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## Aspects of play and social experience in 4 year old pre-school children

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ASPECTS OF PLAY AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE IN 4 YEAR OLD

PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN


by


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## Abstract

Fifty middle class mothers answered a questionnaire covering a wide range of play and social behaviours of their four year old children. The children took part in a simple role-taking task; they were also rated by the tester and subsequently by their teacher at the beginning and end of their first term at school.

A detailed description of the play and peer group contacts of the children in the sample is built up. Major categories of play activity are distinguished and related to role-taking and social adjustment. The findings, which emphasise the importance of dramatic play and peer contact in pre-school children, are discussed in relation to theories of play and experimental studies in this area.

The wider implications for children from different social backgrounds are examined in the context of mounting pressure and increased provision for nursery education.

## Acknowledgements

ASPECTS OF PLAY AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE IN 4 YEAR OLD PRE-SCHOOL
CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

The education system is the major means of socialising the young child
outside the family. Prior to entry into this system the child is socialized
within the family unit: the Newsons (1968) consider that English children are
socialized in a most intimate and intense way as the modern family unit tends
to exclude outsiders. For many children entry into the education system
occurs at the age of five with entry to infant school: for others entry
occurs at the age of three with attendance at a nursery school or a play-
group. Such children are benefitting from the rapid expansion of facilities
for pre-school children which occurred in the 1960s largely as a result of
the stimulus provided by the Pre-School Playgroups Association. Though the
Newsons' assertion remains true for the majority of children, the expansion
of facilities for pre-school children means that for an increasing number of
children external agencies are beginning to impinge upon the family unit,
and that the social adjustment of children will be affected by individuals
outside the family at an earlier age than before and that the process of
socialization will remain entirely within the family for a shorter period.

Facilities for the under-fives grew at a phenomenal rate in the 1960s
largely under the aegis of Pre-School Playgroups Association. At the
beginning of 1971 this national organization was catering for approximately
170,000 children through 6,500 affiliated playgroups. Most of these playgroups
were started in the latter part of the 1960s as a report published in 1969 by
the Devon Pre-School Playgroups Association shows: of the groups mentioned
in the report 26% had been open for less than a year and 35% between one and
two years. In contrast state provision for pre-school facilities has hardly
expanded, for example, Devon at the time of the publication of the report
previously referred to had only one state supported nursery school.

The state has had a long history of interest in the provision of
facilities for the under-fives. However, expansion in this part of the
educational system has owed more to economic necessity than the belief that
provision for the under-fives was of great value in itself. For although
local authorities have been empowered to support pre-school facilities since
1918, there was only    an adequate supply of nursery schools during the last
war, when they were established mainly to free women for war work. When women
were no longer needed to supplement the labour force many of the nurseries
were closed down. Despite the recommendations of the Plowden Report (1967)
state provision of pre-school facilities has until very recently remained **fairly
static,** except for the expansion of facilities in Educational Priority Areas.
The fact that attendance at a playgroup or a nursery school is a common feature
in the lives of many children is the result of voluntary effort. Many playgroups
function only because of the availability of voluntary unpaid labour and
cheaply rented accommodation.

Despite the popular support for pre-school facilities, no government can
be blamed for not extending such facilities, especially in times of financial
stringency, if research findings on the effects of nursery attendance on social
adjustment are considered. These findings, (like those dealing with the effects
of attendance on intellectual development) point to no clear cut finding and
the present pressure for more pre-school facilities could be ascribed simply to
the current middle class cultural pattern. The great majority of research find-
ings relate to American children. The early studies of the effect of nursery
school attendance on social development pointed to a greater degree of socially
out going behaviour on the part of children attending nursery school. These
studies were of limited value in that they were based on repeated observation
of children at nursery school and the effects of maturation cannot be ruled out.
Studies with the methodologically sounder approach of using carefully matched

nursery attenders with non-attenders have been inconclusive, for while a number, e.g. Walsh (1931), Hattwick (1936) and Allen and Masling (1957) report better social adjustment following nursery school attendance others, e.g. Bonney and Nicholson (1958) and Brown and Hunt (1961) do not. These studies do not indicate what are the crucial components in the process of a child's social adjustment or that attendance at a nursery school is a necessary component. Swift (1964) goes so far to argue that "the findings reported thus far do not support the conclusion that nursery school experience is an essential one for every child. It has not been demonstrated that nursery experience itself is of such value that the child for whom it is not available is under a handicap in entering kindergarten or first-grade". Furthermore she argues that "the social skills which a child develops in his relationships with peers in the nursery are also picked up by the average child during his elementary school years, some he will have developed in his informal play experiences at home". In addition she also states that "social play within the nursery takes place generally within small groups of 2 or 3 children, during the early pre-school years. Even during the later pre-school years groups are usually limited to 3, 4 or 5 children. Groups of this size are often available to the child in his own neighbourhood".

Although the studies above refer to American children only, their findings may be relevant to British pre-school children. Little is known of the range of contacts of pre-school children, though expansionists in the field of pre-school education often refer to the isolation of young children created by modern housing conditions such as high rise flats. Play experiences at home may for the majority of children supply the necessary stimulus for socialization and any additional contacts enjoyed through attendance at a playgroup or a nursery school may simply supplement home experiences and may not be of crucial importance in themselves. However, little is known of childrens' informal

pre-school contacts, Boll (1957) points out "there has, however, been an almost complete ignoring of the fact that the average child spends a considerable part of his time after infancy and before entering school with his playmates - ordinarily drawn from whomever is available to him in close proximity to his own home".

Consequently one of the aims of this study is to map out the range of contacts with their peers that pre-school children enjoy and to determine what opportunities for contact and play with peers young children have independently of any pre-school institution and thus to determine how important playgroups and nursery schools are in providing contact with peers for this age group. In addition studies in this area have tended to treat attendance at a nursery school as a uniform experience, which it is not. Nursery schools vary in their size, formality, equipment and their function as viewed by their organizers. This variability in pre-school institutions may be one of the reasons why research in this area has failed to come to any clear cut conclusions. There has been little attempt to define the components of nursery group experience; in fact as Swift (1964) points out there has been a tendency in the studies assessing the effect of nursery attendance on subsequent attainment and development to treat the nursery situation as a constant set of social and environmental stimuli that can be expected to have a specified effect on the individuals exposed to it. However, one of the components of nursery experience for the young child is prolonged contact and play with peers. Both the informal play situation and the formal nursery group can be assessed to some extent by considering these situations in quantitative terms. Both situations can be evaluated in this way by considering the number of peer contacts they provide for the young child. Peer group contact has been investigated in this study along these lines, and one of the principal aims of the study has been to assess whether extent of peer group contact has any

relationship to subsequent social adjustment. The effect of peer influences as opposed to adult influence upon the young child has according to Hartup (1970) not received the research attention the problem merits. Adult contact has also been investigated in this study in quantitative terms, as the nursery group offers the most frequent opportunity for the young child to be exposed to the care and supervision of adults other than parents and data on this point could easily be collected. Furthermore, parental attitudes and activities are discussed: these are only examined in so far as they determine the experiences and contacts the pre-school child has outside the immediate family and again for the purposes of this study are of secondary importance in themselves.

Contact and play with members of the peer group are not the only variables to be considered in relation to the social adjustment of pre-school children. Childrens' play whether on a solitary basis or with others can have a contributory role. Diverse theorists such as Freud and Piaget have indicated that play can enable children to come to terms with unpleasant and frustrating experiences and in this way play facilitates childrens' social adjustment. Furthermore play which involves the acting out of roles and the re-enacting of past events is commonly assumed to be a means for children to learn social roles and behaviours. Childhood play, as Berlyne (1969) points out has received very little attention from psychologists, and it is another topic that Hartup (1970) views as needing investigation "badly". Consequently the major aim of this study has been to investigate childrens' play and its relation to social adjustment. The study has focussed on dramatic play as it is primarily this type of play that has a therapeutic and socializing function for children. Two aspects of this problem were investigated. Details about the content of childrens' play were obtained and examined to ascertain whether the specific content of play fulfilled any particular need or purpose for the child. Play in this respect involved not only establishing information about the role taking

and scene re-enacting dramatic play which is typical of early childhood, but also information about fantasies such as imaginary friends and the production of make-believe places and people. Piaget (1951) discusses such phenomena and indicates that the production of fantasy and the distortion of reality on the part of the child can have a major role in helping the child to accept previous painful experiences or to compensate for present frustrations. The other aspect investigated was the frequency of dramatic play and the extent to which frequency of dramatic play related to various social behaviours. Two studies, Marshall (1961) and Charlesworth and Hartup (1967), indicate that a high involvement in dramatic play activity by children is likely to be characterized by a high level of social interaction and friendly behaviours. Finally, a role-taking task adapted from work described by Flavell (1968) was administered: this task involved making choices of gifts for parents and the results were examined in relation to the frequency children acted out real life situations in their play. Cameron and Magaret (1951) indicate that children can acquire role-taking skills through play situations.

# THEORIES OF PLAY

## Classical Theories

Although children spend much of their time in play, little attention has been given by modern psychologists to this subject. As Berlyne (1969) points out, this lack of attention is reflected in the treatment given to childrens' play in modern textbooks on developmental and child psychology, though earlier books such as those by Stern (1914), Charlotte Bühler (1935) and Valentine (1942) did consider this issue. Recent theorists such as the Harlows, have focussed attention on the play of animals, but there has been little recent theorizing and conceptualization by experimentalists of the problems arising from the study of childrens' play.

Nevertheless, the study of play has had a long history. One of the earliest theories advanced was that of Spencer (1855): Spencer advanced the "surplus energy" theory of play i.e. organisms engage in play activity as a result of pressure from surplus energy. This theory was challenged by Groos (1898, 1901), who maintained that play activity was governed mainly by instinct in animals and by "natural or interested impulses interacting with higher processes in man". He held that play consisted primarily of exercising functions that could be used later in real life situations (e.g. hunting, fighting). However, as Buytendijk (1933) indicated the behaviour of young animals when learning to fly, run etc. is unmistakably different from the behaviour of the same animals when at play. Furthermore much playful activity appears to be learned and in particular many of the resemblances between juvenile and adult activity are explicable in terms of imitation. Hall (1904) attempted to explain play in terms of his recapitulation theory; that is the child enacts forms of behaviour that were prevalent in earlier stages of man's history and thereby purges himself of atavistic tendencies that would hinder his advance. Though most theorists would agree that children do advance through play in a uniform sequence this is, as Piaget (1951) points out, only in reference to the

structure of play activity, not to its content, which depends on the child's experiences.

These classical theories of play are not acceptable today, not only because evidence in support of their contentions has by and large been unobtainable, but also because they do not attempt to explain play in modern psychological terms i.e. to specify under what conditions play is most likely to occur and what form it is most likely to take. Moreover, they failed because the attempts were aimed at formulating one comprehensive theory of play. Such attempts were bound to fail on two grounds: (1) as Schlosberg (1947) indicates there is difficulty in the basic definition of play, as '"play" is simply a descriptive term that may be applied to behaviour in any one of the primary categories, as long as the behavior seems incomplete or otherwise useless'. (2) Furthermore Berlyne (1969) points out that "as research accumulates it is becoming more and more obvious that play consists of a great diversity of activities which could scarcely be amenable to the same explanation. Even one particular form of play must surely fulfil several different functions; that is it must depend on several hereditary dispositions and on learned response patterns that have derived reinforcement from several distinct sources".

Definitions

Schlosberg's comment to the effect that the term play is a vague and scientifically useless concept is not justified in the light of attempts made to establish criteria for play. Beach (1945) offered as a definition of play behaviour the following characteristics:-

(1) Play usually has an element of pleasure

(2) Play is usually regarded as characteristic of the immature rather than the adult

(3) Play has no relatively immediate biological result which affects the continued existence of the individual or the species

(4) The outward forms of play are relatively species-specific

(5) The amount, duration and diversity of play in any given species is related
to its phylogenetic position.

Piaget (1951) in discussing criteria for play uses the following characteristics
to distinguish play from non-ludic activities:-

(1) Play is an end in itself

(2) Play is spontaneous

(3) Play is an activity for pleasure

(4) Play has a relative lack of organization

(5) Play is characterized by freedom from conflict

(6) Play is overmotivated.

The problem of defining play can therefore be seen to have received
consideration by theorists in this field and the criteria established will
obviously cover the dramatic make-believe play of early childhood, which is the
subject of this study. The functions that such play can fulfil has been the
subject of considerable interest. Dramatic play can be seen to fulfil diverse
functions and to be explicable in psychoanalytic, learning theory and cognitive
terms. Explanations along these lines will now be the subject of discussion.

## Psychoanalytic Theories

Psychoanalytic theory in its original Freudian formulation can offer diverse
explanations for play. Play can occur as part of the identification process, as
part of phantasy or as a tension reducing mechanism. Typical play of the young
child is play in which the child takes on a sex-appropriate role e.g. a little
girl plays at being a mother. Such play is common from the age of three to five,
the period which is concurrent with the period of identification in Freudian
theory. Within the structure of his theory Freud (1921, 1923 and 1924) viewed
identification as the process responsible for the development of the super-ego,
the ego-ideal and certain qualities of sex-typing. The modification of his
formulations led Freud to postulate two separate mechanisms, anaclitic

identification and defensive identification. The former involves identification as a function of loss of love and the latter as a function of fear of the aggressor. Bronfenbrenner (1960) points out that Freud used the term identification to refer both to the process (i.e. the sequential interplay of internal and external forces which result in the child acquiring the characteristics of the parent) and to the outcome of the process (i.e. resultant similarity in the characteristics of child and parent). The outcome of the process of identification can be the acquisition by the child of the parents' standards, values and the overt behaviour patterns of the parents. Childrens' play can therefore be explained by both applications of the term identification. Play for the little girl, who takes on the role of a mother, can be seen as part of the process of identification. It can also be seen as the product of identification in that the little girl's behaviour is similar to her mother's and she has acquired her values and standards in that she takes on the feminine role.

Childrens' play can also reflect conflicts and wishes that arise outside the identification process. Waelder (1933) stresses the function of play as "a leave of absence from reality as well as the super-ego". Children can use play to act out wishes, which cannot be realized in everyday life. The child, who wishes to be powerful and grown up can be so in play. In a similar way the child can resolve unacceptable feelings through substitution or through using the mechanism of projection in the play situation. A child can come to terms with his jealousy over a new sibling by substituting a doll as the recipient of his actions. A child who feels guilty over some misdeed will project his feelings on to others. For instance, a child will report that other children are naughty or that an imaginary friend told him to do wrong in order to come to terms with his emotions. Play has this function in Freudian theory as Freud (1959) postulated that in play, dreams and phantasy the wishes of the individual predominate unhampered by external reality. So while the child preserves a

clear distinction between reality and phantasy he can have recourse to the play situation as a means of escape from the restrictions and frustrations of the everyday world.

The function of play in this respect did not provide a satisfactory explanation for Freud, when he later came to consider the frequency with which children act out and continue to repeat unpleasant experiences in play. In the consequent reformulation of his theory Freud (1955) extended Fechner's ideas on homeostasis and postulated the theory that an organism attempts to keep the level of nervous tension as low as possible. Accordingly increases in excitation are felt as unpleasant and decreases as pleasant. Exciting events, which have produced tension and conflict and thus increased the organism's level of excitation, are repeated in play and phantasy. This repetition, as it is tension reducing and so lowers the level of excitation, enables the individual to master a disturbing event or situation. Freud's theory is now inadequate and inaccurate in view of what is now known of the homeostatic systems that regulate behaviour. Nevertheless certain elements of his theory are still relevant. In some respects Freud does approach a learning theorist's position, and in others, Freud and Piaget both ascribe similar functions to certain forms of play behaviour though the mechanisms postulated differ.

## Learning Theories

Learning theorists have not been interested in play, per se. However, explanations couched solely in learning theory terms and explanations, which are expansions of psychoanalytic concepts expounded in learning theory terms are explanations of certain types of childrens' dramatic play. These explanations are particularly relevant, when play involving the imitation or acting out of the role of a mother or an elder sibling, is considered. Such imitative play is typical in childrens' behaviour from the age of two.

The concept of identification, which was originally formulated by Freud, has been reformulated in learning theory terms. This recasting of the basic theory has involved the incorporation of what is known about the effects of reward and punishment and the mechanisms of secondary reinforcement. Sears' (1957) explanation begins with the child's initial biological dependence on his mother. This dependence becomes psychological or in Sears' terms "produces in the infant a secondary drive system of dependency-on-the-mother". As a mother has in the normal course of events to absent herself from her child, the child is consequently deprived of some of the maternal stimulation (secondary rewards) to which he has become accustomed. Sears postulates that the child then begins to imitate his mother. The acts of the mother which are reproduced by the child are those, which have been secondary reinforcers for the child. This imitation enables the child to reward himself. Sears assumes that the child generalizes these actions into "being like" the rewarding parent and when the child behaves in this way his own performance possesses (acquired) reward value. These behavioural sequences lead to children adopting parental mannerisms, playing parental roles and acquiring the values of the parents. Bronfenbrenner (1960) points out that what Sears achieves in his theory is to restate in learning theory terms Freud's theory of anaclitic identification.

Imitation, and thus imitative play, can be explained solely in learning theory terms. Learning theorists notably Hull, developed and tested in experimental situations a system of postulates which have been applied outside the original laboratory situation. So a concept, secondary reward, has been used to refer to praise, money or toys, which have become secondary rewards to the child on the basis of previous learning, which has served to reduce primary drives. On this basis a child learns to imitate parents and older children because matching his behaviour to such models has led to desirable results more often than not in the past. Miller and Dollard (1941) indicate that imitation is a generalized habit learned on the basis of reward. They have demonstrated

experimentally that children will learn to imitate adults on the basis of reward (in this case children learnt to operate machines dispensing sweets only by imitating adults). Furthermore they have shown that such imitation is generalized outside the original learning situation.

