be closer with other friends and started communicating a little, she often rejected another child's approach and suggestion that they play together, if the play situation did not suit her. This was different behavior compared to her not-responding behavior several months before. The more she interacted with other children besides Y, the less she rejected their approaches and suggestions.

**Active Playing with a Few Friends**

Both children observed at different times, finally started play with one or two friends with the help of teachers, which will be explained at the end. At the beginning of this stage both children participated passively, but then became very active later. In the case of S, she even expressed her own feeling and thought directly to Y. S's play pattern was changed from passiveness to activeness.
Passively followed. After D and S started playing with one or two friends they passively followed other friends’ direction. Following are examples of D and S.

Child H: I will be daddy.
J: I want to be a big brother.
Child K: I am mom.
D: I... I... baby.
Child L: Then you have to talk with a baby voice.
D: He talked like a baby.

(Field note of September 4, 2004)

When S came in she bowed to the classroom teacher and looked around to find Y. Y picked up a marker and a board to draw and S did exactly the same. Both of them drew a picture. However, S erased her picture when Y erased her picture.

(Field note of June 2, 2005)

Suggesting ideas actively to one or two friends. Both children learned how to communicate with another child in order to suggest ideas actively to one or two friends, and they even shared conversation. It took a month for D and about three weeks for S to change from passively following to actively suggesting.

Child H and J were reading an alphabet book. D was sitting at a table 1 meter apart from them.
Child H: Hey J, do you know this letter? I know it.
J: So do I. It's D. It's English.
Child H: It became a car with a circle under it. It's magic.
J: Yep it's magic.
D: I have the same book at home.
On the front page there is a triangle (A). It looks like a mountain. And he continued to explain the other letters and pictures to them.

(Field note of October 4, 2004)

Child H made something with Lego blocks.
S sat beside him, took out one Lego block and asked him a question.
S: Don't you need it?
Child H: Air conditioner, air conditioner.
Child H took the block S gave him and put it on the thing he made.
S: I will be the helper and you will be the maker, O.K.?
Child H: Yep.
S: (S gave a block to child H and suggested) A man....
S: (She made a T shape with Lego blocks and gave it to child H) When you make an airplane use this. (Looked at the construction of Lego blocks child H had made and asked him). People go through here, don't they? This round one is a heater, isn't it?
Child H: I will make a heater.
S: Here is a parking lot. Hey, people are supposed to come down here.
Child H: I don't need it. They have to jump down like this, puuung.
S: Here is the entrance. Hey, one man is coming out. Tac, tac, tac....

(Field note of September 27, 2005)

As we can see in the example described above, S was able to approach another friend and share ideas or suggestions. Now she often played in the block and role playing areas so that she could play make-believe plays.

Child H was playing restaurant. S stopped playing seesaw alone and joined him.
S: What are you doing?
Child H: Please order food.
S: What do you have?
Child H: Fried hot rice cake and this.
S: Give me this.
Child H: Here.
S: Thank you.

(Field note of September 27, 2005)

S recovered her self-confidence through make-believe plays and became very active. Experiences in the role play area gave her a starting point to extend her relationship with her peers and to improve her ability to communicate with others. She could insist strongly on what she wanted, even though this still only happened rarely.
**Participating in a Peer Group Play**

It took eight months from the stage of staying alone without any interaction for D and six and a half months for S to be an active member of peer play group. At the beginning of this stage they showed a strong desire to participate and then became an active player. Once in a while they initiated play, which had never happened before.

**Strong desire to participate.** D showed a strong desire to participate in the peer group play by sharing toys with a few friends, which had never happened before. After several experiences of sharing toys, D became an active player.

In the sandbox children were playing and D was playing with a toy excavator.

Child H : (Who wanted to play with that, approached D and asked him.) Did you make the hole with this?

D : (In small voice) Yep.


Child H : Hey, I will use it just for a little bit. You can pound the sand pile while I'm playing with this.

D : (He is silent again and waited a little) Do you know how to use it?

Child H : Sure. Like this.

D : Yes, like that.

Child H : I know how to use it.

D : You have to give me back this.

(Field note of October 14, 2004)

Make-believe play and role play stimulated S's motivation to be a member of the group. She understood the rules that the peer group made and obeyed them, acted properly for the role she was playing, found the right materials and applied various playing methods.

S was watching child A and child K using building blocks to make a restaurant.

Child A : Hey, do you want to play with us?

S : (Nodded)

Child A : All right. Play with us. Let's play together.
Child K: O.K. It is a house. It is a restaurant. Here is the restaurant door. Come in this way (Child K moved a block to let her come in).
Child K: Which role do you want to play?
S: A cook.
Child K: O.K. (S moved a block door and went out to pick up a toy toaster and toy ice cream maker).

(Field note of October 5, 2005)

The waiting and participating pattern continued for twenty days, then she became an active player.

