

# The Social Development of the Preschool Child:

## A Quick Reference

### Competency 3: To interact harmoniously with others

#### Meaning of the competency

*This competency is associated with social development. Through interaction, children compare their understanding of the world their interests and their tastes with those of others. They gradually accommodate their interests and needs to those of others, and learn to resolve conflicts in a spirit of mutual respect and justice. They identify with their cultural environment, take interest in others and are open to new things.*

#### Outcomes at the end of preschool

*At the end of preschool, the children are able to live harmoniously with others. They communicate with various people and are able to share, offer help and encourage others. They appreciate individual differences and take part in group activities.*

According to Beaty (1994), social development of preschool children is revealed in the way they get along with peers. Often we think of social actions as manners and politeness, but in the study of young children, social actions refer to how children learn to get along with their peers. Getting along for this age group rarely involves manners and is usually not very polite. Young children, in fact, frequently struggle to develop social skills. (Beaty, pg.113)

The development of social play is very much age related, and it can thus be observed by the preschool child-care worker in a particular sequence as children progress from solitary play through parallel play, to group play. Age-related development thus signifies that the child's social skill level depends upon his/her cognitive, language and emotional maturity. It also assumes that the older the child is, the more experience he/she has probably had with social contacts.

Mildred Parten, (1932) found that social participation among preschoolers could be categorized, and that the categories correlated closely with age and maturity.

Parten identified six behaviour categories that have since served as a basis in several different fields of study for determining the level of children's social skills. (pg.114)

Engaging in group pretend play helps to transform a preschool child from an egocentric being who is the center of all attention into a socialized human being who recognizes the existence of others points of view and can respond appropriately. (Beaty, pg.127)

<b>Unoccupied behaviour</b> (2-3 year olds)	<p>These are children who may have difficulty separating from the parent. The shyness of children and the newness of the environment may also cause some children to hold back.</p>
<p>The child does not participate in the play around him. He stays in one spot, follows the teacher or wanders around. (Beaty, pg.114)</p>	<p>Lack of experience with other children may put them at a loss as to how to gain access to a group play.</p> <p>Their level of cognitive development also governs their ability to play with others. Immature children may simply not know what to do or how to begin. Their immature language skills may prevent them from making contacts through speaking. (Beaty, pg.117)</p>
<b>Onlooker behaviour</b>	<p>On looking behaviour is often the next level of behaviour. Some children who are new to a program begin by watching. They may walk around the room and see what is going on.</p>
<p>The child spends much time watching what other children are doing and may even talk to them, but he does not join or interact with them physically. (Beaty, pg.114)</p>	<p>It is often the first step toward group participation. If the child appears to be engaged in watching a group at play, it may be best to leave them alone at first. They may join once they are at ease. (Beaty, pg.118)</p>

<b>Solitary independent play</b>	<p>Many children who begin a preschool program start off by playing on their own. This may occur due to lack of familiarity or lack of self confidence with unfamiliar children. Solitary play also occurs because children are attracted by the toys and materials and want to try them out by themselves.</p>
<p>The child engages in play activities, but he plays on his own and not with others or with their toys. (Beaty, pg.115)</p>	<p>For some children solitary play is truly a beginning level of social play that precedes their becoming involved in playing with others. If the children do not play at all with others or only parallel play, then you might consider solitary play as a beginning level of play for such children.</p>
	<p>Some researchers have looked at children's play and their cognitive development. They suggest that levels of play are determined not only by whether children play by themselves or with others, but also by what children do during play (Rubin, 1977: Smilansky, 1968).</p>
	<p>We need to observe not only how children are playing but what they are doing in the play session.</p>
	<p>If children are manipulating, exploring, trying things out, they are at the beginning level of play.</p>
	<p>If they are constructing or creating something by themselves or if they are purposefully using materials toward some end, they may be exhibiting higher level creativity skills. Instead of discouraging these children from solitary play, you should provide them with more opportunities to express their creativity. (Beaty, pg.120)</p>
<b>Parallel activity</b>	<p>Parallel play seems to enable younger children to learn to play cooperatively with others in an early childhood center.</p>
<p>The child plays independently but he plays next to other children and often uses their toys and materials. (Beaty, pg.115)</p>	<p>Children are highly egocentric individuals who are brought together in a physical setting full of toys and activities just for them. They begin by trying things out and testing things. They play alongside one another using the same materials but playing different games. Finally the children begin to cooperate, interchange ideas, and come together to play as a group with self-assigned roles and tasks. (Beaty, pg.121)</p>

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### **Associative play**

The child plays with other children using the same materials and even talking with them, but he acts on his own and does not subordinate his interests to those of the group. (Beaty, pg.115)

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**Cooperative play**  
(5-7 year old)

The child plays in a group that has organized itself to do a particular thing and whose members have taken on different roles (Beaty, pg.115).

**Preoperational-Formal operational cognitive development**

For children to engage in cooperative play, there are four social skills they will need to develop in order to play successfully.

**1-Initiate activities with peers:**

“I’m going to build a tower”, “Let’s play cars”

**2-Gain access to ongoing play:**

Children need to find a way to join in an activity. Social and language skills have an influence as to whether a child is accepted into the play. Cognitive development as well. Those children who cannot yet take things from another perspective may not understand what is required of them to join the ongoing play.

It is up to the teacher to teach strategies how to initiate and gain access to a play group. (Beaty, pg.125)

**3-Maintain their role:**

Gaining access to play is not the end of social skill development but the beginning. The child must also be able to continue to play.

In order for children to be able to maintain their role they need to be able to carry on a conversation, maintain eye contact when speaking, listen to and watch others speakers and adjust their own conversation context in order to be understood within the playing framework. This is quite a complex task for a 3-4-5 year old.

**4-Resolves conflicts:**

Often children turn to the teacher to resolve conflicts. The youngsters themselves have the capability to resolve social play conflicts on their own. However, we need to work with the children to provide them with positive ways in solving these problems.

Children who are successful in resolving play conflicts in a positive manner often use strategies such as: ignoring, distracting, reasoning, negotiating, cooperating, compromising.

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**References**

Beaty, Janice J. (1994). *Observing Development of the Young Child* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada

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