Explanations for imitative play couched solely in learning theory terms are unsatisfactory. They do not explain why imitative play occurs at specific periods in childhood and in freeplay situations away from agents dispensing rewards. Identification as Bronfenbrenner (1960) points out invariably rests upon an emotional tie with an object, usually the parent. Explanations of imitative play which incorporate this emotional element, whether developed in learning theory terms or not, are more acceptable, as they help to explain why play of the role-playing variety is so frequent a behaviour around the age of four.

## Cognitive Theories

Role-playing games and play involving the re-enacting of events have been observed and described by Piaget, and in his theory of play are designated as symbolic games. Piaget's study of childrens' play was based largely on the intensive and systematic observation of his own children. His contributions on play have been subject to the usual criticisms of his methodology in that his methods are observational and interrogatory rather than experimental, nevertheless they form one of the most important examinations on play and in particular of the make-believe dramatic play of early childhood.

Piaget views play as part of intellectual growth. Intellectual development is subject to two processes, assimilation and accommodation, as are all other aspects of behaviour. Assimilation occurs when the individual's reactions to external objects are tailored to fit processes going on within the individual. Accommodation occurs when reactions are made to fit the characteristics of external objects. The distinguishing characteristic of play for Piaget is that in play assimilation predominates. For example, the child may play at re-enacting

a scene that he has observed but the form such reproduction takes will be affected by the processes going on within the child, so reality will be distorted by such factors as the child's previous learning, his emotional needs and his motives. Behaviour ceases to be play, when there is precise adaptation to reality and where accommodation predominates, Piaget sees such behaviour as ceasing to be play and regards it as imitation.

Piaget (1951) distinguishes three successive forms of play: practice games, symbolic games and games with rules. Practice games appear during the sensori-motor stage, symbolic games at the beginning of the period of preoperational thought, while games with rules appear as the child moves towards adolescence. Practice games consist largely of repeating and combining actions to no apparent purpose, and parallel the child's intellectual growth. So at the stage of primary circular reactions the child will be limited to play that consists of repetitive body movements. Play gradually grows more complex as the child learns to manipulate external objects and then to experiment. Piaget distinguishes practice games from other behaviours as such games are carried out for the sake of functional pleasure. This concept was originally formulated by Bühler and Piaget postulates that this motive is operative when a child shows outward signs of enjoyment and is apparently seeking no practical goal. So when a child who has learnt to grasp an object continues to do so, then this repetition is play, as it is actively carried out for the sake of functional pleasure. The child repeats the grasping movement, not to learn or to investigate, but for the joy of mastering the action.

By the end of the second year practice games begin to merge into symbolic games. The child's play develops as he is beginning to master symbolic function and his behaviour is gradually being regulated by words and images. The child acquires the ability to distinguish between signifiers and significates, that is the child develops private symbols to refer to absent objects and remote events.

For instance, a young child can demonstrate his wish to put on a hat and coat that are not actually present by appropriate actions. It is this generalized capacity to differentiate between signifiers and significates that enables the child to make the act of reference that Piaget designates as the symbolic function.

In Berlyne's (1969) description symbolic games progress from a stage when an act is emitted with the help of the most suitable object that happens to be available. For instance, a child will pretend to eat using a cardboard box for a plate. Then a child will identify an object or a person with somebody or something else. Finally the child combines actions and imaginary characters and objects to act out complex stories. The actions used in such games are actions that the child has learnt to perform in other contexts or they are derived from imitation. A child's experience will be reflected in such play. However, the reproduction of actions and the role-playing the child engages in will be determined by the child's inner processes as in the earlier stage. So the child will act out roles with little concern for the attributes of the characters he uses. Reality will be distorted according to Piaget as such play activity is characterized by assimilation. Sutton-Smith (1971a, 1971b) criticizes his theory because he attributes to Piaget the view that play has a limited function, that of "a buttress to an inadequate intelligence" and as a consequence as intelligence increases play decreases. Piaget (1971) maintains that Sutton-Smith has misunderstood his position as he indicates that though play manifests the primacy of assimilation over accommodation it is nevertheless part of the development of cognitive function. There does appear to be an element of semantic confusion in the controversy over the use of the term play as Sutton-Smith uses the term to include a far wider range of activities including group activities, adolescent and adult team games.

Piaget distinguishes certain games of symbolic combinations and in particular games of simple combinations, compensatory combinations and liquidating

combinations are of particular relevance to this study. Games of simple combinations evolve from the transposition of real scenes. For instance, Piaget describes his daughter telling her doll that she (the doll) sees certain objects (objects the child is actually looking at herself). Games of this type progress to the creation of whole scenes which are a mixture of characters and events taken either from reality or are entirely imaginary. The dramatic play of early childhood, which involves everyday events such as shopping, schools etc. can be classified as games of symbolic combinations. Piaget indicates that such play reproduces the child's experience through the means of symbolic representation, and the child's activity in such reproduction is basically self-assertion for the pleasure of exercising his powers and recapturing fleeting experiences.

Piaget sees the play of infancy and early childhood (i.e. practice and symbolic games) as being characterized by the child's pleasure. At both stages the child engages in play activity for pleasure. Just as to the infant play is for the joy of mastering an action, in early childhood it is for the pleasure of exercising powers and skills and recapturing past experiences. Nevertheless as indicated above play functions as a contributor to the child's intellectual development. Intellectual growth requires an equilibrium between assimilation and accomodation; play, as it is primarily assimilation, contributes to this process.

Millar (1968) indicates that the make believe play of early childhood, which involves the re-enacting of actions and role playing involves the exploration, repetition, variation, confirmation and classification of impressions, events and feelings. As such, play can be viewed as belonging to the processes and structures, which involve the coding, storing and checking of information. Millar refers to the suggestion that information for adults is constantly recoded in a more economical form and retrieval is facilitated accordingly. She suggests that such recoding is typical of young children in whom the process of storing and coding information is not well established. She sees such recoding

as being slower in young children and at a different level. Millar consequently
indicates that dramatic play in young children could be viewed as overt
rehearsal, and that whereas adults can code visual events in terms of speech,
this may be more difficult for the young child, who will resort to movement and
action schemata as the basis for the recoding process.

Other aspects of games of simple combinations and games of compensatory and
liquidating combinations can be seen as aiding the child's emotional adjustment
and development. One of the features of games of simple combinations that
Piaget discusses is the imaginary character his daughter had. This creature
who took various forms according to the child's level of zoological knowledge,
obviously fulfilled a supportive function for the child. Piaget states that
for the two months of its "appearance" the creature was a help in all that she
learnt or wanted, gave her moral encouragement in obeying orders and consoled
her when she was unhappy. Games involving compensatory combinations correct
reality rather than reproduce it. Here the child distorts reality when it is
unacceptable. For instance, Piaget reports his daughter, when forbidden to
play with water being used for washing, as subsequently playing at washing and
bringing "water" into her play. Games of liquidating combinations enable the
child to face a difficult situation by transposing it symbolically. The
original situation is acted out in play but is    dissociated from the unpleasantness
of its original context and is gradually assimilated through being incorporated
into other behaviours. Piaget describes how after his daughter had fallen down
and cut her lip, she re-enacted the scene in play using a doll. The function of
games of compensatory and liquidating combinations is that they enable the
child to face reality. In the former the child is able to compensate for
deficiencies and unpleasantness in the real world and in the latter the child
comes to accept unpleasant events.

Make-believe play becomes progressively more elaborate and organized and
with the child's increasing knowledge of his physical and social environment,

his actions result in a more accurate representation of reality. Such representation involves sensori-motor and intellectual skills to such an extent that play of this type becomes constructive, adapted to reality and ceases to be play at all in that accommodation (i.e. imitation) predominates. At the same time the child begins to adapt more to social reality and is better able to cope with its demands. As a consequence the child has less need to resort to symbolic substitutes and to distort reality so symbolic games decline. Millar (1968) points out that not only does dramatic make believe play disappear about the age of seven or eight but that this age is also marked by the disappearance of talk, addressed to no-one in particular, which characteristically accompanies young childrens' actions. Piaget explains this by supposing speech to be similar to thinking in that it is egocentric and asocial; and egocentric speech only disappears when speech becomes social and adapted to informing others. An alternative explanation is offered by Vigotsky, who assumes that speech is undifferentiated rather than asocial in the young child. The difference between speech for others, which is voiced and grammatical, and speech for oneself, which is unvoiced and progressively more elliptical, does not exist for the young child. As this differentiation takes place the incessant chatter accompanying young childrens' actions becomes unvoiced elliptical inner speech. This process coincides with greater linguistic facility. It could be explained in terms of change in the regulatory feedback processes, which become automatic with practice and so shortcircuit the route via overt action. In a similar way the disappearance of make-believe play may merely mark the fact that the child's thinking about objects, people and events has become so skilled that the child can dispense with the props of concrete action.

## Role-taking and play

Though notably Piaget amongst others assigns play an essential role in intellectual development, the play activities of children have been studied more in relation to emotional than intellectual development. Though the play of the

pre-school child is, as the Newsons (1968) point out, largely role-taking and the re-enacting of events, that is dramatic play, there has been little attempt to relate role-taking in the play situation with role-taking skills outside this context. Nevertheless Cameron and Magaret (1951) have ascribed the acquisition of social perspectives to the role-taking play of childhood.

Piaget (1926) suggests that the young child's egocentrism limits his role-taking skills in that the young child is not able to take into account the attributes of another individual but his general cognitive, perceptual and linguistic deficiencies contribute to the ineffectiveness of his skills in this aspect. Piaget whose work has been replicated by Elkind, (1961, 1962) has shown that role-taking barely exists in the pre-school child and only develops in middle childhood. Such evidence as is available indicates that the acquisition of role-taking skills is age-dependent. Flavell's (1968) study of 3-6 year olds required them to choose appropriate gifts for themselves and other people. He found that only three year olds showed extreme disregard for the age and sex of the intended recipient, while none of the six year olds made any choice that was at all role-inappropriate. However, Flavell acknowledges that the study was of an exploratory rather than a definitive kind and, as he emphasises, there is little evidence on role-taking skills in early childhood.

Role of play in education

The dramatic make-believe play of childhood can be seen to fulfil various functions according to the various theoretical viewpoints discussed above and contributes to the intellectual, emotional and social development of the child. Moreover such play has been used as an instrument for diagnosis and therapy with emotionally disturbed children;  there has also been a long tradition of such play being used in nursery groups as a means of stimulating childrens' social and intellectual development.

Psychoanalytic theory, as regards play, has largely been based on the observation of emotionally disturbed children, who have used dramatic play to act out frustrations and disturbances. Such observations have largely been carried out by psychoanalysts on the individual child playing by himself or with the therapist. Though the literature on play therapy is vast, three main orientations exist (i.e. those of Melanie Klein, Anna Freud and the non-directive school) and the interpretation of play activity in this context will depend upon the individual therapist's orientation. By and large the efforts of individuals working in this area have been directed to remedying specific disturbances in individual children and not to developing any general strategies designed to foster intellectual and social skills in children.

Since the work of Pestalozzi and Froebel in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries dramatic play has been seen as of great importance in developing the abilities and fostering the knowledge of young children. Consequently such play has occupied an important part of nursery school experience. Susan Isaacs  although she worked from a psychoanalytic frame-work, regarded dramatic play as a means of furthering intellectual and social development in young children. She indicates from her work (1930, 1933) that such play aids the socialization of the child and at the same time puts the child into situations where he is forced to think at a higher level than he would do otherwise and so stimulates his intellectual development.

Such an account of play is challenged by Hutt's (1971) view. Hutt indicates that play is a redundant activity, relatively low in the motivational hierarchy and that it can be inhibited by fear, curiosity, hunger or almost any other drive. Further her work indicates that play behaviour with a novel object occurs only after exploratory behaviour involving that object. She indicates that much of infant behaviour which has been traditionally characterized as play behaviour is in fact exploratory behaviour and it is because of the repetitive

nature of young childrens' activities that it has been difficult to distinguish between play and exploration. She has, however, been concerned less with the symbolic forms of play which other theorists e.g. Smilansky consider more important for cognitive development.

Smilansky (1968) distinguishes between dramatic play and sociodramatic play, the former can be carried on by the child individually, while the latter essentially involves interaction with another peer. She places great importance on sociodramatic play, and though she does not provide statistical evidence for her assertion, believes that such play is of great importance in fostering the child's creativity, intellectual growth and social skills, and as such sees it as a preparation for school. Smilansky found that the culturally deprived children, amongst the nursery school children she observed in Israeli kinder-garten, did not engage in dramatic play activity at all. She consequently developed and tested various strategies for developing sociodramatic play and found adult intervention and participation in childrens' play to be effective.

Two studies, Marshall (1961) and Charlesworth and Hartup (1967), demonstrate the relationship between dramatic play and the frequency of desirable social behaviours. As such, these studies are of particular relevance to this study and will now be discussed. The more important and detailed study, Marshall's, focusses on the language children employ in dramatic play situations. She indicates that her experience as a nursery school teacher and as an experimenter collecting observational data lead her to conclude that childrens' use of language and hostility in dramatic play differs from their use of hostility and language when they talked as themselves and were concerned with reality. Marshall employed this difference as the basis of the dramatic play and reality dichotomy of her investigation. She isolated language measures of suggestion, imitation, agreement, greeting and question. These categories appeared to her to cover all types of language usage between children. Her investigation was concerned with the collection of these language measures in dramatic play and reality

situations. She also collected measures of hostility in dramatic play and reality situations and was thus able to develop and use the dramatic play language and hostility and reality language and hostility distinction as separate variables in her study. Though Marshall was concerned with refining dramatic play and reality activity into particular language categories, her study, despite its basic orientation as to childrens' use of language, nevertheless reflects the relationship between the incidence of dramatic play activity and various social behaviours.

Marshall studied middle class children, whose ages ranged from two and a half to six and a half, in their nursery schools. To collect her data for the findings relevant to this study she employed the following measures: (1) observational measures of the number of social interactions (2) measures of the frequency of use of language and hostility (3) sociometric scores. Her findings can be classified as follows.

Age and Sex Differences: Marshall found an increase with age of all the dramatic play language and hostility measures with the exception of one measure, imitation. The same measures relating to the reality use of language and hostility did not increase with age. Her results indicate that as children grow older they interact using language more frequently in dramatic play situations, although their use of language in their interactions outside dramatic play activity does not show a similar increase. Boys were found to use dramatic play language and hostility more frequently than girls.

Incidence of friendly behaviours: Marshall found significant relationships between childrens' use of dramatic play language (one measure, suggestion) and hostility and the measures of friendly interaction employed (association, friendly approach and conversation). No significant relationships were found between reality use of language and hostility and the friendly interaction measures. Marshall asserts on the basis of her findings (1) an increase in the use of dramatic play language and hostility by a child is accompanied by an increase in

the number of friendly interactions he has with other children, (2) her results

support her conception of dramatic play and reality classifications as opposite

or disparate variables. In addition this classification is further strengthened

by the failure of the childrens' vocabulary age on the Stanford-Binet

Vocabulary Test to relate to the measures of language and hostility.

Social Acceptance: Marshall found significant relationships between two dramatic

play language measures (suggestion and agreement) and the sociometric scores.

No significant relationships were found between the language measures for reality

use of language and the sociometric scores. These findings indicate that children

who talk more often in dramatic play are more likely to be socially acceptable in

their peer group. In addition Marshall found that the extent to which boys

exhibited hostility in dramatic play related to their social acceptance. She

describes boys as having to "shoot their peers dead" in order to be popular.

Displays of hostility in dramatic play situations did not appear to be an

important factor for the social acceptance of girls. Social acceptance for girls

related to their use of dramatic play language and number of friendly interactions.

Home Experiences: Though there are a number of variables that can contribute to

language development in children, Marshall limited her investigation to

experiences that might provide children with information about the topics that

they played in their dramatic play activity. She found that as a child's home

experiences with the dramatic play topics of the nursery group increased, the

child's use of dramatic play language and hostility increased but use of reality

language and hostility either decreased or was not affected by these home

experiences. The home experiences that had the largest number of significant

relations with the use of dramatic play language and hostility were talk with

father, talk with mother and talk with other adults. Marshall concluded from

her findings that children learn more about the topics that they can use in

dramatic play from loved adults than through books, radio and television. Boys

had more opportunities to learn about dramatic play topics than girls. Boys had

as much exposure to information about home and family topics as girls but had more opportunities to find out about other topics. Marshall suggests that if parents and other adults talk with pre-school children more about the topics the child can use in play with other children, the child talks and plays these topics more frequently with pre-school peers and therefore has a better chance of social acceptance in the pre-school nursery group. Children, who failed to have home experiences of this type, engaged in dramatic play less and were found to be more dependent on their teachers. Other home experiences were important in determining the level of childrens' dramatic play activity: parental attitudes of suppression, punitive control and overpermissive/*ness* were apparently detrimental to the development of dramatic play activity as rated by the language measure Marshall employed.

The other relevant study, Charlesworth and Hartup (1967), which demonstrated the relationship between dramatic play and various social behaviours, investigated patterns of positive social reinforcement in the nursery school peer group. The subjects in Charlesworth and Hartup's study were middle class children of three and four attending laboratory preschool nursery groups. Charlesworth and Hartup took Skinner's concept of "generalized reinforcer" as the basis of the definition of positive social reinforcement used in their study. Skinner (1953) postulates that reinforcement from people gives rise to several important forms of generalized social reinforcers: attention (attending to another), approval (praise or acceptance), affection (physical gestures or verbal statements), submissiveness (following a request or suggestion) and tokens (giving tangible physical objects). Skinner's conceptualization was used as a guide for defining categories of social behaviours, and the authors of the study then designed an observational method for obtaining information about reinforcement frequencies occurring in nursery school peer groups.