**Playing actively and becoming an initiator.** About eight months for D and six and a half months for S after the teacher's intervention began, they became active members of peer group play so that they voluntarily participated and even initiated the play. Now they could voluntarily take a role or be a leader and ask other children to take a certain role. Now they adjusted very well in the peer group play. They observed the play and thought over the roles, materials and method, and then they accepted the roles they wanted to take or compromised. They did not mind whether they were leaders or followers.

Child J: Lets make tunnels under the sand. Several children agreed and joined.
Child B: I want to do it, too.
Child J: O.K.....
Child L: Come on, those who want to play hospital. Come here those who want to play hospital (Five children including S gathered around Child L).
Children: Me a nurse, me a doctor, me(S) a puppy. Then I will be a baby.
Then child M started making a hospital with blocks. Child L and child N also brought more blocks.
S moved inside the block hospital like a puppy.
Child L: Here is a playroom in the hospital.
S: In the hospital the playroom is on the second floor....
Child N: Now I want to be a puppy.
S: (Came out from the block hospital and asked). Please give me a spoon. Do you know which medicine the puppy has to take?
S put a thermometer under child N's arm and pushed down her tongue with a wooden presser. She pretended to put medicine in child's mouth and rub ointment on the puppy's skin. (Field note of October 28, 2005)

Figure 1 is the summary of the changing process of participating patterns S showed from March to October, 2005. For almost two months at the beginning, S stayed alone and it took her six and a half months to become an active member of the peer group play. Until the summer vacation she played with only one or two friends. Participating in a peer-group play appeared in October.

As we can see in Figure 1 the process of changing took place gradually and changes overlapped during that period. However, right after summer vacation S showed 'a staying alone pattern' and 'showing interest in the peer group play' again. The reason was that Y had moved away.

**The Teachers' Role in the Process**

The classroom teachers tried their best to help the children to be members of a peer group play. Teachers observed children continuously and played several roles whenever they felt it was necessary. The roles can be categorized into two: Giving teachers' emotional stability, and having opportunities to go near play areas. Table 2 shows the teachers' roles, the teachers' action, and the effect of the roles.

To improve children's emotional stability teachers played two strategies: They observed the children continuously to find a chance to talk to them as often as they could in order to make them feel safe with teachers. The teachers also tried to express their concern by giving lots of hugs, touching their backs, and holding their hands. All these actions by the teachers made D and S confident in their teachers and helped them recover their emotional stability.

Offering them chances to experience the teachers' efforts to make them feel at
home by singing songs they knew well with other children or offering art activities they could do well were helpful for recovering their self-confidence and activeness.

Table 2. The Teachers' roles, action, and the effect of these strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>The effects on the child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make child feel comfortable</td>
<td>- Talk to children as often as possible</td>
<td>- Feel safe with the teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Give them lots of consideration</td>
<td>- Feel comfortable in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Get emotional stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give an opportunity to experience familiar things</td>
<td>- The teachers find out songs and activities children know well and sing them at the circle time as often as possible</td>
<td>- Get self-confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Become more active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggest plays</td>
<td>- Introduce various kinds of play areas</td>
<td>- Their interest is extended to many areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Suggest an activity in the area where they stay such as the art area and block area</td>
<td>- Makes them feel secure and familiar in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Try to stimulate their interest in the areas where many children play such as the block and role play areas</td>
<td>- Stimulate them to take an interest in the interactions of the peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create opportunities to become acquainted with other children</td>
<td>- Send them on errands with another child</td>
<td>- Feel safe with another child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Invite them to play with another child</td>
<td>- Enjoy a chance to play with another child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model how to play with other children</td>
<td>- Show them how to talk to a friend by modeling</td>
<td>- Get self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher herself plays with children and invites them to join</td>
<td>- Improve their communication skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Participate smoothly in a peer group play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Get familiar with peer group play</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To give them opportunities to be acquainted with peer group play the teachers played the following roles: Suggesting plays, creating opportunities to become acquainted with one or two children and modeling how to play. First of all, the teachers introduced to them different kinds of activity areas such as art area, role play area, sandbox play area and block area. Then they suggested an activity D and S could do easily in the area where they stayed alone. The teachers continuously stimulated the children to take an interest in the children playing in the other activity areas such as the block area and role play area where interaction between children occurs a lot. Through this experience D and S started to feel comfortable with the existence of other children and to feel secure in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

This study has been done since I agreed to give the keynote speech at the 7th PECERA conference in Seoul. In order to find the reasons for the difficulties of non-sociable young children, the changing process of children's playing behaviors, and the role of teachers, a four-year-old boy and a girl who were very lonely and never played with other children at the beginning of the school year were chosen. Kim (2004) and Son (2005) agreed to observe the children and intervene whenever they needed interaction. They did observational monitoring and I meta-analyzed the results of the observation. The results were as follows.

