Characteristics of Friendships Between Children with and without Mild Disabilities

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Abstract: Friendship is a very important component in human lives, but it is difficult for children with disabilities to make friends with their typical peers. This study investigated quality of play behaviors in friendships between children with and without disabilities and analyzed how typical peers perceive friendships with children with disabilities. Fifteen pairs of children with and without disabilities who chose each other as friends were selected in elementary regular classrooms. Fifteen pairs of children without disabilities and their normal friends were also selected. Each pair’s play behaviors were observed twice for 30 minutes. Then children without disabilities were interviewed about their perception of friendship with their friends with disabilities. Results showed that play role and positive/neutral affect of dyads without and with disabilities was different from dyads of normal peers. Children without disabilities perceived children with disabilities as playing mates, but they noted that limitations in communication, as well as behavior problems made it difficult to maintain friendship. Future research directions were discussed.

Authors have been concerned about friendships that develop within regular education settings between children with disabilities and their typical classmates (Evan & Richardson, 1989; Siperstein, Leffert, & Wenz-Gross, 1997). Recent studies suggested that both students with and without disabilities have social benefits from support being provided in general education placement (Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Kennedy, Shukla, & Fryxell, 1997; Peck, Donaldson, & Pezzoli, 1990). Children with disabilities experience social relationships, as indicated by rejected or neglected social status (Sale & Carey, 1995; Taylor, Asher, & Williams, 1987) or positive or average social status in the regular education classroom (Siperstein & Leffert, 1997). During preadolescent years, children with disabilities have been low in social status (Cohen & Zigmond, 1986; Jenkins, 1983; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993), and viewed as less socially acceptable by their peers with typical abilities (Marotz Ray, 1985). On the other hand, students with disabilities often appeared to have success in making friendships with typical peers. Students with disabilities spent more time participating in activities with their typical peers, received higher proportions of social initiations, and had richer friendship networks in regular education classrooms (Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994).

Friendship plays an important role in children’s social development and well being (Siperstein et al., 1997). Especially, preadolescent children expand conceptions of friendship to include more mature dimensions (i.e., mutual support, loyalty, and affection; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980; Furman & Bierman, 1983). In addition, children exhibit predominantly same-sex of friendship formation (Hartup, 1992; Lewis & Feiring, 1989). Prior to adolescence, children’s social relationships, especially, their friendships with peers are important in their school life.

Friendship is described as reciprocal liking and behavioral involvement between people (Hall & McGregor, 2000; Howes, 1990; Salisbury & Palombo, 1998; Siperstein et al., 1997; Stainback & Stainback, 1987). In order to determine if a friendship exists, several re-
searchers suggested use of multiple measures such as sociometric measures, observations of social interaction and interviews (Buysse, 1993; Hall & McGregor; Hunt, Alwell, Farron-Davis, & Goetz, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1985).

Reciprocal liking is typically measured by sociometric instruments (Stainback & Stainback, 1987). From a sociometric perspective, reciprocal liking is seen as two or more individuals’ nominating each other as friends. Hall and McGregor (2000) insisted that mutual nominations are clear indicators of friendships.

Behavioral involvement is usually measured by directly observing children’s social behaviors using observational methodology. Direct observation has been shown to be effective in assessing the social behaviors of children ages 10 to 13 years (Cole, Vandercook, & Rynders, 1988; Hall & McGregor, 2000; Marotz Ray, 1985; Roberts & Zubrick, 1992; Shulman, Elcker, & Stroufe, 1994). Observation can reveal if children interact verbally/physically, show active/passive roles and exhibit positive/neutral/negative affect in relationships involving classmates with disabilities relative to typical peers.

The interview is designed to reveal children’s perspectives on relationships by asking children to report their friendships with peers. It is important to determine if children’s interaction is sharing, helping or caring, if children identify their classmates as “friends,” and if they use positive adjectives to describe peers with disabilities.