Charlesworth and Hartup found that considerably more positive social reinforcement was given by the four year old children than by the three year olds. The four year olds distributed their reinforcements to a larger number of children

than the younger children did. Charlesworth and Hartup point out that these

findings parallel the classic findings of Parten (1943) and others, which demon-

strate the association between chronological age and social participation.

Younger girls gave less reinforcements than the young boys: girls of three

apparently appear to be less socially active than boys when they are placed in

nursery groups. The amount of reinforcement given was positively related to the

amount received, and the authors point out that their results on the giving and

receiving of reinforcement indicate that these are reciprocal activities. However,

the most relevant finding for this study is that dramatic play activities were

found to be characterized by a high incidence of reinforcement. 65% of the

reinforcement was given during dramatic play, and boys were found to give a larger

proportion of their reinforcements during dramatic play than girls did. Girls

were reported as dividing their reinforcements almost equally between dramatic

play and more sedentary activities. Charlesworth and Hartup conclude from their

findings that "dramatic play activities are particularly conducive to the child's

acquisition of positive social skills with peers", and that "activities which

involve attending to a project or to an adult do not elicit as large quantities

of social reinforcement from peers as do dramatic play activities".

Though the two studies discussed above emanate from different theoretical

viewpoints and are concerned with different measures of behaviour, both illustrate

not only the association between dramatic play activity and desirable social

behaviours but also similar age and sex differences. Marshall found boys

exhibiting more dramatic play language and hostility than girls: Charlesworth

and Hartup found boys engaging in a larger proportion of socially reinforcing peer

interaction in dramatic play than girls. These two findings suggest that boys

are more active in their dramatic play activity than girls and the extent of

their involvement may be a more important factor in determining their social

behaviour than it is for girls. Marshall found an increase in friendly ·

interactions with age: Charlesworth and Hartup found that the level of positive

social reinforcement dispensed by children showed a similar increase with age.
These findings, as stated earlier, reflect Parten's classic findings, which
demonstrated the relationship between age and social participation.  Though
both studies indicate the importance of dramatic play activity in fostering
social skills, it is probable not until the age of four that the extent to which
a child engages in dramatic play can be considered as a variable that will
affect his social adjustment.  Younger children are unlikely to participate
in joint activities, that are sustained for any period, for involvement in
dramatic play to appear as a separate and important variable.

## PEER GROUP CONTACT IN EARLY DEVELOPMENT

### Animal Studies

Contact and play with other children is generally assumed to be of great importance for the young child: the current importance assigned to peer group interaction is reflected in the existence of pre-school facilities for young children and their rapid development in the 1960s. The Newsons (1968) found that most mothers wanted their children to have contacts outside the immediate family and that middle class mothers in particular saw the provision of suitable company for their children as much a part of their tasks as mothers as the provision of food and clothing. However, there is little research and theory to indicate the importance of contact with the peer group for the young child. There is considerable research on the effectiveness of nursery experience in fostering childrens' social adjustment, but such research involves variables such as the programmes followed in nursery schools, the physical setting and organization of such schools, as much as contact with the peer group.

Such evidence as is available to demonstrate the role of peer group contact comes from animal studies. Hartup (1970) indicates that the development of childrens' relations with peers can be seen as similar in some respects to the development of peer relations amongst Rhesus monkeys, and that the work of the Harlows is relevant in this context. The Harlows (1965) found that amongst Rhesus monkeys peer interaction develops from an initial stage where the young animals' interaction is simply limited to visual orientation to an exploratory stage involving brief periods of body contact, then a period of interactive rough and tumble play follows until finally in the aggressive stage patterns of dominance are established. The Harlows found that young animals deprived of contact with peers (apart from sight and sound) for the first four months of life were wary and aggressive compared to animals, who had such contact from the first fifteen days, and that animals who had been deprived of peer contact for a longer period (8 months) were even more wary and hyperaggressive. They indicate as a

consequence that animals deprived of contact with peers during the first year of life, (before patterns of dominance are established) fail to acquire the necessary modulating and controlling systems needed for effective social relationships. The Harlows also indicate that the peer group can compensate the young animals, whose mother is absent or whose mother-surrogate is atypical. Though it is possible to maintain as Hartup does that evidence obtained from animal studies can provide theoretical postulates for the development of childrens' behaviour in this area, it is difficult to see how such postulates can have any meaning in normal circumstances. While it may be possible to argue that there are critical periods for the development of peer relations amongst animals from the evidence the Harlows supply it is unlikely that there can be such critical periods in normal circumstances for human children.

## Peer contact and deprivation

Parten (1943) and others have demonstrated the relationship between social participation and age in young children. Children attending nursery groups or infant schools around the age of five cannot avoid having prolonged contact with peers and in normal circumstances, it is not the lack of peers, but the child's maturity or rather lack of it, that hinders the development of successful peer relations. Support for Hartup's contention that the principles that the Harlows established are applicable to human children can only be found in abnormal situations. In this context the study by Freud and Dann (1951) is relevant as it indicates how the peer group can provide a compensatory role. Freud and Dann's study involved six Jewish-German children whose parents had been killed in concentration camps before World War II. The children subsequently arrived in the same concentration camp when they were only a few months old. The children remained in close contact with each other and were taken to England at the age of three or four, where they lived in a residential nursery. At the time of their arrival the children were aggressive, disturbed and were coldly indifferent or actively hostile to adults. The children showed no desire to be

attached to adults but instead had a deep and close attachment to each other. The children wished to remain together and were unhappy at even a temporary separation. No child would go out for a walk without the others or remain upstairs, if the rest of the group were downstairs. If such situations did occur, the child separated from the others would constantly ask questions about the other children and the rest of the group would fret in the absence of one of their members. None of the children dominated the others; the group was closely knit, and there was none of the jealousy, rivalry or competition that occurs amongst siblings in normal families.

Although the children were still disturbed at the end of the study and were reported as being "hypersensitive, restless, aggressive and difficult to handle" they were not in spite of their experiences "deficient, delinquent or psychotic". Freud and Dann indicate that despite their traumatic experiences and the lack of stable adult care the children "had found an alternative placement for their libido and on the strength of this, had mastered some of their anxieties and developed social attitudes". The support these children had received through their close involvement with their peers had presumably been sufficient to prevent any of these children from becoming seriously withdrawn, and they were sufficiently responsive to their new environment to master a new language. The history of these children indicates that peer group contact can be of great importance for childrens' social development. Contact with peers was probably crucially important for these children. In normal circumstances peer deprivation in a child's early years cannot be viewed as leading to any long term disturbance but the question remains whether greater or lesser contact with peers in early childhood is advantageous.

## Comparisons involving nursery groups

Contact with peers is obtained for the pre-school child through attendance at nursery groups, and the average child will meet and play with more children through attending such groups than he would do otherwise. The opportunity to

interact with peers that attendance at a nursery group provides has been viewed

as enabling children to acquire social skills and facilitating their social

adjustment. Consequently the effects of nursery attendance on childrens' social

development have been investigated. The history of such investigations dates

back to the early 1930s. The early studies in general indicate greater maturity,

independence and socially outgoing behaviour on the part of children attending

nursery groups. However, these early studies were based on the repeated

observation of the same child over a period of attendance in a nursery group and

were methodologically unsound in that the effects of maturation cannot be ruled

out in the absence of control groups or standardized norms for evaluating social

development. Later studies have involved the comparison of children attending

nursery groups with non-attenders. Such studies have used samples matched for

variables such as socio-economic background, sex, ordinal position and intelligence.

These later studies do not indicate any consistent trends for while a number

(Walsh 1931, Cushing; 1934 ; Hattwick, 1936; and Allen and Masling, 1957;)

indicate that children who have had the opportunity of nursery experience are

better adjusted socially, other studies (Bonney and Nicholson, 1958; and Brown

and Hunt , 1961;) do not. The failure of these studies to demonstrate any

decisive findings as to the value of nursery experience can be ascribed to

several factors. The majority of the studies were based on teachers' ratings

of various aspects of social behaviour. Differences in the experience, training

of the teachers making the ratings as well as differences in the variety of

behaviours used as measures of social adjustment could account for the failure

of these studies to demonstrate any clear-cut trend. In addition selective

factors may operate in the initial decision of parents to send a child to a

nursery group. For example, Brown and Hunt point out that children may be sent

to a nursery group because they present emotional difficulties for one reason or

another to their parents and not because the parents wish their children to have

more opportunities to interact with peers or for other socially acceptable

reasons. Furthermore the social climates of the schools which the children attended and in which they were assessed may differ widely and contribute still more variability and so hinder the establishment of definite trends in this area. The studies discussed above are concerned with American children, however, the same pattern emerges when English studies in this area are considered. For instance O'Sullivan's(1957-58) study involved closely matched groups and extensive tests but her results led her to conclude that there was little difference between children who had attended nursery groups and those who had not; while the results of a subsequent similar study by Harrold and Temple (1959-60) found children who had enjoyed nursery experience to be socially superior to other children who had not.

The failure of these studies to demonstrate any decisive findings can be ascribed to the fact that in the majority of studies great attention has been paid to recruiting uniform samples of children, in that variables such as age, socio-economic background etc. have been carefully matched, but the variability in the types of experience provided by nursery groups has largely been neglected. As Swift (1964) points out there has been a tendency in the majority of studies to treat nursery experience as a constant or given set of social or environmental stimuli that can be expected to have a specified effect on every individual or group exposed to it. Experience in a nursery group cannot and does not represent such a precise or constant set of stimuli, nevertheless, this tendency has persisted and is evident in a recent evaluation of the Head Start programme where Head Start children are compared to controls (Smith and Bissel, 1970). In their discussion, the authors show that despite a common orientation in the Head Start scheme for a supportive, unstructured socialisation programme rather than a structured informational programme there was of necessity variability in the selection of participants. All of these last factors must make for as much variability in the Head Start group of children as between the Head Start children and the controls. In particular the selection of participants for the

Head Start schemes is of interest: in some centres only the most disadvantaged children in the area covered by the centre were enrolled whilst in other centres volunteers were enrolled.

In general the difficulties in controlling the variability in children attending or not attending nursery groups and in the variability in the experiences provided by nursery groups make. the assessment of the effectiveness of nursery experience in fostering social development extremely difficult.

In addition, although as stated earlier nursery groups usually do provide the pre-school child with the opportunity to come into contact with more of his peers than he would do otherwise, children often come into contact with their peers through the informal play situation. Boll (1957) views the informal play group drawn from whoever is available to the child in close proximity to his own home as providing the child with his first opportunity to mix with peers in a relatively unsupervized manner and as being of some importance in directing the child's development and behaviour. Boll does give some indication of how she sees the informal play group as affecting childrens' social development but her study can be regarded as suggestive only. The importance of formal nursery experience as opposed to informal play group experience will vary from child to child. Probably formal nursery experience is of less importance for the middle class child who as the Newsons (1968) indicate is provided with social contacts by his parents, but is of far greater importance for the child who suffers a disadvantageous environment such as that provided by high rise flats. However, both sources of peer contacts, the formal nursery situation and the informal play group must be considered when assessing the effects of peer contact at this age, even though the effects in this study can only be investigated along quantitative lines.

## METHODOLOGY

<u>VALUE OF QUESTIONNAIRE METHOD</u>

The American work which dominates the study of the pre-school child follows a general pattern: the studies are conducted under comparatively ideal conditions as the subjects are observed and tested in nursery schools attached to university departments. The experimenters are able to enjoy advantageous experimental conditions, which would not be possible if they had to rely on the co-operation and kindness of individuals to carry out their work. Consequently very sophisticated and rigorous methods have been developed enabling the collection of detailed data. In addition the experimenters have often been able to recruit subjects of the sex, intelligence and age desired and thus have been able to apply precise sampling techniques.

The general trend of such studies has been well established since the 1930s: while work which relies heavily upon questionnaire data would seem to be of far less value in contrast to studies that appear superior on methodological grounds. However, whatever advantages such work may have in precision and reliability can be counterbalanced in that the behaviour studied is not representative of childrens' behaviour in less structured and "natural" situations. Moreover certain types of data can only be collected from mothers, as they are the most fruitful sources of information for their children. Even if mothers lack some reliability and precision in reporting their childrens' behaviour, they have access to their child in a wide variety of situations, not necessarily available to nursery school teachers and experimenters.

This is particularly important when information of activities that will only occur in particular circumstances is required. Children's dramatic play may only occur in the unstructured informal play group and may not have the opportunity to occur in the formal organized programme of nursery schools. Moreover the mother is the only source of information on certain topics, for

instance, topics of conversation, the number of informal play contacts her

child enjoys, the physical opportunities and restrictions for play the child

has. If the aim is to build up a total and general descriptive picture of a

child's contacts and play activities then questionnaire techniques must be

used; if the study of isolated segments of children's play behaviour is

desired then the laboratory and experimenter-controlled type of situation would

be preferred.

This study wished to build up a general descriptive picture of children's

dramatic play activities and peer group contacts; this necessitated

information which only a mother would be able to supply, consequently the use

of a questionnaire to the mother is not only justified but the only possible

method, given the resources available. Moreover, it was assumed that though a

mother's involvement may make her distort and misrepresent her account in order

to present a socially desirable image of herself and her child, she is less

likely to do this if she sees the interview situation as a non-threatening one.

An interview concerned mainly with her child's play activities is less likely to

be seen as a threat than one involving a discussion of her child-rearing

practices, as this will reflect upon her performance in her parental role, a

role in which she may feel more or less adequate. Wenar (1961) notes that

attitudinal and evaluative statements made by mothers are difficult to validate

as it is difficult to correlate a mother's report with any independent measures.

In the present study the response to one question in the interview schedule in

which the mother was required to rate her child's reaction to a strange adult,

could be correlated with the tester's own rating of the child.

While complete reliance cannot be placed on data collected through interviews,

for example the Newsons (1968) admit that they cannot be certain that they have

obtained the truth, they also stress that mothers are unlikely to dissemble for

an hour or so. Thus interview schedules may not be able to provide the precision

that other approaches allow they do not merit the harsh criticism of Danziger
(1971) who views maternal reports as almost totally unreliable. Wenar's
discussion indicates that mothers' histories on retrospective behaviours should
be regarded differently from mothers' reports on on-going behaviours.
Macfarlane's findings (1938) from the Berkeley longitudinal study indicate that
little reliance should be placed on mothers' retrospective data. However the
findings from Smith's (1958) comparison of interview and observation measures
of mothers' behaviour show that greater reliance can be placed on mothers'
accounts of present behaviours. In an investigation of dependency in mother-
child interaction Smith found that 70% of the mothers reported using techniques
they were observed to use and that ratings on techniques from the interview were
positively related to the total observed techniques at the 0.05 level. These
findings strengthen the case for using the interview as a major research tool.
In the present study the majority of the questions in the interview schedule
required mothers to report on their child's on-going behaviour and required little
information about past events.


DESIGN OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The design of the questionnaire was influenced considerably by the findings
of Marshall (1961), Gesell (1940) and J. and E. Newson (1968); the work of the
Newsons had by far the greatest influence in the construction of the questionnaire
not only because of the relevance of the Newsons' work to this study but also
because the Newsons obtained their information through discussion with mothers
and a large part of this study was conducted along similar lines. The full
questionnaire is presented as Appendix A.

Part I

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to obtain information
about the child's family background and his peer and adult contacts outside the

family. Questions 1-13 were based on similar questions in the schedule used by

the Newsons, and provided information on the following points:

(1) the number of children and their birth order in the family:

(2) the age of the children and the date they were expected to attend school:

(3) the social class of the family. The fathers' occupations were ascertained
and the subjects allocated to social groups according to the Registrar-General's
classification (1961):

(4) whether the family unit was unbroken by death or divorce. Though children
might fulfil the criteria for inclusion on other grounds, children, whose parents
were either divorced or separated or who had suffered bereavement were not
included:

(5) the fathers' participation in family life. Question 12 in Part 1 and Question 2
in Part III were included to establish information on the role of fathers in the
socializing of children and whether fathers contributed significantly to the
extension of childrens' knowledge and interest in activities and people outside
the immediate family group. Nash (1961) points out that most studies in this
area neglect any contribution fathers might make in child rearing and notes
that authors such as Sears, Maccoby and Levin (1957) equate mothers' child-rearing
practices with child-rearing practices:

(6) the mothers' occupation prior to marriage and whether any mothers were
engaged in part-time or full-time work. Employment of mothers was viewed as
likely to affect the likelihood of children attending nursery school and the
range of experiences they enjoyed:

(7) whether there were any adults other than the childrens' parents living
within the family group, who might supplement the parents in the socialization
of the child.

As discussed in the introduction, one of the basic aims of the study was to
assess the relationship between extent of peer group contact and various social

behaviours. Questions 14, 18 and 19 were designed to establish the number of

peer group contacts children enjoyed through informal and formal opportunities

for play with other children. Siblings were excluded in the calculation of

peer contacts since the emphasis of this study is on contacts outside the

immediate family group. Question 14 deals with peer contacts the child enjoyed

on an informal basis, that is the informal play group Boll (1957) describes.

Such groups are usually made up of any children who happen to live in close prox-

imity to each other and operate in a relatively unsupervised manner. There is

often little deliberate attempt by parents to organize the opportunity for play

that such groups provide. Mothers were asked to provide information on the

number and sex of such contacts their children had in this way and also to

estimate the length of time spent playing with each of these contacts. As one

of the aims of the study was to establish the extent of peer contact a child

could enjoy independently of attendance at a formal nursery group, mothers were

asked to exclude in their responses to question 14 any children their child might

also meet at a nursery group. A child could meet the same children both in the

formal nursery group and in the informal play group: this would occur if the

children lived near to each other or if their mothers were themselves friendly and

the mothers' own friendship led to increased contact for the children.

Questions 18 and 19 dealt with the number of peer contacts children enjoyed on a

formal basis that is through attendance at either a playgroup or a nursery school.