The reasons the children could not play with other friends at the beginning of the school year were their lack of communication skills and their emotional instability. The processes they went through were categorized in five patterns, ‘staying alone’, ‘showing strong interest in the peer group play’, ‘going voluntarily to other children’, ‘actively playing with a few friends’, and lastly, 'participating actively in a peer group play'. The playing behavior patterns of D and S were the same but the two children took different lengths of time to go through the process. There were individual differences. The boy spent six months getting out of the staying alone pattern but the girl only stayed alone for two months. Another difference was the
time it took them to become active participators. Whereas the boy took only two months to be an active member since he got out of the staying alone stage, the girl took five months. The third difference was the way they accepted their friends. The boy rejected friends' suggestions to play with them most of the time at the staying alone stage. S only rejected friends' suggestions when they did not suit her. The boy did not need to have an emotional bond with one or two close friends before he became a member of active peer group play but for the girl, one close friend was a necessity. It was evident that S stayed alone again after the summer vacation when her close friend moved to another area. The reasons for these differences might be the difference in sex, disposition, and emotional situation.

When we compare our finding with those of Parten's study there are both similarities and differences. The similarity is that children who play alone gradually become members of peer group play by themselves or with teachers' help. The differences might originate from the differences in the study methods such as the fact that Parten studied over 30 children at once so she could not observe each child in a specific way, while this study observed only one child at a time for more than nine months. Table 3 is a summary of the play patterns observed by Parten, those of the four-year-old boy D, and four-year-old girl S.

First, Parten categorized ‘onlooker behavior’ as non-sociable behavior because the onlooker is not involved in play actively. This is correct, but the four-year-old boy and girl in both observations done in Korea showed a strong desire to be a member of peer group play, while ‘onlooker behavior’ appeared on the surface. In the Korean study ‘onlooker behavior’ was a sign of becoming a socially competent child.

Second, before doing associative and cooperative play the girl voluntarily went to one or two friends. It was necessary for her to have an emotional bond with a few children because of her emotional instability. On the surface this looked like parallel play behavior since she did not cooperate at all but just played beside the other child. However, it was an important turning point for the girl.

Third, Parten did not mention clearly whether the associative play behavior and cooperative play behavior appeared overlapping or separately. They are understood
Table 3. Comparison of Play Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play Patterns of Four-year-old Children</th>
<th>Parten's Play Patterns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stay alone:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Look at other children's play</td>
<td>Onlooker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solitary play (D. S.)</td>
<td>Solitary Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow the teacher (D)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Show interest in the peer group play:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wander around the children's play area (D. S.)</td>
<td>Onlooker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitate children's play she has observed (D. S.)</td>
<td>Parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore peer's suggestion to play (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry at the child who wants to play (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Go voluntarily to one or two friends:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to one or two friends without interaction (D. S.)</td>
<td>Onlooker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a close friend (S)</td>
<td>Parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to be closer to other friends (D. S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share playthings (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actively play with one or two friends:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Passively follow the close friend (S)</td>
<td>Associative play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish what he played (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggest ideas to one or two friends (D. S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participate in peer group play:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show a strong desire to participate (D. S.)</td>
<td>Cooperative play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play actively and become a leader (D. S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help a friend who needs help (D. S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D for Dongsuk, S for Soonie

generally to appear separately, associate play first and then cooperative play behavior next. However, in this study these two play patterns appear together most of the time. As soon as the children have self-confidence in building relationships with one or two other children and a teacher, their social growth surges ahead and their relationship with other children improves. From this result we concluded that, in order to be socially competent from the beginning, children need positive attachment
with their parents before they come to a kindergarten or child-care center. Otherwise kindergarten or child care centers teachers must develop an emotional bond with those children who need it. Emotional competence is more important than cognitive learning or social learning for young children. It was proved by the research done by Rhee and Kim (2006) that the more mothers used strategies such as advising, supporting, giving chances, and supervising, the more children's sociability, social competence and initiative increased.

The title of the 7th PECERA conference is "Early Childhood Education for Social Competency and Global Citizenship." At the beginning I asked a question, "How can we early educators build social competence in young children?" I think we have found a possible answer.

We have to encourage young children to increase their awareness and understanding of other human beings. Their awareness comes from exploring a widening field of people, starting with their mothers and fathers, siblings, and other children nearby and then extending to children in other parts of the world and to all living beings. We have to start with one child in our family, kindergartens and child care centers. And self-confidence should come first from a child's inner self before he/she become socially competent.

Young children learn slowly. Sometimes we might become discouraged when trying to teach them to be aware of and understand others, but we have to understand that it is really hard for them to be aware of the existence of other human beings and to understand other children's feelings and thoughts. Nevertheless, it is our responsibility to guide them toward global citizenship, even if this means starting by helping just one child to participate in peer group play.

As Dewey (1897) mentioned “Teaching social competence is truly individual because it recognizes that this right character is not to be formed by merely individual precept, example, or exhortation, but rather by the influence of a certain form of institutional or community life upon the individual.”

References

The Role of Teachers in Furthering the Development of Social Competence in Young Children

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