The literature has addressed specific areas as critical in increasing friendship opportunities at school. These areas are (a) the nature of friendship interactions between children with and without disabilities (Bergen, 1993; Hall & McGregor, 2000; Kishi & Meyer, 1994; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Siperstein et al., 1997; Staub, Schwartz, Gallucci, & Peck, 1994), (b) impact of placement on the nature of social relationships and friendships (Buysse, 1993; Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Hunt et al., 1994; Kennedy et al., 1997); (c) social competence to establish and maintain good relationships with typical peers (Fujiki, Brinton, Hart, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Siperstein et al., 1997); (d) strategies teachers and parents can use to facilitate friendships (Buysse, 1993; Kishi & Meyer; Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombo, & Peck, 1995; Turnbull, Pereira, & Blue-Banning, 1999).

Typical children display a distinctive pattern of interaction with peers who have disabilities (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Siperstein et al., 1997). Typical children interact verbally toward children with disabilities more than children without disabilities. They also show more positive affect to typical children than children with disabilities. Typical children show an unbalanced division of roles when they interact with children with and without disabilities. Kishi and Meyer (1994) reported that types of social interaction frequently mentioned in social interaction between children with and without disabilities were playing, and teaching/helping. Other researchers also reported that children with typical abilities acted as helpers, caregivers or tutors of the children with disabilities (Hall & McGregor, 2000; Kishi & Meyer; Staub et al., 1994). Several authors have expressed concern that interaction between children with disabilities and their peers without disabilities may resemble care giving relationships rather than friendships (Bergen, 1993).

Previous studies have indicated that general education participation increases social interactions between students with and without disabilities (Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Hunt et al., 1994; Kennedy et al., 1997). Children with disabilities have demonstrated weak social-interaction skills in regular classes (Fujiki, Brinton, Hart, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Siperstein et al., 1997; Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Strain, 1982). Several authors have been concerned about presence of inappropriate social behaviors (Peck et al., 1990), difficulties in accessing or ongoing interactions (Brinton, Fujiki, Spencer, & Robinson, 1997; Craig & Washington, 1993), communication difficulties (Fujiki et al.) and social-cognitive abilities (Siperstein et al.). Because of deficiencies of social competence, many children with disabilities seem to have an especially difficult time establishing and maintaining good relationships with peers.

Investigation of relationships between children with and without disabilities has centered on clarifying how children with disabil-
ities relate to their peers within regular classrooms. Typical children reported having reciprocal friendships with children who have disabilities (Siperstein et al., 1997; Zetlin & Murtaugh, 1988). However, previous studies did not verify the differences between friendships with peers without disabilities and friendships with peers with disabilities. Hall and McGregor (2000) indicated that research that evaluates peer relationships during the upper elementary grades has rarely included observations of interactions. Siperstein et al. also insisted that the characteristics typical students display in the upper elementary grades should be observed from peer relationships involving students with disabilities.

There is little information on friendships that form between children with and without disabilities in regular education classrooms in South Korea. Therefore, this study was designed to clarify the characteristics of these relationships during the upper elementary grades by using multiple measures (sociometric measures, observations of social interaction and interviews). This study included observations of interactions between students with and without disabilities for normative comparisons. In order to facilitate social competence in school contexts, educators need to understand the nature and impact of peer relationships in typically developing children and in children with disabilities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate typical children’s social interaction and perceptions of friendships with friends with and without disabilities in preadolescent years. First, this study examined the nature of friendship interactions between dyads of children when a child with typical abilities (no disabilities) was paired with either a child with a disability or another child with typical abilities. Second, it investigated how typical children perceive social relationships with children who have disabilities.

Method

Participants

Participants were 15 fourth through sixth grade students (10 boys, 5 girls) without disabilities in 15 regular classrooms within seven elementary schools in Seoul and Inchon in Korea. Each subject nominated a child with a disability as a friend in her or his class through a sociometric nomination process. Their friends with disabilities (13 boys, 2 girls) were identified as having mild disabilities, that is, mental retardation \((n = 11)\), Down syndrome \((n = 2)\), and learning disabilities \((n = 2)\). All of them have difficulties in learning and communication due to their disabilities. The children with disabilities attended regular classes with their same-aged peers as well as separate self-contained resource rooms in elementary schools.

Procedure

Use of multiple measures in assessing peer relationships is frequently recommended (Evans, Salisbury, Palombaro, Berryman, & Hollywood, 1992; Grenot-Scheyer, 1994; Hall & McGregor, 2000; Kishi & Meyer, 1994). Multiple methods employed in the present study include a sociometric nomination procedure, observation of social interaction between peers, and interviews.