Mothers were asked to provide information on the number of sessions their children

attended such groups and on the total number of children attending the nursery

group. The responses to these questions provided the information on the number

of peer contacts the children enjoyed. As the mothers invariably talked about

the nursery group their children attended, it was possible to check mothers'

statements about the number of children attending the groups with the nursery

groups organizers. The numbers presented for this source of contact are precise

in a way that the figures for informal contacts are not. Here, distortions occurring from the fallibility of the mothers' memories cannot be ruled out. Mothers were asked to think back over the previous fortnight and bear the last two weeks in mind when making their responses as to the number of contacts their children enjoyed in an average week. However, where few contacts have been reported this probably does represent the real state of affairs and inaccuracies are only to be likely when frequent contacts with other children are reported.

While a major aim was to establish the number of peer contacts each child enjoyed, it was only a subsidary aim to obtain information on how much time each child spent in play with his contacts. For this reason the problem of overlap mentioned earlier was not pursued. Mothers were assumed to be able to give precise answers to questions about the length of time their children spent playing with other children at formal nursery groups. No such precision was thought possible with regard to informal contacts. Informal play contacts will fluctuate according to the weather, illness and family circumstances. Mothers in general can be sure about the number of children their children will come into contact with, but they cannot be certain as to how long the children will actually play together, especially if there are opportunities for unsupervised play. The value of question 14 in this respect was though it could not provide material that could be used in a quantitative way, it could nevertheless reveal the paucity of some pre-school childrens' contacts with peers.

Questions 15 and 16 provided information about the informal play situation, as they provided information on the geographical location of childrens' play and any physical restriction which might restrict play opportunities.

Question 17 provided information as to whether mothers ever attempted to restrict contacts. Question 20 established whether children met peers through attending parties. Question 21 required mothers to rate the importance with which they regarded attendance at a nursery group for their child. The questionnaire was piloted amongst a middle class group of mothers; this probably

accounts for the five gradings of importance. A less homogeneous group might have expressed more ambivalent attitudes towards attendance for their children. Question 22 required mothers to rank in order of importance three reasons for sending a child to a nursery group.

The last question was concerned with adult contacts. Mothers were asked to supply information about adults, who might supervise the child in the mother's absence either in the child's own home or elsewhere.

At this point it is convenient to state that the term nursery group is used in the text to cover both nursery school and playgroups. Both are formally organized situations providing opportunities for play for young children; but, as further description of the groups encountered in this study shows, they can vary considerably.

## Part II

Dramatic play, play in which a child takes on the roles of others and can involve the creation of an imaginary world and people, is a frequent occurrence after the age of three. Dramatic play activity can be considered in terms of solitary play, play with peers or play with an adult. These distinctions have relevance to theoretical positions as discussed in Chapter II. However, the present study aimed simply at establishing ratings on the proportion of childrens' play occupied by dramatic play activity and frequency ratings of such activity. The study was not primarily concerned whether dramatic play activity was solitary or carried on with others. The distinctions that were made were (1) the overall proportion of dramatic play activity to other types of play e.g. playing with construction kits, (2) play which involved the acting out of real life situations, (3) play which involved the acting out of roles and situations which either arose from the child's own imagination or occurred in stories read to the child or in films or television programmes he had watched. In subsequent discussions, whenever the context demands it the term dramatic play activity has been used to

refer to dramatic play in general, and the term dramatic play has been used to
refer to the ratings mothers gave to the proportion of their childrens' play
occupied by the acting out of roles of one sort or another. Similarly the
terms reality play and fantasy play have been used to refer to the ratings
mothers gave to the frequency their children acted out real life or imaginary
situations.

Questions 1, 4 and 5 were aimed at establishing information on this point.
Mothers were asked to supply ratings and provide as many examples of their
childrens' dramatic play activity as possible. Mothers were asked to supply
examples as, though such a procedure is subject to deficiencies of memory and
interest, a wider range of examples might well have been obtained through using
this procedure than through giving mothers a checklist of play topics to examine
and asking them to note whether the topics occurred in their childrens' play.
Marshall's (1961) findings indicate that children will use a wide variety of
topics in their dramatic play activity, and from her observations she concluded
that "as these lists make evident only night life and a few adult privileges
and responsibilities escape the scope of the play of these children". No
comprehensive checklist of play topics could possibly be drawn up. Furthermore
procedures involving checklists would not reveal play topics, which are idiosyncrat-
ic and only comprehensible in terms of one particular child's previous experience
and present needs and wishes.

Questions 2 and 3 were included as Gesell (1940) notes that these behaviours
are typical of the four year old. Toys and props of one sort or another can
be seen as conducive to dramatic play activity.

The period of symbolic play, during which the child engages in dramatic
play activity is characterized by the need to distort reality and to make up for
deficiencies in the present situation. This need results in the creation of
imaginary friends, animals and places. In some instances a child will not create

a fantasy but will animate a particular toy, which will then serve the same function as a fantasy. In a similar way because of the need to distort reality a child may misrepresent events and supply his mother with fictitious accounts of either his own or other peoples' activities. Questions 6, 7 and 8 were aimed at supplying information on these points.

In the main the questions passed easily through the piloting stage. At one time it had been hoped to include children of three in the sample as this is the age when children usually start to attend nursery groups. However, the sample was restricted to four year olds, partly because during the piloting stage it became apparent that three year olds had far less dramatic play activity than four year olds, but mainly because at this stage it was decided to follow up the children in the sample by obtaining reports from their schools on how they had adjusted to school after one term's attendance. To include three year olds would have meant that there would have been an unacceptable time lag between time of mothers' reports and teachers' reports.

## Part III

Part III of the questionnaire was designed to obtain information about childrens' relationships with adults, principally with his parents. The aim of this section was not only to ascertain how he reacted to strangers etc., but also to establish how his relationships and experiences with adults affected his knowledge of the world at large and thereby affected the quality and variety of his play.

Piaget (1951) amongst others indicates that the variety and content of a child's play reflects the child's experiences. The Newsons (1968) emphasize the close relationship between the average four year old and his home environment, and in particular with his mother, and that mother and child take care to be more or less in constant communication with each other. In addition, they comment

upon the average father's close participation in the family unit. The experiences the child enjoys through being with his parents and watching their activities can be assumed to represent the limits of the child's experiences, unless the child is frequently in the company of other adults. Children's opportunities or lack of them in this respect are likely to be reflected in the variety or lack of it in their play. Questions 1 and 2 therefore asked about the activities of the parents that the children watched; these questions were open ended in order to record any unusual activities that might not be included in a check list.

However, simply watching parents may not be enough to foster dramatic play activity in a child. Marshall (1961) found talk with loved adults supportive of dramatic play activity in children. Her study was precise in that she established relationships between the topics of dramatic play activity and discussion about such topics. As previously discussed this study did not wish to replicate Marshall's methods in using check lists and the study simply aimed to ascertain whether a high level of general discussion was supportive of dramatic play activity. For the purposes of this study general discussion was defined as discussion about the activities the child watched the parents engaged in. Mothers were asked to rate the amount of discussion the child had with themselves and with their fathers and these ratings formed the second parts of Questions 1 and 2. Marshall found discussion with parents the most important home "informational experiences" supportive of dramatic play activity. Mothers were not asked to record how much time they spent in discussion with their children; the point of the questions was to establish whether being with parents widened the childrens' knowledge because parents were prepared to talk to their children and presumably answer innumerable questions or whether being with parents meant that children were simply passive onlookers whose presence was tolerated rather than actively encouraged. Questions 3 and 4 were extensions of questions 1 and 2 in that mothers were asked if there were other adults who would talk to

the children about their activities. Question 5 dealt with the amount of
conversation with siblings. This question was only asked if the child had
older siblings.

Question 6 was designed to obtain information about any special efforts
that parents made to widen the child's experience outside normal domestic issues
and whether they were trying to interest the child in any particular activities
and people. Question 7 and Question 10 attempted to ascertain whether parents
took up and encouraged any interests that the child might bring to his parents'
attention of his own accord. Question 7 was concerned with conversational topics
that a child was particularly concerned with and would appear as favourite
topics: question 10 was aimed at establishing whether mothers tolerated fantasy
and whether fantasy creatures such as imaginary friends were encouraged or not.
Questions 8 and 9 were further questions aimed at establishing the degree of
communication between parent and child. Question 8 was concerned with the
frequency with which mothers read to their children, and with the books the
mothers read. The first part of the question is in line with earlier questions
concerned with communication, the second part with actual content of reading
material as this might provide further information as to the content of childrens'
dramatic play. Question 9 was concerned with mothers' participation in
childrens' play: mothers were asked to state whether they participated or not
and were asked for further comments. Such comments could provide further
information on parental participation in childrens' fantasy. The final question
required mothers to rate their child's behaviour to strange adults. This
question served as a check on the veracity of mothers' responses as mothers over-
concerned to represent their child in a favourable light might forget that the
tester could independently rate the child in this respect. The question
served other purposes as the effect of nursery group attendance could be
considered in this respect.

Part IV

    This part of the questionnaire was concerned with childrens' relationships with peers. The behavioural norms described in Gesell (1940) were the basis for many of the questions.

    Question 1 asked mothers to provide ratings on how happy their children were playing with other children. The aim of this question was to establish how happy children could be in the company of their peers without having their mothers' attention. The question attempted to distinguish between children, who wished to cling to their mothers even though there were children around to play with, and children, who demanded their mothers' attention for specific reasons such as quarrelling and accidents. McCandless, Bilous and Bennett (1961) indicate that children who request adult intervention in peer group quarrels will tend to be less socially acceptable to their peers. However, the Newsons (1968) emphasize that the English middle class child will expect his mother to intervene and arbitrate in disputes with peers. The Newsons' study was felt to be of most relevance to this study. The framing of the question to exclude requests to mothers to arbitrate in quarrels was felt appropriate and children who were accepted sufficiently by peers and who enjoyed the company of peers sufficiently to forgo their mothers' attention could be distinguished from those who were not.

    Question 2 was designed simply to establish the child's reaction to other children, and mothers were required to rate their children on a scale of sociability and friendliness towards other children.

    Question 3 asked mothers if their children tended to prefer to play with members of their own sex. Gesell (1940) indicates that children of four often prefer to have a favourite companion of their own sex. Question 4 followed this up by asking whether children who exhibited this preference also played at sex appropriate games.

    Question 5 was designed to obtain information about behaviour that could be

regarded as socially appropriate behaviour for this age group in that children who

failed to exhibit such behaviours could be regarded as failing to adjust socially.

The behaviours mothers were required to report upon were suggesting other

children take turns, willingness to wait and ability to share.  Gesell (1940)

indicates that three year olds will wait for their turns in play with other

children and by the age of four children will be sufficiently aware of others to

be able to suggest that other children take turns, even though children of this

age are still silly and bossy in their play.  Sharing was included as a behaviour

for mothers to report upon as fully co-operative play will involve sharing of

toys etc.

The final question was included as Gesell (1940) notes that children of four

want to take school equipment home with them.  This type of behaviour presumably

drops out as the child approaches five but it may still be more apparent in

the child who has not had experience in mixing with many other children.

## SAMPLE

### Criteria for drawing sample

In order to investigate the pre-school contacts of four year old children,

the survey aimed at drawing a sample of 50 children, all of whom had been born in

1966 and were due to enter school sometime in 1971.  Children, who fell into this

particular age group were selected as they would be available for testing in their

own homes and their mothers would be able to report on-going behaviour in the first

part of the research period, and they would enter school, and thus be available

for assessment by teachers in the latter part of the research period.  The children

were drawn from three areas of Newcastle, Jesmond, High Heaton and Kenton.  These

areas were selected on the following grounds:

1. pre-school facilities i.e. playgroups and nursery schools were known to exist

in greater numbers in these areas than in other parts of Newcastle

2. these areas were known to contain higher proportions of middle class families
than other parts of the city

3. the areas consisted of "good" class (i.e. owner-occupied) housing.

The sample was drawn from three areas, rather than drawing from one area
only as teachers' ratings on their childrens' adjustment to infant school were
to be collected. Drawing the sample over three areas avoided restricting the
sample to the reception classes of one or two infant schools. The co-operation of
several infant schools meant that the possibility of bias occurring in the rating
procedure would be reduced; obviously, the likelihood of such bias occurring
would be the greater the fewer the schools used. In addition as the co-operation
of the schools could not be guaranteed in advance, avoiding total reliance for
ratings on one or two schools meant that the failure of a school to co-operate would
not negate the aim to collect ratings of the childrens' adjustment.

Another major criterion was to draw as middle class a sample of four year olds
as possible. Children from higher socio-economic homes were decided upon as the
subjects of the survey, as their parents were more likely to be aware of the
issues surrounding the provision of pre-school facilities, to be able to pay for
such facilities and to wish their children to enjoy such facilities. In addition
the aim was to recruit only "normal" children i.e. children who were not suffering
from any gross physical handicap that required treatment or were suffering from
any severe emotional disturbance requiring specialist attention. Furthermore,
children from recent immigrant families were to be excluded in order to minimize
any differences due to language difficulties. Finally, the remaining criterion for
inclusion was that the child should come from a "normal" family; that is children
of one-parent families (i.e. the children of divorced and separated parents or
illegitimate children) should be excluded.

However, the recruitment of a random sample of middle class children, who
could be further selected on the above criteria is more an ideal than a practical

reality. The time allowed for interviewing, the time needed to contact parents and arrange interviews and above all the location of possible subjects for the sample all presented formidable difficulties and in view of such difficulties the sample eventually drawn appears to represent a satisfactory compromise.

## Source of information on pre-school children

The problem of locating possible subjects was the first problem to be overcome. Several possible alternatives were considered: infant schools, local authority nursery schools, privately-run playgroups and nursery schools, local Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the Medical Officer of Health. Some of these possible sources were soon discarded. Headmistresses of infant schools are not certain of the exact intake into their reception classes until fairly late in the term preceding the term in which children are due to enter infant school. Contacting parents from names supplied by headmistresses at this stage would allow too little time for interviewing. In addition requesting ratings of children would require a second approach to a school, if a headmistress had been contacted to supply names in the first place: consequently much would depend on the co-operation of individual headmistresses. It was felt to be unwise to request a great deal of co-operation from any one source, so no requests for names and addresses from headmistresses were made. Local authority nursery schools and nurseries were not approached for the names and addresses of parents of four year olds as these nurseries and schools were not situated in areas likely to draw children from the higher socio-economic groups. The local Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages were approached to see, if they could provide the names and addresses of children born in 1966. However, the only information available from this source was the registration numbers of Birth Certificates lodged in the various Registration Districts.

The only sources that proved the means of locating four year olds were local playgroups and the records of the Medical Officer of Health. These sources enable

mothers of four year olds to be contacted but do not enable the drawing of a random sample of four year olds; children contacted through playgroups are already a selected population and the Birth Register of Medical Officer of Health has many deficiencies in its use as a research source. While Voters' Lists exist for the adult age group, there is no comparable source of information for the pre-school age group.

Local playgroup organizers were contacted and the majority were willing to co-operate in the survey by providing the names of mothers of four year olds, who could be approached for interview. Though it was apparent that, through approaching play group organizers, a sample of children from the upper socio-economic classes could be drawn, total reliance upon playgroup organizers as a source of subjects would have been unsatisfactory. The drawing of a sample from such sources would provide a sample of mothers, whose opinions were likely to be skewed positively in favour of childrens' attendance at a playgroup. Such a sample could not be relied upon to reflect the variety and range of opinions about playgroup attendance that could be held.

Names provided by playgroup organizers were consequently regarded as a secondary source of information, and once the co-operation of the Medical Health Officer was obtained names provided from the Birth Register were regarded as the primary source of information. However as mentioned above the Birth Register, as an information source, has deficiencies and names provided by playgroup organizers, though they were regarded as a secondary source were vital in providing names of suitable children so that a total sample of 50 could be obtained. The Birth Register does not provide accurate up-to-date information on pre-school children, as the Voters' List does for the adult age group. The Register only provides information on the time and place of birth and the name and address of the child's family. Movements of families out of the area are not recorded. Gross physical handicaps and emotional difficulties are not necessarily added to a child's record. Though information may be available about certain children additional

relevant information is not available on all children; that additional relevant information is patchy presumably is the result of pressure of work on Health Visitors.

## Details of actual sample

90 names (two of which proved to be duplicates) were supplied from the Birth Register, there was some reluctance to provide a more extensive list i.e. a list containing over one hundred names. The information provided was limited to the child's date and place of birth and the family surname and address. No information was given about the child's sex or Christian name. Equal numbers of children were drawn from all three districts and the childrens' dates of birth ranged from the beginning of January 1966 to the end of the year. Of these names a number were not contacted, a further number could not be traced and some children proved unsuitable for inclusion in the sample. Further details are given in Appendix B.

In the first instance as the sample was intended to be drawn from the higher socio-economic groups, a child's address was checked to see whether a child lived in a council house, if a child lived in a council house his mother was not approached for interview. Twenty six children were not contacted for this reason.

Secondly a number of children proved impossible to contact, of these families six were found to have moved from the area recently and five could not be traced in the sense that no information could be obtained about the family.

Thirdly a number of children were not suitable for inclusion in the sample. Children found to be suffering from an emotional disturbance, that required specialist attention, or who were suffering from any severe physical handicap were not included. Three children fell into this category. If children were found to belong to immigrant families, even if only one parent was an immigrant, the children were not included. Two children fell into this category. As the

mother was required to report on current behaviour and not on past behaviour, children, who although they had been born in 1966, were not included if they were found to be already attending school. Four children fell into this category. Infant schools at this time varied considerably in the average age of children in their reception classes. Some children in the survey were able to enter infant school at 4 years 5 months, others were not able to enter until after their fifth birthday. One of the difficulties in obtaining children for the survey was not only to recruit children, who fitted the aims of the sample in terms of social class, age and lack of physical and emotional problems and family difficulties, but also to interview the child at an appropriate time, that is shortly before the child was due to enter infant school. The majority of children in the sample were tested and their mothers interviewed at about four to five months before the child entered school.