Identification of dyads through sociometric nominations. A sociometric instrument was used to identify typical children who nominated peers with disabilities as friends and that were also nominated by them. In Seoul and Inchon, 1440 children in 36 regular education classrooms in 14 elementary schools were asked to nominate and rate five friends with whom he or she (a) talks and plays a game, and (b) would like to invite to his or her birthday party.

Of the total children, 38 were identified as having disabilities. Among them, 15 peers with typical abilities nominated 15 children with disabilities as friends. These peers with typical abilities were selected as subjects in this study. Fifteen pairs of children with and without disabilities were identified in this study. The subjects with typical abilities nominated two friends with disabilities for first place, six for second, one for third, two for fourth, three for fifth. Their friends with disabilities nominated six peers with typical abilities for first place, four for second, one for third, three for fourth, and one for fifth.

In order to compare the subjects’ characteristics of social behaviors to friends with disabilities to those of typical classmates, the
subjects’ friends with typical abilities were identified through the sociometric nomination procedure. Fifteen friends with typical abilities were nominated by the subjects with typical abilities and also nominated them as friends. Subjects nominated 11 friends with typical abilities for first place, one for second, two for third, and one for fifth. Their friends with typical abilities nominated 11 subjects for first, three for third, and one for fifth.

The 30 dyads were made up of 15 children with disabilities and 30 children with typical abilities. They consisted of 12 pairs in the sixth grade, 8 pairs in the fifth grade, and 10 pairs in the fourth grade. Of 15 dyads with children with and without disabilities, there were 12 same-sex cohorts (10 males with disabilities, 10 males with typical abilities, 2 females with disabilities, 2 females with typical abilities) and 3 different-sex cohorts (3 males with disabilities, 3 females with typical abilities). All 15 dyads with typical abilities were same-sex cohorts (10 male-male, 5 female-female). The subjects’ predominant pattern of friendship formation was same-sex friendships.

Observation of dyads. There were two 30-minute observations (60 minutes total) for each dyad. Each dyad played four games: the Four-Stick game, marbles, Lego blocks, and dominoes, in a self-contained resource room during lunchtime and after school. While videotaping each dyad’s interaction, the experimenter asked subjects to play all four games during each play session.

Subjects’ observed behavior was coded using a system based on the work of Stainback and Stainback (1985) and Siperstein et al. (1997). The observation period was divided into 15-second intervals (total 120 intervals). For each dyad session, occurrence of the following verbal interaction and observed behaviors were coded into three categories: (a) type of interactions: verbalization or vocalization interaction (V); physical interaction (B) in which touching between the interactors occurs (includes contact through objects); visual social exchange (Vi) in which neither touching nor verbalization/ vocalizations are involved.

1. Type of interactions: Verbalization or vocalization interaction (V); physical interaction (B) in which touching between the interactors occurs (includes contact through objects); visual social exchange (Vi) in which neither touching nor verbalization/ vocalizations are involved.
2. Student’s role: leader (L), scored when a student is the active initiator in the interaction exchange; follower (F), scored when a student is a receiver of an interaction exchange.
3. Student’s affect: positive expression (P), scored when a student is exhibiting behaviors indicative of liking such as smiling, laughing, or verbalizing enjoyment; neutral expression (Nu), scored when a student is exhibiting behaviors indicative of contentment or comfort but not definitely positive or negative; and negative expression (N), scored when a student is exhibiting behaviors indicative of dislike, such as crying, frowning, and/or verbal statements of dislike.

In order to ensure the accuracy of the observer’s recordings, training was conducted to practice observing and recording the defined behaviors by viewing videotapes of children playing together. Training continued until an inter-observer agreement of at least 90% was established. This criterion for terminating training is higher than one frequently found in studies using behavioral observation and recording (Hall & McGregor, 2000; Odom & Ogawa, 1992).

Interviews. Following completion of the play session, each typical subject was interviewed separately by the experimenter in the same room where he or she played. The aim of the interview was to collect information on perception of their relationships with friends who have disabilities. Interview protocol in-
cluded the following questions: (a) How is your relationship with XXX (a child with disability)? (b) How are you related to? What made you think XXX is your friend? (c) What did you do together? and (d) How is your relationship with XXX different from your relationships with other kids?

Interviews lasted approximately 10 minutes. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Subjects’ responses to interview questions were categorized into descriptors of the relationship: (a) factors contributing to friendship formation, (b) type of social interaction, and (c) characteristics of friends with disabilities differing from friends with typical abilities.

**Results**

This study investigated typical children’s social behaviors and perceptions of friendships with friends with disabilities. Typical children were interviewed and observed in their social interaction with friends with and without disabilities in his or her regular education classroom. Comparisons were made of the characteristics of friendships in upper elementary grades when a child without a disability played with friends with and without disabilities. Subjects were interviewed to determine how they perceived relationships with peers who have disabilities.

**Inter-observer Agreement**

Inter-observer agreement was calculated on an interval-by-interval basis using the following formula: number of agreements divided by number of agreements plus number of disagreements, multiplied by 100 (Zirpoli & Melloy, 1983). Twenty-five percent of the total observation sessions (25% for each dyad without disabilities, 25% for each dyad with a disability and without a disability) were recorded independently by two observers.

Mean percentage of agreement by subcategory of social interaction was: 93.1% (with a range of 88.0 to 95.8%) for type of interactions, 93.4% (with a range of 90.4 to 96.2%) for a student’s role, and 95.9% (with a range of 92.7 to 98.8%) for a student’s affect. Mean percentage of agreement by coding category of interviews was: 93.6% (with a range of 81.2 to 100.0%) for factors contributing to friendship formation, 88.0% (with a range of 76.0 to 100.0%) for type of social interaction, and 94.3% (with a range of 84.0 to 100.0%) for characteristics of friends with disabilities differing from friends with typical abilities.

**Characteristics of the Friendships**

Comparisons were made between subjects’ responses in reference to friends with and without disabilities. In terms of type of interactions, subjects frequently used verbalization or vocalization interaction toward both friends with disabilities ($M = 51.36, SD = 24.90$) and without disabilities ($M = 54.85, SD = 20.84$). They less frequently used visual social exchange toward both friends with disabilities ($M = 38.11, SD = 24.07$) and without disabilities ($M = 42.74, SD = 19.49$), and infrequently used physical interaction toward both friends with disabilities ($M = 16.47, SD = 9.86$) and without disabilities ($M = 13.13, SD = 7.36$).

Subjects used more verbal interaction and visual social exchange towards typical friends than friends with disabilities. Typical children interacted more physically with friends with disabilities than with typical classmates. However, there were no significant differences on subjects’ verbalization or vocalization interaction, physical interaction, and visual social exchange when they interacted with friends with disabilities and when they interacted with typical friends.

In terms of a student’s role, subjects acted as leaders ($M = 33.52, SD = 18.70$) rather than followers ($M = 6.16, SD = 5.21$) toward friends with and without disabilities. Subjects acted predominately as leader and infrequently as follower toward their friends with disabilities. However, subjects acted as both leaders ($M = 17.57, SD = 8.78$) and followers ($M = 14.17, SD = 6.71$) toward their friends without disabilities. In comparison of the students’ roles toward friends with and without disabilities, subjects acted more as leaders toward friends with disabilities than friends without disabilities ($t = -4.23, p < .05$), and acted more as followers toward friends without disabilities than friends with disabilities ($t = 5.23, p < .05$).

In terms of affect, subjects showed predom
inately neutral affection and infrequently negative affection toward both their friends with and without disabilities. Subjects showed more neutral affection toward friends with disabilities \((M = 90.01, SD = 7.26)\) than friends without disabilities \((M = 72.67, SD = 3.17)\) \((t = -5.06, p < .05)\). In comparisons of positive affection toward friends with and without disabilities, subjects showed more positive affection toward friends without disabilities \((M = 27.00, SD = 17.23)\) than friends with disabilities \((M = 8.83, SD = 6.95)\) \((t = 5.36, p < .05)\). However, there was no significant difference on negative affection toward friends with disabilities \((M = 1.44, SD = 3.20)\) and without disabilities \((M = .28, SD = .74)\).

**Perceptions of Friendships by Typical Students**

Subjects’ responses to interview questions were categorized into (a) factors contributing to friendship formation, (b) type of social interaction, and (c) characteristics of friends with disabilities differing from friends with typical abilities.