Of the mothers who were contacted and whose children proved suitable for in-clusion in the sample, the total number in this category was 42. Of these mothers 37 agreed to participate, two of whom were used for piloting the questionnaire as at this stage it was thought that the playgroup mothers on whom the questionnair had already been piloted might proved to be an unusual group. The mothers, who did not participate did so for the following reasons: three mothers were working and said they were too busy to participate, one mother refused to participate, apparently only because of lack of interest, and one mother was not pressed for interview as she was convalescing after a major operation.

Given that over half of the names supplied from the Birth Register were not suitable or not available for inclusion, only forty mothers were recruited. However, thet fact that the great majority of mothers of "suitable" children were prepared to co-operate illustrates the general willingness of mothers to participate, an attitude that was reflected in the ease with which the subsequent interviews were conducted.

All the mothers, whose names were supplied by the Medical Officer of Health were contacted in the same way, that is by a letter, which was issued under the Medical Officer of Health's signature, describing the purpose of the survey and inviting the mothers' co-operation.  The issue of this letter was followed up by a telephone call, if the family was on the telephone, or by a call on the mother.

In any area, there are only a limited number of four year old children, and it seems probable that the children included in the survey represent not merely a limited sample of children appropriate for inclusion (i.e. fulfilling the criteria for inclusion discussed earlier) but a high proportion of the four year olds actually suitable for inclusion.  While it would be possible though difficult to discuss what proportion of four year olds of the total age group it had been possible to contact,  it is meaningless to attempt to discuss what proportion of four year olds belong to the higher socio-economic groups had been sampled as it is impossible to know precisely the proportion of the total population falling into this category.  However, through using two sources (MOH records and names supplied by playgroup organizers) childrens' names appeared twice:  that is they appeared on the MOH records and their names were suggested by playgroup organizers. In the course of interviewing, children were found to be attending the same play-group and were mentioned by mothers as playing with each other.  In certain roads in the areas the entire population of four year olds was covered, and in the event it is likely that the majority of four year olds, fulfilling the criteria for inclusion, in the neighbourhoods were contacted, despite the fact that the inadequacy of the MOH records gave rise to some uncertainty in the sampling procedure.

The final sample obtained represents a reasonable compromise in view of the difficulties of drawing a sample of suitable children from restricted areas within the limited period of time allowed for interviewing and testing.  The children included in the survey fulfil the major criteria for inclusion in terms

of social class, age, place of residence and freedom from mental and physical defects. All children belonged to "normal" families i.e. no child belonged to a family, where the parents were separated or divorced, or the mother widowed. The majority of mothers did not work outside the home, only five worked part-time and another five worked full-time. The work of five of the fathers necessitated their occasional absence and only one father's work led to prolonged absence. In all other instances the father was an integral part of the family unit. In all but four families where another relative was resident the family unit was restricted solely to parents and children. The majority of children were drawn from MOH records: of these 20 boys and 15 girls were recorded. The remaining 15 needed to make the sample up to 50 were obtained through the co-operation of playgroup organizers; of these eight were boys and seven were girls. All the children had passed their fourth birthday, their ages ranged from four years and a few days to four years and ten months. The mean age was four years four months.

The children came from the first three social classes, the majority of children belonged to Class I and II. The exact class distribution is as follows: 19 were classified as belonging to Class I, 11 to Class II and 20 to Class III. The children were classified on the basis of their fathers' occupations. The "Classification of Occupations" compiled by the General Register Office for the 1960 Census was used to allocate the occupational status of the father to a particular social class. The occupation of the fathers of the children in the sample are as follows:-

Class I:    doctors, dentists, university teachers and research workers, and chartered engineers

Class II:   teachers, musicians, technical college lecturers, personnel, bank, insurance and building society managers

Class III:  draughtsmen, policemen, civil servants, bank cashiers, decorators, builders and joiners

The children in the sample are from families, where the father belongs to a professional, intermediate or skilled occupation. In three cases, the mothers'

occupation belonged to a higher social class than the fathers; for three of the children, who had fathers whose occupations were classified as Class III, had mothers, who were teachers or nurses, who are classified as Class II.

However, it is debatable whether membership of a particular social class is necessarily meaningful, in the sense that membership of a particular social class always leads to some significant difference in life style. For example, two children in the sample lived in the same road, went to the same playgroup and subsequently entered the same infant school and were recorded as playing with each other. Both have intelligent articulate mothers, who could discuss their children in such a way that showed they were aware of the wider issues of child rearing; both mothers regarded the pre-school experiences of their children as important and appeared to be the type of parent ready to foster and encourage their childrens' skills and interests. Though the middle class child is generally assumed to have a more favourable life position, in this particular case, it seems very difficult to see that the child, who came from the lower social class (her father was a bank cashier and consequently classified as Class III) was at any significant disadvantage to the child, who came from the higher social class (this child's father was a hospital doctor and therefore classified as Class I). The environment these children enjoyed was very similar, and the differences between these children could be ascribed more to differences in the size of their families (the Class I child had three siblings, the Class III child only one) than to differences in class membership. So, although the class composition of the sample covers three social classes, in general the children form a reasonably homogeneous group, when all the criteria of class, age and residential area are considered.

## INTERVIEWING AND TESTING

### The Interview situation with mothers

The majority of mothers approached for interview were pleased to co-operate; all the mothers whose names had been forwarded by playgroup leaders co-operated and of the mothers, whose names had been supplied by the Medical Officer of Health and who had been invited to co-operate in a letter sent out under the Medical Officer of Health's signature, only five refused to participate. Most of the mothers appeared to be pleased to have an opportunity to discuss their children and very often after the questionnaire had been administered the interview developed into a general discussion.

In these circumstances the majority of the interviews went smoothly: only five of the mothers were regarded as brief and restricted in their replies. In general the amount of useful information yielded by mothers related to the mother's general level of expansiveness i.e. whether she found it easy to discuss her attitudes and her child to a complete stranger. In addition, the mother's own level of education and level of conceptual analysis she was used to employing was an important factor. In this respect though graduate mothers did not appear to differ significantly in their child rearing practices, they often appeared able to make perceptive comments on their childrens' behaviour and to be able to provide more causal links for the various sequences of their childrens' behaviour that they described. The mothers appeared to report their childrens' behaviour fairly accurately as the majority of mothers were prepared to report unfavourable aspects of their childrens' behaviour and only one mother appeared to be concerned with making socially desirable responses. This mother was not aware that the quality of her responses could be detected as she insisted that her child always reacted in a friendly way to strange adults although the child in question refused to answer any of the tester's questions. Furthermore, the mothers appeared to differ in the degree of interest they had in childrens' behaviour. Some mothers

obviously found child rearing a rewarding task and took delight in the world of
fantasy a child of four can create, these mothers were naturally expansive in
the interview situation. A minority of mothers appeared to find child rearing
a dull task and spoke of being "tied to the house", not surprisingly, although
these mothers co-operated pleasantly enough they replied in a brief and limited
way to the questions.

In every case the child was present during some part of the interview. The
presence of the child did not appear to inhibit or affect the responses. In
many cases the mother would turn to the child for additional information in
answering the questions related to the child's play. Usually the children pursued
their own occupations occasionally breaking into the conversation of their own
accord or being brought into it by the mother or the tester. Although four
year olds did not appear to impede adult conversation the presence of a two year
old was another matter; when a younger sibling about this age was present it
sometimes required considerable perseverance on the part of the mother to complete
the questionnaire.

Some mothers felt they could not report their childrens' relationships with
peers accurately. This was felt to be encouraging as it was indicative that the
mothers were attempting to reply as accurately as possible. In such cases in
order to reply to certain questions the mother would attempt to remember the last
occasion on which her child had met a strange child and base her reply on this
occasion accordingly or mothers would refer to playgroup leaders to ascertain the
number of children their child was happy playing with.

There was some difference in the mothers' attitude to the questionnaire.
Only a few remarks were made about the design and length of the questionnaire
but from these the less well educated mothers appeared to find the questionnaire
quite long while the better educated mothers did not find it excessively long at
all. Only/mothers made remarks to the effect that they found it difficult to
locate responses on the rating scales.

Great effort was taken by the tester to note all mothers responses very carefully and to note any additional comments she made on particular topics; this was done at the time of the interview if possible or immediately afterwards. All interviews took place in the childrens' homes.


## ROLE-TAKING TASK

A role-taking task based on one described in "The Development of Role-Taking and Communication Skills in Children" (Flavell, 1968) was administered. The task as administered by Flavell and the conclusions drawn from it are as follows:

### Procedure

"The task materials consisted of several exemplars of each of the following objects: silk stockings, necktie, toy truck, doll, and adult book. Examiner places one of each kind of object on the table. "We're going to pretend this is a little store" Examiner encourages Child to identify each object "Let's pretend If you could choose one of these gifts for your _____'s birthday, which one would you choose?" This question is asked successively for the child's father, mother, teacher, brother or sister (if any), and self for one-half of the children at each age level, and in the order, mother, father, teacher, brother or sister (if any), and self for the other half. After the child makes each choice, the object chosen is replaced by another of the same object category. When all choices have been made, the examiner inquires about each by saying: "Why did you choose _____ for your _____?"

### Results

We shall first consider the presents which the children chose for themselves before considering what they chose to give to others. So far as we could judge, not one of the 40 children made a choice which could definitely be labelled as role-inappropriate, from either the standpoint of sex or of age. Fifteen boys chose a truck; none chose a doll. Nineteen girls chose a doll; none chose a truck. Two boys chose ties, 2 girls and 1 boy chose a book, no child chose

stockings, and 1 three-year-old boy insisted that he wanted a pair of boots, which were lying in a corner of the testing room, and refused to settle for anything else!

As for the gifts selected for others, it was possible to sort children's responses into four categories according to the level of role-taking skill they appeared to reflect:

Level A. Child selects a truck for his mother or a doll for his father (or both)

Level B. Child shows no instances of Level A, but selects a truck for his father or a doll for his mother (or both)

Level C. Child shows no instances of Levels A or B, but selects an adult gift (for example, a book) for his sibling or (much more frequently) a child gift for his teacher. The former selection was judged to be less clearly role-in appropriate than those of types A and B, both because of our uncertainty as to the sibling's age and because several children, as we have indicated, actually chose adult gifts for themselves. The latter selection was so judged because a number of children rationalized it in the inquiry on the basis that the teacher would want or need things like trucks and dolls for classroom use. While these two kinds of choices did not appear to be as unequivocally role-appropriate as other readily available selections would have been, neither did they appear to be as manifestly unreasonable as those defined in A and B.

Level D. Child shows no instances of Levels A, B or C, that is, all of his gifts are clearly appropriate to the age and sex of the recipient.

Number of Subjects Responding at Each Level of Role Taking Skill on Task IIIB

| | Age | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| A | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| B | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| C | 1 | 6 | 1 | 0 |
| D | 1 | 3 | 5 | 10 |

The table shows the distribution of children across the four levels. These data suggest both that skill on this task is very much a function of age during the pre-school years, and also that one may be able to speak of developmental differences in the degree or kind of skill involved. For example, it is only the three-year-olds who ever show what looks like a really extreme disregard for both the age and sex of the gift recipient. Two of these six children, by the way, actually selected a doll for the father - just about the most inappropriate matching of gift and receiver possible in this situation! Conversely, not one of the 10 six-year-olds ever made a choice with even a hint of role inappropriateness about it. The B and C responses, mostly found in four-and five-year old groups, may reflect some sort of transitional level, one which lies between a complete or near-complete absence of any role-attribute discrimination and an intellectual differentiation of the other's wants and needs which is wholly adequate to this simple task. Further speculation as to the exact nature of this intermediate-skill level seems unwarranted on present evidence, however; a careful scrutiny of the response patterns and associated inquiry data on these children has simply not yielded any clear picture of what may have mediated their overt choices."

The task as administered by the tester was as follows. A display of five objects (tie, nylons, adult book, toy car and a doll) was presented to the children and they were encouraged to identify each object. They were then told "We're going to pretend this is a little shop. What would you choose as a present for your _____?" The question was asked successively for the child's father, mother, teacher (or auntie as appropriate), little boy (or little girl as appropriate) for one half of the subjects and in the order mother, father, teacher (or auntie as appropriate) little boy (or little girl as appropriate) for the other half. All the children were finally asked "What would there be for yourself?" The children were asked to make a choice for a teacher, if they attended a playgroup or a nursery school, otherwise they were asked to make a choice for an auntie; they were asked to make a choice for the opposite sex of their peer group. As the

children made their choices the article chosen was removed and so each successive choice was made from a reduced display. The task was changed as the original task was felt to be unsuitable. The problem that confronted the tester was not to establish general trends but to obtain minimal data from each child that could compared statistically with other data from the child's mother. In the first place the lack of uniformity in the original task was felt to be a disadvantage: all the children would not necessarily have a teacher and could not be assumed to know what a suitable gift for such a person would be. Far more important is that a certain degree of sociability and willingness to participate is a prerequisite for the test. The task was altered so that a child's powers of concentration and sociability were not taxed too much. Moreover though the task was to be administered in the child's own home the tester could not rely on testing the child at an opportune moment but had to administer the task whenever expedient. The tester aimed at testing every child after the conclusion of the interview with the mother; this was the most the tester could do to enable the child to become accustomed to her. In every case the tester was a stranger to the child.

The major alteration was to use the responses to the first two questions as the basis for classifying the children; and thus to divide the sample into two groups, those who could make appropriate choices for their parents and those who made inappropriate choices i.e. the children who chose toys as gifts for their parents. This division was used partly because the choice point could occur early and classification of children's responses would not depend upon the child responding to all the questions, but also because the major division appears to fall here when Flavell's discussion of this task is considered. Flavell states that in this "task there is an uncertain correlation in these task(s) between level of performance and the occurrence of role-taking cognitions" and that a "S could achieve a correct response by simply utilizing acquired habits or experiences of one sort or another". He goes on to state that the task does not

expressly ask for role-taking behaviour either. S is instructed only to choose

a present for O: it remains for him to reason that the gift ought to be a suitable

one, and that an estimation of O's needs and wants could determine its suitability"

and specifically states that it is unlikely that Level A and B responders (i.e.

children who choose toy gifts for their parents) did much of this kind of estimating

when making their choices.

These children even if they will not provide reasons for their choices are

unlikely to have taken the attributes of the recipients into account when making

their choices, and differentiating these children from the others in the sample,

who were able to choose appropriate gifts, appears justified as Flavell singles

them out as being particularly lacking in role-taking skills.

In addition Flavell states that children who make responses which are age

and sex appropriate are not necessarily utilizing role-taking skills in making

their choices; they may merely be aware of what their parents have received

as presents in the past or may simply be "utilizing acquired habits or experiences

of one sort or another". The level the child is operating at can only be judged

from the reasons he provides. If he provides a reason that takes into account

the needs and wants of the recipient, it is probable that these factors were

borne in mind when making the choice. If a child cannot be induced to give a

reason or provides a reason that does not throw any light upon his choice (e.g.

"Because I did") he cannot be assumed to have taken into account the attributes

of the recipient. This illustrates how necessary the child's willingness to

talk is in judging the level of his responses.

Moreover Flavell's original question "What would you choose for your brother?"

(or sister if any) needs to be followed up by additional questions where the

child has siblings of such an age range where child or adult gifts would be

appropriate; in such a situation a child could have made an appropriate choice

but the tester would not be able to discern this if the child refused to say for

exactly whom the gift was intended.

The children in the survey could not be relied upon to talk or even co-operate; so a minimum response level that could be reasonably expected from every subject had to be considered. This was obtained by allowing the child to choose an object on one occasion only this meant that the responses of children who were only prepared to respond by naming the object chosen and who would not volunteer reasons could be considered as well as the responses of children who would only respond at the most minimal level of all i.e. by pointing to gifts and remaining firmly silent throughout the whole procedure. Restricting the number of choices available as choices were made was also necessitated because of the book; this alone of the adult gifts can be considered appropriate for father, mother, teacher and auntie. If a child chooses the same object on successive occasions, and if he cannot be induced to give reasons for his choice or gives reasons that do not provide any additional information, he cannot be necessarily assumed to be operating at a higher level than the children, who chose inappropriate toy gifts for their parents. Such a child may simply be perseverating in the performance of the task and need not be taking into account the attributes of the person for whom the gift is intended. Reducing the number of gifts as choices are made but keeping largely to the order Flavell describes means in effect that the child has to make two adult choices out of three available when responding to the first two questions and as the book can only be used for one response the child has to choose one gift that is not only age appropriate as the book is but is sex appropriate as well. The child who chooses a toy for his parent only does so by rejecting adult gifts. Thus the sample could be divided into two groups on the basis of responses to the first two questions; one group, which can reasonably be regarded as having negligible role-taking skills while the other group may possess such skills even if the occurrence of such skills cannot be definitively proved.

An attempt was made to classify the children's reasons for their two choices along the lines provided by Bruner, Olver and Greenfield (1966) in an object-

sorting task, viz. perceptible, affective, fiat-equivalent, nominal and functional reasons. The classification proved a difficult task as children provided reasons that could not be classified or failed to give reasons at all. Where classifications were possible the groupings were perceptible - if external characteristics were actually referred to by the child (because it's green); affective - if the child gave a response indicating the emotion aroused (she likes them); fiat-equivalent - if the child simply indicated he had chosen (because I did); nominal - if a child mentioned that objects related to certain classes of people (they are for ladies, referring to stockings); and functional - if an appropriate verb was used.