**Factors contributing to friendship formation.** The most frequently mentioned factor contributing to friendship formation was “the opportunity to spend time together in a classroom” (33.3%). Other responses consisted of (a) a classroom teacher’s encouragement to help and understand a child with a disability (16.7%), (b) social contact of a child with a disability (13.9%), (c) willingness to teach or help a child with a disability (11.1%), (d) closer placement to a child with a disability (11.1%), (d) appearance of a child with a disability (5.6%), and (e) a mother’s suggestion to help a child with a disability (5.6%).

**Type of social interaction.** The most frequently mentioned type of social interaction was “playing together” (e.g., singing, reading, and playing games) (34.8%). The subjects also engaged in helping (e.g., telling them not to do wrong behaviors, tutoring, and caring) (21.7%), talking (21.7%), and greeting (8.7%).

**Characteristics of friends with disabilities differing from friends with typical abilities.** Characteristics frequently mentioned were having language difficulties (26.6%) and having disabilities (20.0%). Subjects identified that friends with disabilities talk softly or do not talk, so they could not understand what their friends talked about. Other characteristics were difficulties of making decisions (13.3%), controlling behaviors (19.9%) feelings (13.3%), and having social relationships (6.6%).

**Discussion**

Typical children’s social interaction and perceptions of friendships with friends who have disabilities was investigated by examining how typical children interact verbally/physically, play active/passive roles and show positive/neutral/negative affect in relationships involving classmates with disabilities relative to typical peers. Also investigated was children’s interaction is sharing, helping or caring, if children identify their classmates as “friends,” and if they use positive adjectives to describe peers with disabilities.

**Characteristics of the Friendships**

Consistent with previous research (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Siperstein et al., 1997), this study found that subjects displayed a distinctive pattern of interaction as they played games with friends with and without disabilities. Subjects engaged with both friends with disabilities and without disabilities through a process of verbal communication, physical interaction and visual social exchange. Subjects frequently used verbalization or vocalization interaction toward both friends with and without disabilities. Subjects less frequently used visual social exchange and physical interaction toward both friends with and without disabilities.

Significant differences were not found in the subjects’ verbalization or vocalization interaction, physical interaction, and visual social exchange in interaction with friends with disabilities versus interaction with typical friends. However, consistent with previous findings (Siperstein et al., 1997), the interaction of subjects was marked by a symmetrical distribution of roles to friends without disabilities. The subjects’ role with friends without disabilities was shifted fluidly between the roles of leader and follower. This result indicates that typical children act as both leader and follower toward their typical friends. On
the other hand, the subjects’ roles with friends with disabilities differed from their roles with typical friends in their distribution of the roles of leader and follower. The typical subjects acted mostly as leaders with friends with disabilities. Typical children acted predominantly as leader and infrequently as follower with their friends with disabilities. This result was also consistent to other researchers’ finding that peers exhibited an asymmetrical, hierarchical pattern of role distribution in the relationship with a child with a disability (Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Siperstein et al.).

Typical children showed predominately positive affect in a relationship with children without disabilities versus in a relationship with children with disabilities. On the other hand, the typical children showed more neutral affection to children with disabilities than children without disabilities. Siperstein et al. (1997) also reported that children with typical abilities laughed at children without disabilities more than they did at children with disabilities.

This study found that subjects displayed a distinctive pattern of interaction as they played games with friends with and without disabilities. Children with disabilities played the role of receiver of an interaction exchange. Results supported the finding of Siperstein et al. (1997) that disability status effects relationship status. This study found a significant interaction between disability status and friendship status. This result indicates that children with disabilities might lack friendships skills and behaviors for friendship development (Siperstein et al.; Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Strain, 1982). Children with disabilities must have or develop their friendship skills and behaviors (motivation, effective approach, cooperation, entry and initiation behaviors, etc.) in the context of natural activities (Siperstein et al.; Stainback & Stainback; Strain). As Siperstein et al. explained, the friendships between children with and without disabilities might not be like same-age friendships between children without disabilities. Children with disabilities may mimic other important peer relationships in regular education classrooms. The nature of social relationships that exist between preadolescent children with and without disabilities in regular education was examined by observing students’ behaviors. In this study, reciprocal friendships in which one of the children has a disability differ in important respects from reciprocated friendships in which both children are without disabilities. Friendship between children with and without disabilities was marked by responsiveness and an unbalanced division of roles that is different from the typical pattern of friendships between typical classmates.

**Perceptions of Friendships**

Typical children’s perceptions of relationships with children with disabilities are summarized by three categories: (a) factors contributing to friendship formation, (b) type of social interaction, and (c) characteristics of friends with disabilities differing from friends with typical abilities. The most frequently mentioned factor contributing to friendship formation was the opportunity to be in the same class with a child who has a disability. Previous studies have indicated that general education participation increases opportunities of social interactions between students with and without disabilities (Buysse, 1993; Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Hunt et al., 1994; Kennedy et al., 1997) and that teachers and parents develop strategies to facilitate friendships (Buysse; Kishi & Meyer, 1994; Turnbull et al., 1999).

In this study, types of social interaction the typical children frequently mentioned were “playing together” and “helping/tutoring/caring.” Kishi and Meyer (1994) also reported that types of social interaction frequently mentioned in social interaction between children with and without disabilities were playing, and teaching/helping. Other researchers also reported that children with typical abilities acted as helpers, caregivers or tutors of the children with disabilities (Hall & McGregor, 2000; Kishi & Meyer; Staub et al., 1994). As Bergen (1993) noted, some typical children in this study seemed to have care giving relationships with friends who have disabilities rather than friendships.

These relationships might stem from weak social-interaction skills of children with disabilities. In regular classrooms, children with disabilities have shown presence of inappropriate social behaviors (Peck et al., 1990), low...
social-cognitive abilities (Siperstein et al., 1997; Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Strain, 1982), difficulties in accessing or ongoing interactions (Brinton et al., 1997; Craig & Washington, 1993; Fujiki et al., 1999) and in communication (Fujiki et al.). Social competence deficits of children with disabilities seem to make it difficult to establish and maintain good relationships with peers.

Language difficulties were the characteristic most frequently mentioned by typical children of their friends who have disabilities. As Fujiki et al. (1999) noted, communication barriers are associated with friendship formation. Children with disabilities need to find ways to express their ideas and share their enthusiasm. Strategies that both facilitate and compensate for language may be required. Also, educators and parents need to develop strategies to facilitate social competence of children with and without disabilities to establish and maintain good relationships (Buysse, 1993; Fujiki et al. 1996; Gertner et al., 1994; Kishi & Meyer, 1994; Salisbury et al., 1995; Turnbull et al., 1999). Educators and parents should remember that friendship depends on shared experience and is fostered by joint activity in and outside of school. In addition, strategies and activities to develop and to facilitate social acceptance by peers and to assist typical peers to become sensitive to social initiations and behaviors of children with disabilities would be helpful (Turnbull et al.).

Although the present findings indicate that friendships between children with and without disabilities differ from typical friendships between children without disabilities, this study has not yet clarified factors that influence these differences. Siperstein et al. (1997) exemplified difficulties of social-cognitive skills such as social cue interpretation, perspective taking, and the generation of strategies for solving social problems as a major factor. Siperstein et al. believe that these skill deficiencies make it more difficult for a child with disabilities. Other researchers have been concerned about social-interaction skills in regular classes (Fujiki et al., 1999; Siperstein et al.; Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Strain, 1982), presence of inappropriate social behaviors (Peck et al., 1990), difficulties in accessing or ongoing interactions (Brinton et al., 1997; Craig & Washington, 1993) and in communication (Fujiki et al.). Further study needs to be focused on investigation of factors that contribute toward development of these friendships.

Several limitations must be considered for this study’s findings. One issue is related to generalization of the findings. Results of this study might not generalize for children with any other type or severity of disabilities. Participants included only children with mild disabilities and their classmates. Additional research is necessary to establish if similar findings occur for preadolescent children with severe disabilities or other types of disabilities who attend public schools.

During observations, the presence of the experimenter could limit an opportunity for natural social interactions among children with and without disabilities and could influence the type of interactions that occurred in play sessions. Future research needs to be extended observations of naturally occurring peer interaction to clarify the nature of friendships between children with and without disabilities.

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