## TEST SITUATION WITH CHILDREN

The co-operation of every child in the survey was obtained on some level: and the majority of the mothers were happy for their child to co-operate in a task with the tester. Most of the children co-operated when the tester asked them to participate and 37 of the children co-operated without excessive persuasion from either their mother or the tester. The remaining 13 were very difficult to test. In some cases the children were very shy and reserved: 5 boys fell into this category, 3 of whom refused to respond to the tester in any way. These children responded to the questions, which were presented to them in the presence of the tester by their mothers, only by pointing to the objects. (These children were the only ones to have the questions administered by their mothers.) Another group of five only co-operated after an excessive amount of persuasion mainly from their mothers. Of the remaining three, two children wanted to get on with their own activities and clearly resented the interruption, while one was simply unruly.

As over a quarter of the children presented a problem in testing, the simplifying of the role-taking task to choices for parents only was justified. Though the results obtained can provide only a simple dichotomy, to administer a more ambitious task, and with it finer gradings of role-taking skill, would have

meant that data could not have been collected from every child. In the original

task to decide whether a gift was appropriate for a sibling would have meant

ascertaining the age of the sibling; there were children in the sample, who had

siblings of such an age range that either child or adult gifts would have been

correct, but who would not talk to the tester except to name the articles of

their choice. Such children would have been impossible to classify on the

original task but were possible to classify on the modified task.

The behaviour of the children did not vary to any real extent outside the

test situation. Though the test always took place in the child's home and was

always left until after the interview with the mother, this was not enough for

some of the children to become accustomed to the tester and they remained shy

and reserved to the tester throughout. Fifteen of the children had the objects

identified for them by the tester: this failure to identify objects was usually

part of the child's shyness or unwillingness to co-operate though in two cases

the children mistook the tie for a belt.

Twenty of the children either would not provide reasons or gave reasons that

did not yield any additional information as to why they made their choices. This

group includes three children, who would only point to objects, the minimum

possible response, three children, who would only name objects but would not

advance any reasons, and thirteen children whose reasons can be labelled as

stereotyped; the typical response from children in this group would be to reply

"Because I wanted to" when questioned as to the reasons for their choices. The

limited nature of such responses may reflect the children's lack of role-taking

skills; they are, however, much more likely to reflect the child's lack of

sociability. Flavell does not discuss how necessary the children's sociability is

in assessing his performance in tasks of this type; the validity of children's

responses to a test, which enables the division of results into four categories,

must be questionable if the child makes his responses under duress, in fact he may

make them simply to get out of the situation.

RATINGS OF CHILDRENS' SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

(a) The tester's rating of the children

All the children to be included in the survey were . .. unknown to the tester prior to the interview. The childrens' behaviour was therefore rated as their reaction to a strange adult and the tester's rating could serve as a check on the mothers' responses to question 11, Part III, which required mothers to rate their childrens' behaviour towards strange adults. All mothers when agreeing to the interview were asked if their children could be present during the interview so all children would be able to become accustomed to the tester before they were required to interact with her in the test situation.

The tester's rating was finally reduced to a rating on a five point scale identical to the ratings used in the questionnaire for reaction to strange adults and children. The tester noted the behaviour of the child in the interview and in the test and appropriate categories on the rating schedule as soon as possible after the conclusion of the visit to the child's home and the overall rating was made at this time.

Child's Behaviour

During Interview with mother

Child exhibited normal speech and stance/child played independently-taking no notice of stranger/child showed off/child withdrew/child acted in other abnormal fashion/

Child took initiative in speaking to strange adult/child responded easily after being spoken to by strange adult/child responded after prompting/child refused to reply/

Child played independently of mother/child played independently of mother for most of the time - demanding her attention rarely/ child made moderate demands on mother's attention/child made excessive demands on mother's attention/

Child obeyed mother's instructions/child disobeyed mother's instructions/

Child's speech/intelligible/voluble/unintelligible/limited

. <u>During test</u>

Child recognized all articles with prompting/child recognized articles without

prompting

Child co-operated easily and readily - without persuasion/child co-operated after

persuasion from mother/child co-operated - but in a half-hearted fashion/child

showed off/child acted in a very diffident manner/child refused to co-operate/

When asked for reasons:

Child gave answers readily, clearly and intelligibly/child gave answers readily

clearly but unintelligibly/child dried up/child gave stereotyped answers/

Child needed persuasion from mother to complete/child needed persuasion from

tester to complete/child would not complete test/

<u>Overall Rating</u>

Very friendly/friendly/takes a while to "warm up"/shy and reserved/extremely shy

and reserved i.e. withdraws from the situation

(b) <u>The teachers' ratings of the children</u>

An important aim of this survey was to follow up every child's progress by

obtaining reports on their adjustment to school. Data on the children at this

stage would serve a dual purpose; alternative assessments other than the

mothers' would be obtained and information would be available to establish whether

variability in peer group contact and dramatic play activity in the pre-school

period were important enough/there to be differences between children in various

aspects of their social behaviour both to other children and in their overall

adjustment to school. The teachers were asked to complete the reports on the

children at the end of the childrens' first term at school.

RATING FORM

CHILD'S NAME .......................
Please circle the categories which you
feel are most appropriate to the child's
behaviour.

1. <u>Overall adjustment</u>

In your opinion how has the child adjusted to school?

far better than / better than / average / poorer than / far poorer than
    average        average              average         average

2. Reaction to other children at (a) the beginning and (b) the end of term

(a) very friendly and / friendly / needed to / shy and / very shy and
        outgoing                 "warm-up"    reserved     reserved

(b) very friendly and / friendly / still needs / shy and / very shy and
        outgoing                 to "warm-up"    reserved     reserved

3. Child's ability to share e.g. toys and equipment

   very good / good / satisfactory /poor / very poor

4. Child's ability to wait for his turn

   very good / good / satisfactory / poor / very poor

5. Were there any behavioural problems?        Yes/No

   If yes, please give a brief description of the problem and circle the
   appropriate category for the duration of the problem

   Description ...........................................................

   .......................................................................

   Duration

   under a week / week to a / fortnight / over a month / still continuing
              fortnight   to a month

The major aim borne in mind while the report schedule was being constructed

was to design a schedule that would be quick and easy for the teachers to

complete, as anything less than this was assumed as likely to have an unfavourable

reception. The schedule was satisfactory in this respect as every child was

successfully followed up. The questions were concerned with basically the same

aspects of behaviour that mothers were required to report on, and similar five-

point rating scales were used. Question 1 asked the teachers to rate the

childrens' overall adjustment to school. Question 2 required ratings on the

childrens' reaction to the other children both at the beginning and end of term.

Reports of the children at both these times were required to see whether

differences in behaviour resulting from variability in the pre-school situation

apparent at the beginning of term were still present at the end of term.
Van der Eyken (1967) in discussing the evidence of research in this area notes
that studies of the effects of nursery attendance tend to indicate that though
nursery school children have an initial advantage on entry to school this
advantage does not persist.  Questions 3 and 4 required ratings on the childrens'
ability to share and wait for their turn.  Mothers were asked to supply
frequency ratings in these areas but teachers were asked to rate the children in
evaluative terms ranging from very good to very poor.  Such terms were felt more
appropriate in the school situation.  Teachers were not asked to supply ratings
of the frequency children suggested other children take turns, as teachers were
felt not to be able to report on this behaviour accurately in large reception
classes, whereas children who were impatient or poor at sharing would be easily
distinguished in such classes.  The last question asked whether there were any
behavioural problems and if so for a brief description.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected by means of the 5-point rating scales described
above (tester's and teachers' ratings) or derived from the responses to the
questionnaire (see Appendix A).  Absolute numbers of peer group and adult
contacts were calculated from replies to Part IB of the questionnaire.

(i) Product-moment correlations (Pearson's r) were calculated between
scores on each of the 21 variables; Appendix C summarises the results for
the 4 variables central to this study viz. dramatic play, reality play,
fantasy play and extent of peer group contact.

(ii) Contingency tables were constructed to show the frequencies of
occurrence of the activities represented by these 4 central variables in
different subject groups.  These were analysed by $\chi^2$ ; the results appear
in the next chapter.

## RESULTS

In presenting the experimental results the frequency and content of children's play will first be considered. Relevant data were obtained from the mothers' replies to questions 1, 4 and 5 in Part II of the questionnaire and questions 3 and 4 from Part IV. In addition the answers to questions 6, 7 and 8 of Part II refer to phenomena which are part of children's symbolic games. As discussed in Chapter II, Piaget (1951) proposes that symbolic games specifically develop in a variety of symbolic combinations, viz. simple combinations, compensatory combinations, liquidating combinations and anticipatory-symbolic combinations. These games only refer to Stage I of Piaget's classification; the more complex symbolic games of Stage II involve detailed observation and questioning for their classification and occur in older children. Only the first three of the four categories above will be discussed, since it was not feasible to obtain the detailed information required to comment on the last category.

## CATEGORIES OF PLAY AND THEIR INCIDENCE

### Introduction

Much of children's play of this age group, according to Piaget, is the reproduction of scenes from real life and, as such, can be classified as games of simple combinations. These games develop with the transposition of real scenes and become, as Piaget describes "an inextricable medley of scenes from real life and imaginary episodes and involve varying degrees of imitation and distorting assimilation". For instance, Piaget's daughter L.

reproduced whole scenes with her dolls, dressing them up, taking them for walks etc. This example can be paralleled by many reports gained during the course of interviewing. The games of families, shops and schools are very often faithful reproductions of the child's experiences. Girls in particular will act out in their play with dolls their mother's activities with younger siblings. Words and actions that have been heard and observed in shops and in playgroups will be used in the appropriate games. For some girls who were assigned the highest ratings for dramatic play and reality play, their play was such a precise reproduction of their experiences that mothers were aware of what had occurred at the playgroup or during a shopping expedition with a neighbour through observing the child's subsequent play. Piaget indicates that such reproduction occurs as the child enjoys the "pleasure of exercising his powers and recapturing fleeting experience". As children vary considerably in the extent to which they engage in play of this type, it seems that they differ in the enjoyment they can obtain from such activity.

## Results

The results showed that/the children of this age group dramatic play
with

forms the greatest part of their play. The proportion of the mothers'

ratings for this type of play are as follows:

Table 1

| Majority | Some | Only sometimes | Very little | None |
|----------|------|----------------|-------------|------|
| 42% | 28% | 14% | 14% | 2% |

It is worth emphasising that for 70% of the sample dramatic play occupies a large proportion of their play activity, whilst only 2% never engage in this kind of play at all.

Dramatic play was further classified into either the acting out of real-life situations or imaginary situations by the next two questions. These two categories are termed reality and fantasy play. The frequency with which children engaged in these behaviours was assessed by the mothers' replies to questions 4 and 5 in Part II of the questionnaire.

Table 2

| Reality play | Most of the time | Quite often | Some of the time |
|--------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| (Fantasy play) | 28% (6%) | 34% (18%) | 24% (34%) |

| Very rarely | Never |
|-------------|-------|
| 10% (24%) | 4% (18%) |

From the table it is clear that reality play occurs far more frequently than fantasy play. The relative importance of reality and fantasy play are reflected in the extent of the correlation of each with dramatic play ($r = 0.724$, df 48, $p < 0.001$ and $r = 0.342$, df 48, $p < 0.05$ respectively). A summary table of intercorrelations is to be found in Appendix C. Detailed examination of the data indicates that for the majority of the children dramatic play is the acting out of situations they have seen in their own lives, performing actions they have seen the people around them engaged in: in contrast the reproduction of actions from TV, films or stories read to them is only a minority occupation. Most children (39) used to dress up for their dramatic play activities and 28 used adult clothes in their play.

## Discussion

The fact that some children only engaged in dramatic play with particular companions calls for comment. A few mothers reported that their children engaged in such play only with their siblings or a particular friend. One child who had a large number of friends acted out stories only with one friend and none of his other friends. If time-sampling techniques had been used to observe such children in free play situations with nursery groups, the data obtained could be different unless the companion who facilitated dramatic play was a member of the same group. Another child, the subject of later discussion, only engaged in dramatic play in the context of a bedtime ritual. Again, such behaviour would not be apparent from observation in experimental nursery groups.

In addition, other children were reported as being somewhat secretive in their play: the mothers of such children usually hesitated before replying to the questions on play and thought for a while before they felt able to reply accurately to the questions. These mothers said that their children preferred to play away from adults, usually in their own rooms, and tended to want little adult participation in their games. It is debatable whether the behaviour of these children would remain unmodified in the presence of adults or even in a contrived experimental situation without adults present.

Certain children who could be well described as solitary, i.e. they had only contacts with peers at a nursery group and minimal or no contact outside the nursery group, were nevertheless reported by their mothers as being high on the dramatic play scale. The studies on dramatic play (e.g. Marshall, 1961; Charlesworth and Hartup, 1967) indicate that it facilitates acceptable social behaviours and investigate it as a group activity. One of the earlier studies (Green, 1933) is more definite and reports dramatic play (in the nursery situation) as being rarely carried on without a companion. However it can occur without companions: four out of five children in the sample who had no peer contacts

outside the nursery group were reported by their mothers as being active on this dimension.

Children for whom dramatic play is an infrequent activity are also of interest; dramatic play may only occur here for specific reasons, which will be the subject of later discussion. Moreover, this finding makes Gesell's (1925) use of dramatic play in his developmental testing of three and four year old children inappropriate, as dramatic play activity cannot be assumed to be a developmental variable.

No differences in frequency of dramatic play activity were found that could be attributed to social class or age differences. This was expected in view of the homogeneity of the sample. To sum up children appear to range from much dramatic play activity through medium to very little. A child at the high end of the scale will if he imitates animals pretend to be several species, if he pretends to be people known to him he will play at being his siblings or other relations. Such a child will be constantly reproducing what he has seen or overheard. In the middle of the scale there appear to be children from whom dramatic play is only a part of their play activity, while at the lower extreme dramatic play will only be a minimal activity for some children or it may not appear at all. An illustration here is a boy whose play consisted mainly of assembling and re-assembling parts of objects such as torches, batteries and lights.

## PLAY IN RELATION TO CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

### Introduction

Berlyne (1969) amongst others maintains Piaget's position that the content of children's play is determined by their experiences: he states "content depends rather on what the child has encountered in his environment". Furthermore it appears that it is the child's "real" environment, his family, his home and his everyday experiences, that are the influential agents, while other experiences

such as books, films and television, as Marshall (1961) noted, have far less

influence. The greater influence of events and people of whom the child has

first-hand experience is shown above by the difference in the levels of

significance of the correlations between dramatic play and reality play and

between dramatic play and fantasy play. The former exceeds the 0.1% level while

the latter is significant only at the 5% level.

## Results

From general conversation with the mother all the children apparently

watched the usual television programmes for children and in some cases many adult

programmes as well. They were all read to mainly by their mothers and fathers and

often by older siblings. Nevertheless despite their exposure to these media,

comparatively little of the content entered into their play. This suggests that

the selection of incidents from their environment that children incorporate into

their play is determined not simply by frequency or immediacy but by other

influences. The child's need to identify with his parents or other important

loved members of his family appears to be one of the decisive factors in deciding

the content of play.

Marshall (1961) found positive correlations between play topics and

informational experiences with adults in the home. The present study did not wish

to replicate Marshall's methods but relationships between play topics and

(1) the child's experiences through watching his parents and (2) the particular

topics his parents wished to bring to his attention were investigated. The three

most frequent dramatic play topics were families, schools and shops. These

topics represent most of the average child's experiences. The responses of the

majority of mothers as to what activities their child observed them performing

could be covered by one mother's reply "everything around the house and shopping".

These everyday experiences account for the high frequency of the topics of

families and shopping. The frequency of schools is not surprising as this was

the topic that was most frequently reported as being raised both by parents and children in conversation. Mothers mentioned it as a topic when asked for what matters outside the home they were trying to bring to their child's attention, and as a topic children raised in conversation of their own accord.

## Discussion

The importance of experience and parental discussion becomes clearer when isolated examples of certain play topics are considered: play topics which are peculiar to a child relates to experiences that only the child in question was reported to have had. For instance, (1) the only boy in the sample who played at being a footballer (George Best) was the only one taken to football matches. His father was reported as trying to interest his son in football. (2) A girl who played at putting her dolls to sleep had a mother who worked as an anaesthetist. (3) One child played at church ceremonies; her parents had stressed the idea of attendance at Sunday Mass. These rather unusual play topics can always be matched some particular experience or training in the child's background. The majority of children's play usually represents far more mundane events, the ordinary round of shops, schools and home. This probably reflects the circum-scribed nature of their mother's lives, occupied as several mothers pointed out by the demands of younger children. The wider the child's and his parents' experiences the more varied his play is likely to be, as Millar (1968) indicates.

## EXAMPLES OF SEX-APPROPRIATE ROLES

### Introduction

The dramatic play content reflected not only the everyday experiences of the children but also the roles that were sex appropriate to them. Explanations of play which involve learning theory principles mainly relate to behaviour where a child matches his behaviour to that of a model. Children's play, which takes the form of role-playing and re-enacting of events can be explained along these lines.

The typical children's games of shops and families can be viewed in these terms as such games involve the acting out of parental roles and the roles of other appropriate models such as siblings and other adult relations. Mothers reported their children as playing at being their parents or other adult relations, siblings or other children. Only one boy played at being his mother: this could be explained along lines Sears (1957) postulates to explain how adoption of parental roles, mannerisms etc. stems from the child's initial dependence on his mother. Four girls played at being their mothers and incorporated their mothers' words and mannerisms in their play. This behaviour could be explained by reference to concepts such as observational learning, secondary reinforcement etc. Nevertheless the psychoanalytic concept of identification whether elaborated in learning theory terms or not is probably a more comprehensive explanation of such behaviour. As Bronfenbrenner (1960) points out the concept in its original Freudian formulation invariably includes an emotional tie between child and model. It seems reasonable to see this emotional tie as being at the basis of the child's activity in patterning himself upon a particular model.

## Results

The games of families and shops and schools were played by the following numbers of children:

Table 3

|  | Boys | Girls | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Schools | 9 | 13 | 22 |
| Shops | 11 | 11 | 22 |
| Families | 8 | 17 | 25 |

In the case of shops and schools, the division of sexes does not differ to any extent but in the most common game, families, girls predominate. Analysis of a 2 x 2 contingency table for boys and girls playing or not playing at families yielded a highly significant value of $\chi^2$ ( $\chi^2 = 9.82$, 1 df, p < 0.001). Of the 17

girls reported as playing at families, eight were specifically stated to like taking the mother's role and four of this sub-group imitated their mother's actions in play. These girls would speak to their dolls in exactly the same words their mothers used in speaking to a younger sibling and would imitate their mothers' actions with the sibling, for example, one child would always bath her doll whenever her mother bathed the baby.

Marshall (1961) found that while boys had as many opportunities as girls to learn about home and family situations, boys had far more opportunities to learn about non-domestic issues. She consequently indicates that while boys are given the opportunity to learn the roles of both sexes, girls are provided with experiences to foster their easy acceptance of their female role and their identification with mothers. The present study supports Marshall's contention as the game of families enables early identification with the maternal female role.

Two other games that appeared particularly popular with girls were hospitals, which involved acting out the role of doctor or nurse, and recreating the illnesses of other members of the family. The proportion of boys and girls playing at these games are:

Table 4

|  | Boys | Girls | Total |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Playing nurturant roles i.e. games of hospitals and illnesses | 3 | 21 | 24 |
| Not playing such games | 25 | 1 | 26 |
|  | 28 | 22 | 50 |

Looking after other people, that is basically nurturant roles, were unpopular roles for boys but were obviously appropriate for girls ($\chi^2 = 33.00$, 1 df, $p < 0.001$). Six girls played at illnesses and 15 out of 22 girls played at hospitals and often used equipment that their mothers had themselves used when they had worked in hospitals. The question of identification with the family also arises

in relation to acting out family illnesses and may reflect the fact that girls appear to identify more with members of the family than boys.

Boys played at a number of games which involved male roles and also roles that occurred outside the context of the family. As the table indicates, girls participated little in this form of game. In particular, aggressive play is untypical of girls.

Table 5

|  | Boys | Girls | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delivery men (Coalmen, Milkmen, Postmen etc.) | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| Transport workers (Bus, train, truck drivers) | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| Workmen (Construction labourers, electricians, etc.) | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Firemen, Policemen | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Aggressive games (War games, Cowboys and Indians) | 15 | 1 | 16 |

Only one girl played at Cowboys and Indians and only two others imitated male roles of delivery men, transport workers and workmen.

In this context it is interesting to note that only 11 children in the study were reported as preferring to play with members of their own sex. Nine of this small group were boys who were described as enjoying war games and other forms of aggressive play.

Discussion

Although children of both sexes are exposed to very much the same experiences, and are for the most part left in the company of their mothers, they nevertheless play out sex-appropriate roles. Whilst the content of play can be said to be determined by a child's experiences, as the previous discussion showed, the part of a child's experience that appears relevant and pleasurable enough for him or

her to reproduce in play, is determined by his or/sex regardless of the fact that both sexes have been exposed to the same environment. With regard to the game of families, it is worth emphasising that participation involves for girls imitation of their mothers in the maternal role. On the other hand boys rarely appear to imitate their father in their play, even when they are playing families. Only one mother reported her son as reproducing his father's actions in this game and the only other example was a boy who played at being "Daddy at his office". This difference is not surprising in view of the conclusions of Hartup (1962) who measured the tendency to imitate the like-sex parent in preference to imitation of the opposite-sex parent in a forced-choice doll play interview. His findings led him to conclude "that boys learn masculine behaviour outside the imitative relationship with the father, on the other hand general imitation of the mother makes some contribution to the femininity of young girls".

## PLAY INVOLVING FICTITIOUS CHARACTERS OR DISTORTION OF REALITY

### Introduction

The responses to questions 6, 7 and 8 in Part II of the questionnaire fell into the various categories of symbolic combinations. Question 6 provided information on (i) imaginary animals; (ii) animated toys; (iii) various monsters and witches which appeared at night-time. Question 7 asked about imaginary friends and question 8 about (i) exaggerated reports of incidents that had happened to the child or other children and (ii) exaggerated reports of what the child was supposed to have done.

### Results

The majority of the children in the sample (34) were reported as distorting reality and/or creating imaginary friends. 17 children talked about imaginary people, places or animals of whom 7 had imaginary friends. 31 reported events to their parents as if they were true when their parents knew they were not.

With six of the children their fantasies involved fear of the dark. They created witches and monsters from shadows at night and they were confused as to whether their dreams were real or not. These children could be argued to be externalising their fears of the dark.

Imaginary friends have already been the subject of discussion in Chapter II; they can be ways of improving situations which are either deficient through the child's lack of social skills or the lack of real companions. These fantasies can be construed as a response to the child's emotional needs. 22 of the children exaggerated events that had happened to them or to other children: for instance, at the playgroup or within the family. In many cases such behaviour was a ploy to obtain the attention of their mothers as these stories occurred when the mothers were attending to siblings. Thus the children will distort reality when sufficiently motivated or anxious enough to do so, and, the misrepresentation appears to be a reaction to an emotive situation. In other children no obvious explanation can be found for their misrepresentation of reality. For instance, one boy told his mother a story about a trip to Edinburgh some neighbours were supposed to have made. He told so plausibly that the child's mother asked the neighbours about the trip only to find the event was a pure fabrication.

## Discussion

Games of simple combinations can involve the creation of imaginary beings for whom no model can be found. Piaget describes this form of symbolic combinations as somewhat superior to the preceding ones. Only one of his children J. invented this type of game systematically; it consisted of a cycle of episodes relating to a character who was entirely imaginary from the start. He goes on to state that fictitious characters only exist insofar as they provide a "sympathetic audience or a mirror for the ego." The 'Aseau' created by Piaget's daughter was a "help in all that she learned or desired, gave her moral encouragement in obeying orders and consoled her when she was unhappy." Data relating to

these phenomena were collected. One child animated his toys at night, "when his teddies have a world of their own" and make "an awful racket". Though this child's characters are not imaginary, his animation of his toys which his mother believed helped him over his fears of the dark, is not simply an example of animistic thought, but can be seen to be very similar to the creation of the "Aseau" who had an identical supportive role. Other children had imaginary friends whose function was largely in relation to the child's problems with authority: these will be considered later.

In games of compensatory combinations real situations are reproduced not for pleasure but in Piaget's terms to "correct reality". For instance, when Piaget's daughter J. was on a diet she made a whole scene about a meal. In games involving liquidating combinations a disagreeable situation is liquidated by reliving it in make-believe. The situation can be dissociated from the unpleasantness of its original context by being gradually assimilated through incorporation into other behaviours. For instance J. was afraid of sitting on a new chair at table. Subsequently she put her dolls in uncomfortable positions and said to them "it doesn't matter, it will be alright", repeating what had been said to her.

Similar reports were collected about the children in the sample. For instance mothers reported their children telling exaggerated stories. Very often these stories involved what was supposed to have happened at the playgroup or to other children, for example, one child who wanted a doll's house reported to her mother that at first one girl at the playgroup had a doll's house, the next day it was five girls and on subsequent days the number increased correspondingly. Another little girl would give exaggerated reports to her mother of what other people were supposed to have promised her for her birthday. An imaginary cat was created by another child and was said to closely resemble a pet which had recently died. This imaginary animal was presumably a replacement. All these examples can be considered as games of compensatory combinations.

Examples of liquidating combinations were found in the responses on content, (reality play questions) for instance one child re-created her father's near-fatal heart attack, which obviously caused great anxiety within the family at the time. The child was presumably assimilating the experience through playing it out in a less stressful situation away from the original context and thus coming to terms with it.

Alternative explanations for their behaviour can be found in psychoanalytic theory which is also discussed in Chapter II. Erikson considers play to be one of the major ego functions; though he studies children's play in different situations from Freud, he does not arrive at any fundamentally different conclusions as to its importance and function when he states that "the child uses play to make up for defeats, sufferings and frustrations" (Erikson, 1940).

In Freud's earlier formulation of his theory he indicates that in play the child can gratify wishes that cannot be satisfied in real life, and can project disquieting feelings and fears onto other people and objects. Children were assumed to be able to resolve sibling rivalries in this way and to be able to satisfy wishes to be grown up by pretending to act out adult roles. Data from the sample provided many examples of boys identifying with male adult roles (policemen, firemen etc.) and of girls identifying with adult female roles (mothers, nurses etc.). Equally interesting is that with few exceptions each sex kept to the appropriate adult roles. This indicates that by the age of four children have learned what are the appropriate roles for their sex and adhere to them. This finding is in line with the sex-appropriate preferences observed by Hartup and Zook (1960), who asked children of three and four to choose between toys such as guns, dolls, kitchen utensils and soldiers. Presumably these children would have made their choices in the context of their play activity.

In addition boys were noted to engage far more in hostile games (wars, robbers etc.). Marshall (1961) found expression of hostility to be important

for boys as they had to "shoot their peers dead" to be popular. She found boys engaged far more in hostile interactions with other children in both reality and dramatic play situations. She does not attempt any detailed explanation for the differences between the sexes, but briefly suggests an explanation along psycho-analytic lines by stating that boys of this particular age group "may be solving an Oedipal Complex at about this age".

Waelder (1933) in his discussion of play attaches importance to its function as "a leave of absence from reality as well as from the superego". The imaginary friends of certain children in this study illustrate the function of play in this respect. One little girl had an imaginary companion who was the collaborator in all her misdeeds. Another boy had "an owl on the tree" who was apparently responsible for enticing him to misbehave, that is, whenever this child was naughty his response was that "the owl in the tree" had told him to do it. This fantasy had been a frequent feature of the child's life in his third year but was appearing less often in his fourth. These imaginary friends provided escape from the superego. With two other children who had no peer contacts at all outside nursery groups, their imaginary friends presumably provided an escape from the lack of real companions. Both of these children had several imaginary friends: their play with them was a considerable feature of their lives, for example places for these friends had to be laid at the table, and both children were reported as spending much of their time in conversation on the telephone with these imaginary companions. The Newsons (1968) suggest that children of this age are not always successful in coping with the problems that social interaction can produce. They indicate that as a consequence solitary dramatic play with imaginary companions may be preferred by some children to play with real companions. Therefore, such fantasies may not only be an escape from loneliness but from the difficulties of peer-group interaction.

Freud's earlier formulations did not satisfy him later as to why children so frequently repeated unpleasant experiences in their play. Later (Freud, 1922) he postulated that unpleasant experiences are repeated because the replication of an incident reduces the excitement that the original experience created. Whatever the process may be (as conditioning and extinction, accommodation/assimilation) play in Freudian theory enables the child to master situations and come to terms with the real world. As discussed earlier, Piaget (1951) assigns the same function to games of liquidating combinations. In these games reality can be assimilated to the ego, while the ego is freed from the demands of accomodation. Piaget states that the function of this type of play is "to reproduce in their entirety scenes in which the ego ran the risk of failure thereby enabling it to assimilate them and emerge victorious". A learning theory explanation such as Mowrer's (1960) is less adequate here, since it would predict gradual extinction of such behaviour when reproduced outside the original context. The following evidence shows that reproduction of incidents can persist for months.

One little girl had been rushed to hospital for an emergency operation in an ambulance a few months before the interview and still very frequently played at being an ambulance rushing along the road. Her play provides a clear illustration of the therapeutic function of play which both Freud and Piaget emphasise.

This child's dramatic play always occurred in the context of a bedtime ritual. The Newsons (1968) indicate that such rituals can be explained in terms of the child's need for security as ritualized behaviours are reassuring for the child. The example referred to above is best described in Piagetian rather than Freudian terms as it is a clear example of an unpleasant situation being · dissociated from its original context and gradually being assimilated through being incorporated into other behaviours in this instance, in the sequence of a bedtime ritual. Moreover, this was the only type of dramatic play that she engaged in, otherwise her play consisted of painting, moulding plasticine etc. Indulgence in

dramatic play on this limited scale probably had as much value for her as frequent dramatic play activity had for other children. Such play therefore has to be considered on a qualitative as much as a quantitative basis. Children in whose behaviour dramatic play never otherwise (normally) appears, do resort to dramatic play when it has the function specified by Maier (1965) as a "natural auto-therapeutic agent". Perhaps children who suffer distressing experiences and subsequently require clinical treatment need this treatment not so much because of the experiences themselves but because they lack the ability to overcome the effects in their play on their own.

## ABSENCE OF FANTASY IN PLAY

### Introduction

The same questions relating to fictitious characters or the distortion of reality also revealed information about a group of children whose behaviour was of interest in that they were not reported as engaging in fantasy.

### Results

16 children in the sample did not distort reality or create imaginary characters: their mothers reported them as describing events in a purely factual way. This group was separated from the rest and contingency tables produced for the relative frequency of dramatic play, reality play and fantasy play (ratings 5, 4 v 3, 2, 1). While the analyses of the tables did not produce statistically significant results in the case of dramatic and fantasy play ($\chi^2$ = 2.06 and 0.88 respectively) the value of $\chi^2$ for reality play was significant beyond the 1% level ($\chi^2$ = 7.60, 1df).

### Table 6

|  | "Reality-bound" children | Children reporting fantasies | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reality Play High Levels | 5 | 26 | 31 |
| Reality Play Low Levels | 11 | 8 | 19 |
|  | 16 | 34 | 50 |

Table 7

|  | "Reality-bound" Children | Children reporting fantasies | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dramatic Play High Levels | 8 | 27 | 35 |
| Dramatic Play Low Levels | 8 | 7 | 15 |
|  | 16 | 34 | 50 |

Table 8

|  | "Reality-bound" Children | Children reporting fantasies | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fantasy Play High Levels | 2 | 10 | 12 |
| Fantasy Play Low Levels | 14 | 24 | 38 |
|  | 16 | 34 | 50 |

The failure of the dramatic and fantasy play variables to yield significant results is not surprising as reality play proves the more sensitive variable on other dimensions. This result emphasises that children who do not often engage in play which involves simple role-playing activities also do not engage in types of play which may have some therapeutic value for the child in helping him to overcome emotional situations. It may be that these children are well adjusted to reality and they do not need to assimilate to their ego to a great extent. These children can be termed "reality-bound" in the sense that what they report is invariably correct as a matter of fact and their play does not have an element of fantasy but is concrete and practical. Children of this type prefer to play with construction sets, to crayon and paint, in other words to engage in physical activities that often involve manual skills.

No significant results were obtained between the groups in relation to mothers' tolerance of childrens' fantasies. However the analysis of a 2 x 2 contingency

table comparing boys and girls with respect to their creation of fantasy showed that significantly more boys are "reality-bound" ( $\chi^2$ = 4.58, 1df, p < 0.05).

Table 9

|  | Children not reporting fantasies | Children reporting fantasies | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Boys | 13 | 15 | 28 |
| Girls | 3 | 19 | 22 |
|  | 16 | 34 | 50 |

This may be due to the fact that boys are given more opportunities to learn motor skills, while girls are allowed to give free rein to their imaginations.  In addition girls are not so inhibited in the expression of emotion.

Discussion

Support for the last point is found in the study by Sarnoff, Lighthall, Waite, Davidson and Sarason (1958).  In their work on the construction of anxiety scales among English and American primary school children, they state that "both cultures condone freer emotional expression in girls than boys".  Their hypothesis that girls in both countries would exhibit higher levels of anxiety than boys was confirmed.  The finding in this study that more boys than girls did not distort reality and did not misrepresent events to suit their moods and feelings is in line with the trends that Sarason et al suggested.  It also indicates that the cultural forces that shape this differentiation of behaviour between the sexes are pervasive and already operative before entry to school.

It is also worth pointing out that children can enjoy an element of fear in their play.  Play involving fear does not necessarily answer a deep emotional need in the child.  Two mothers reported their sons as enjoying being frightened. The Newsons (1968) found similar examples and Valentine (1942) indicates that children can use play to explore feelings and emotions.

## PLAY AND THE ROLE TAKING TASK

### Introduction

The Newsons (1968) state that much of the play of children of this age group is role-taking. Though comments of this type are easily confirmed by brief observation of children's play as play often involves role-enactment (i.e. the child actually takes on the role attributes of another and behaves overtly in accordance with them), there is little empirical evidence to establish whether such play involves role-taking (i.e. the child engages in the more exclusively cognitive process of adopting the perspective or attitude of another in a given situation). Great importance has been attached to the role of play in the social development of children. For instance Cameron and Magaret (1951) postulate that "to gain social perspective, a person must be able to put himself realistically in another's place, to have the other's attitudes and to be able to predict and understand what the other does. In childhood play, this is achieved by actively playing out the part." Childhood play is therefore accredited with the acquisition of role-taking skills.

### Results

As discussed in Chapter IV the modified Flavell test required the choice of appropriate gifts for parents by the child. If the child failed to do this, his actions meant that he had rejected appropriate adult gifts in favour of child gifts. The procedure enabled the sample to be divided into two groups, children who chose appropriately or not. Contingency tables were then constructed for levels of dramatic and reality play, the three highest levels v the two lowest. Analysis failed to produce a significant result in the case of dramatic play but yielded significant results for reality play ( $\chi^2 = 4.53$, 1df, p $< 0.05$).

Table 10

|  | Appropriate Choices | Inappropriate Choices | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reality play High Levels | 33 | 10 | 43 |
| Reality play Low Levels | 2 | 5 | 7 |
|  | 35 | 15 | 50 |

This result must be interpreted with some caution as one of the expected frequencies was 2.1. Even so, it seems clear that the children who were assigned the lowest levels of reality play were poorer in choosing gifts correctly for their parents.

Using the classification of children's reasons along the lines proposed by Bruner et al (1966), a comparison was made between the incidence of correct and incorrect choices of gift for mother and for father separately in relation to the different categories of explanation offered by the child (perceptible, affective, fiat-equivalent versus all other categories, including no response). The results were not significant in the case of choices for father $(\chi^2=1.31, 1df)$ but were significant for mother, ( $\chi^2$ = 4.40, 1df, p < 0.05).

Table 11

|  | Correct Choice for Father | Incorrect Choice for Father | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Categories of Response on lines proposed by Bruner et al (1966) | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| Fiat-equivalent, affective and perceptible |  |  |  |
| All other categories | 32 | 4 | 36 |
|  | 42 | 8 | 50 |

Table 12

| Categories of Response on lines proposed by Bruner et al (1966) | Correct choice for Mother | Incorrect choice for Mother | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fiat-equivalent, affective and perceptible | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| All other categories | 33 | 5 | 38 |
| | 39 | 11 | 50 |

The results between parents differ because children, who make correct responses for their mothers also show a lower incidence of perceptible, affective and fiat-equivalent reasons. The results also indicate that children who failed to make appropriate choices tended to give explanations which did not take the attributes of the recipient into account. This point is exemplified by one boy who seemed to have no role-taking skills whatever in that, when asked for the reason why he chose a car for his father, said "because I want to – he doesn't want one, but I do". However the difficulty in classifying reasons given by the children permit only tentative conclusions to be drawn.

Other contingency tables were analysed but no relationship between age, sex or social class and correct choices in the test were found. The ranges of age and social class were probably too limited for developmental variables to be reliably identified. Only the relationship between reality play and correct choices was found to be significant. This is not surprising as reality play often takes the form of games of families i.e. games which involve the acting out of parental roles. As girls predominate in such games, a significant difference between the sexes might have been expected on the test. Feffer and Gourevitch (1960) have demonstrated that skills in role-taking are positively correlated with cognitive skills and it may be that level of intellectual functioning is relatively more important than variable such as sex and social class, in the acquisition of such skills.

## Discussion

All of the results using the modified Flavell test must be interpreted with caution because of the difficulty in carrying out the task. For many of the children the test was as much one of sociability and outgoingness as of any other factor. Nevertheless the relationships indicated above are interesting as they suggest that certain types of dramatic play can provide opportunities for the child to acquire knowledge of others and thus to free himself from egocentrism. Flavell (1968) in mapping out the development of role-taking skills adopted an essentially developmental-descriptive approach. The results from this modified task suggest how other variables may be related to the acquisition of these skills in terms of an antecedent-consequent approach.

Scrutiny of the responses that were not subjected to statistical analysis showed that 26 children (56% of the sample) made choices that were sex and age appropriate. Among the children, who allocated child gifts to either of their parents, the usual pattern of response was to choose a toy, that could be considered sex appropriate for the parent, and then to allocate the adult gift on a sex appropriate basis when making a choice for their peers. For example, a mother would be given a doll and a little girl would be given nylons "for when she grows up". These choices suggest that children find it easier to make appropriate choices on a sex appropriate basis than on an age appropriate basis.

## PLAY AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

### Introduction

This section is concerned firstly with a minority group in the sample, the children who had imaginary friends. Subsequent results and discussion concern the whole of the sample and their relation to certain social behaviours as reported by their mothers and teachers.

### (a) Children having imaginary friends

The seven children who had imaginary friends were examined as a separate group as

they had stood out in the course of interviewing as being particularly shy and

reserved and would only speak in a very hesitant way or not at all. Fantasies

were a frequent occurrence in their lives - their mothers referred to the

children's fantasies by name and said that the children spent a considerable

amount of time reporting the activities of their imaginary friends and in "talking

to the friends".

## Results

The tester's ratings of the friendliness of the children (5, 4, v 3, 2 and 1)

were considered in relation to the incidence of imaginary friends. Analysis of

the contingency table yielded significant results ($\chi^2 = 4.43$, df1, $p < 0.05$).

### Table 13

|  | Children referring to imaginary friends | Children not referring to imaginary friends | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Testers rating of friendliness |  |  |  |
| Outgoing children | 1 | 28 | 29 |
| Reserved children | 6 | 15 | 21 |
|  | 7 | 43 | 50 |

These results suggest that children of this age, who have imaginary friends tend

to be less socially outgoing than their contemporaries. In addition, they are

more likely to be reserved in their behaviour to both adults and peers as the

mothers' ratings of the childrens' reactions to strange adults were positively

correlated with their reaction to strange children ($r = 0.382$, 48 df, $p < 0.01$).

The mothers' ratings of reactions to strange adults are corroborated by the

tester's ratings of friendliness to her ($r = 0.719$, 48 df, $p < .001$). This

correlation also adds general plausibility to the mothers' ratings. Differences

between this group of children and the rest of the sample did not reach statistical

significance when the teachers' ratings of friendliness to other children at the

beginning of term were considered. ( $\chi^2 = 0.119$, df 1, N.S.)

## Table 14

| | Children referring to imaginary friends | Children not referring to imaginary friends | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers' Ratings of friendliness towards the children at beginning of term | | | |
| Outgoing children | 3 | 25 | 28 |
| Reserved children | 4 | 18 | 22 |
| | 7 | 43 | 50 |

This result is not altogether surprising as the teachers' ratings were made at time intervals differing between three months and nine months after the interview. Nevertheless the ratings of the children were in the expected direction as four of the group of seven were rated as shy or needing to warm up at the beginning of their first term. In particular one little girl who was very much involved with her imaginary companion was rated by her teacher as being reserved to other children both at the beginning and end of her first term.

Six other children were reported to have had imaginary companions in the past, but their mothers reported at the time of interview that their children no longer referred to these fantasies. With some children such fantasies are only a passing phase and appear briefly about the age of three and a half. With the seven children considered as a separate group this type of fantasy was still persisting in their fifth year. The child most involved in fantasy was one of the most poorly adjusted socially. She was the little girl discussed above as being rated as shy both by the tester and her teacher. Her mother described her as living in a complete world of her own in that nearly everything the child said was make believe. This child could be considered as the paradigm of over-involvement in symbolic play.

## Discussion

The findings on the social correlates of imaginary friends are in line with other work on this subject. The Newsons (1968) suggest that children of four are not skilled at coping with the problems that arise through interacting with peers and consequently solitary dramatic play on a fantasy level will be preferable for some children to dealing with real playmates. Piaget (1951) proposes that symbolic play declines from the age of four because amongst other factors children learn to adapt themselves more effectively to physical and social reality. Continued involvement with an imaginary friend can be viewed as participation in an extremely complicated form of symbolic play and such play can be considered as evidence of failure to adjust to reality. A similar explanation is given in psychoanalytic theory: Waelder (1933) emphasises the importance of play as "a leave of absence from reality". The child who cannot cope with real friends of his own age can find a way out from this situation through fantasy. Involvement with an imaginary friend enables the child to satisfy his own needs but does not provide practice in accommodating to the needs of others. It can represent continued assimilation to the self and satisfaction of the ego.

Situational variables as much individual differences could affect the creation of fantasy figures. Imaginary friends could be seen as the child's response to isolation from peers. However all the children who had imaginary friends had opportunities for play with peers through attending nursery groups, and five out of seven played with other children in their home. The Newsons (1968) found fantasies occurring in 22% of their sample: they occurred more frequently in Class I and II than in Class V and more frequently in small families, especially with singletons. The lower incidence of fantasies of this type in the present study (14% against 22% by the Newsons) can probably be explained by the fact that the children were several months older on average. In the Newsons' study the interview took place within a month of the child's fourth birthday. The Newsons

concluded from their findings that mothers who reported fantasies of any sort were sympathetic and encouraging towards such fantasies. In contrast with some working class mothers there might be some anxiety over this sort of behaviour in a child. No significant differences between classes were found in the present study. The great majority of mothers (44) either encouraged fantasy or would have done so if the occasion arose, only one mother was not prepared to state her attitude, while five mothers said they would discourage such imaginative behaviours. The prevailing attitude of the mothers was that of a middle class group who according to the Newsons "typically welcome and encourage fantasy".

(b) <u>Friendliness of social behaviour reported by mothers and teachers</u>

Marshall's (1961) study on dramatic play, language and hostility indicated that a child's social acceptance by his peers and his friendliness towards them was related to the frequency with which he engaged in dramatic play activity. Charlesworth and Hartup's (1967) work on the frequency of social reinforcement in the peer interactions of nursery school children demonstrated that dramatic play situations were characterised by a high frequency of such behaviours. Though based on different theoretical positions, these two studies suggest that children who engage in dramatic play activity often are likely to be more friendly to their peers. The present study examined the relationship between dramatic play activity and friendliness through using (i) the mothers' ratings on the extent to which their children engaged in various categories of dramatic play activity and their ratings on the childrens' behaviour to peers and (ii) the mothers' ratings on play and the teachers' ratings on friendliness towards peers.

<u>Results</u>

(i) <u>Mothers' Reports</u> - The relevant ratings ᵔ (see Questionnaire, Part IV, page 155 relating to (i) the child's interaction with peers and his dependence on his mother and (ii) the child's reaction to strange children were correlated with the

dramatic play, reality play and fantasy play ratings. While the correlations, with one exception, for the child's social acceptance and the three categories of play did not yield significant results, a significant correlation was found for the child's reaction to strange children and reality play.

Table 15

|            | Dramatic Play | Reality Play | Fantasy Play |
|------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Question 1 | $r = .030$    | $r = -.001$  | $r = .017$   |
| Question 2 | $r = .269$    | $r = .323$   | $r = .166$   |

It is not surprising that the reality play rating proved to be the significant measure as it has proved to be the more sensitive measure in other instances. This result indicates that the extent to which children are friendly to strange children relates to the extent to which they engage in play, which involves the acting of real life situations. However, the result was only significant at the 5% level ($r = 0.323$, 48 df) and, as such, does not suggest a strong relationship between play and friendliness. Nevertheless it is in the expected direction and in line with other findings. It is worth pointing out that this result was obtained through using mothers' ratings while Marshall's results were obtained through the use of observational procedures. Crandall and Preston (1955) comment in their discussion on maternal behaviour that "the results of such research are inextricably bound to their data collection methods, results obtained by one method may be considerably different from those obtained by other methods". In view of this comment the above finding is considerably strengthened.

Marshall specifically investigated whether parents talked about the topics of dramatic play activity with their children, and found that the incidence of dramatic play activity in children was related to the extent they enjoyed such discussion with their parents. The present study simply attempted to establish whether a high level of general discussion about the parents' activities was

supportive of dramatic play activity. Both reality play and fantasy play were found to correlate significantly with the mothers' ratings of the amount of discussion they had with their children. (r's = 0.388 and 0.426 respectively, df = 48, p < 0.01) In Marshall's study fathers' discussion related to dramatic play activity; in the present study no relationship was found between fathers' discussion and any of the dramatic play indices. Discussion with elder siblings also related to dramatic play activity; dramatic play, but not reality or fantasy play, correlated positively with such discussion, (r = 0.306, df 48, p <0.05). It is not surprising that such a relationship should be demonstrated as mothers in discussing topics their children acted out in their play often mentioned that particular topics had been introduced to a child by an elder sibling. Marshall (1961) found such discussion only important for children older than four and a half. A large number of mothers (38) reported that their children enjoyed discussions of an informative nature with adults other than parents. This was so in every instance where another adult in addition to the parents was part of the family unit and very often the case where children were supervized by adults in their parents' absence.

## Discussion

A high level of discussion may be supportive of dramatic play activity and, as Marshall indicates, lead to socially desirable, behaviour with peers. However a high level of discussion can have other implications. A negative correlation was found between the mothers' ratings of their discussion with their children and their ratings of how happy their children were playing with other children without needing their mothers' attention (r = -0.298, 48df, p < 0.05). This result is on its face value somewhat against the expected trend of the findings. An explanation was obtained through scrutinising the additional remarks mothers made when assigning ratings to the levels of discussion they enjoyed with their

children. The mothers who assigned the two/ratings [highest] to their levels of discussion,
often said that their children liked to be in their mothers' company. One

mother, for example, spoke of her child "wanting to be in on everything". In

contrast mothers who assigned the lower ratings to their discussion tended to

say that their children preferred to play by themselves and spoke of their children

as being left to "get on" by themselves. The mothers in the first group may be

extremely gratifying mothers. Crandall, Preston and/Rabson (1960) suggest that such

mothers may develop habits of dependence in their children. This hypothesis helps

to explain why a negative correlation should be found between mothers' discussion

and their childrens' ability to get on with other children without having to request

their mothers' attention. A high level of maternal discussion can be supportive

of dramatic play activity in a child and consequently lead to socially desirable

behaviour with peers: alternatively it can be indicative of a relationship which

is extremely gratifying for the child and likely to lead to the establishment

of habits of dependency in the child.

A similar trend was found in Marshall's study. Marshall not only checked

dramatic play topics with home sources of information (talk with parents,

television and books etc.) but also investigated the number of hours during a

week children spent in discussion with members of their households. From her

findings Marshall concludes that "there was some evidence although not demonstration

that as the time children spent talking with family members increased, they talked

less frequently and had fewer interactions with peers at preschool." Marshall

offers explanations for her results by suggesting that children, who enjoy much

discussion with parents are ill-equipped to cope with pre-school peers, who will

not treat their remarks with as much deference and attention as gratifying parents

will. The importance of parental discussion for fostering childrens' dramatic

play appears to lie in the fact that parents can provide information and hence

improve the child's conceptual grasp of the world, which will in turn enable the

child to improvise situations in dramatic play. The fact that parent and child

engage in verbal interchange must be of importance, as linguistic skills are a prerequisite for dramatic play. Of the six boys in the study whose speech was difficult to understand because they were unable to pronounce certain consonants correctly, all with one exception were reported as engaging in dramatic play infrequently.

Marshall suggests that a possible way for parents to help their child's social adjustment to peers is for parents to talk to their child about more of the topics the child can use in play with other children. She indicates that as a consequence the child will use and play these topics more frequently with peers and will have a better chance of social acceptance in the nursery group. However, the topics a child uses in dramatic play activity are by and large a reflection of his everyday experience and it is difficult to see how Marshall's suggestion can be implemented in practical terms.

Marshall's comment could be changed into suggesting that parents talk more about everyday experiences with their children, but excessive discussion can have disadvantageous effects as discussed above.

## Results

### (ii) Teachers' reports

The teachers' ratings of the childrens' friendliness to peers both at the beginning and end of term did not provide any support for the relationship between dramatic play activity and friendliness. Both dramatic play and reality play ratings were correlated with the teachers' ratings and neither were found to be significant.

Table 16

Teachers' ratings of friendliness of children towards peers

|  | At the beginning of term | At the end of term |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Dramatic Play | -0.004 N.S. | 0.060 |
| Reality Play | 0.029 N.S. | 0.057 |

## Discussion

The failure of either of the dramatic play measures to correlate significantly with friendliness to peers on entry to school can be explained by the fact that the measures of dramatic play activity must be considered in relation to other measures of individual differences. A high level of dramatic play activity can be related, as pointed out in an earlier discussion, to the production of fantasy and the distortion of reality. This type of behaviour can be typical of a child, who is to some extent lagging behind his contemporaries in terms of social adjustment. The play of such a child can be marked by distorting assimilation and his play may serve to maintain his egocentrism. It may be that there is an optimal level of dramatic play activity. If there is over-involvement in dramatic play activity accompanied by the production of fantasies, such as imaginary friends and much dramatic play on a solitary basis, the child will probably be restricted by the boundaries of his own egocentrism. Alternatively, if there is lack of involvement in dramatic play activity, the child may suffer from the lack of experience in terms of social reinforcement, that such play provides. All the children in the sample except two were rated either as friendly or very friendly towards their peers by the end of their first term in school. The two exceptions were two children, who could be considered as representing the extreme ends of the dramatic play activity scale. One child was the little girl referred to in an earlier section as the paradigm of over-involvement in dramatic play activity and who was very much involved with her imaginary friend. The other child was the only child in the sample, who had never engaged in dramatic play activity; a boy who enjoyed a very individualistic type of play, the dismantling and erection of equipment which had electrical lights and batteries.

The first child, referred to above, was significantly one of the few children (5), who were reported by their teachers as exhibiting behaviour problems in their first term at school. This child's behaviour was reported as continuing

to be immature at the end of her first term in that she appeared to be reluctant to abandon the habits of early childhood such as sucking clothes or hair. In contrast the other children, who were reported as having problems had for the most part minor problems of dependence on mothers for a few weeks at the beginning of term.

## (c) Waiting, sharing and taking turns

In their study on the incidence of positive social reinforcement in the nursery school peer group Charlesworth and Hartup (1967) found that the amount of positive social reinforcement a child gave was related to his age and to the amount of reinforcement he had received. Of particular interest to this study is the fact that Charlesworth and Hartup found that positive social reinforcement was dispensed in a higher proportion when a child engaged in dramatic play activity than when he was engaged in other activities. This finding indicates, as Charlesworth and Hartup point out, that dramatic play situations are conducive to the child learning positive social skills with peers. In the study the categories of social behaviours, which were used as exemplars of positive social reinforcement, were based on Skinner's formulation. Skinner (1953) postulates that reinforcement from people gives rise to several important forms of generalized social reinforcers: these include amongst others (1) submissiveness (following a request or suggestion) (2) tokens (giving tangible physical objects). These two categories were considered to be subsumed under the everyday notions of waiting and sharing. If a child has learnt to wait with some degree of patience he can be considered to follow a request. Similarly if a child is able to share he will be able to engage in operations, involving the handing over of physical objects. The present study attempted to establish whether there was any relationship between dramatic play activity and these two behaviours. Both mothers and teachers were asked to provide ratings on the childrens' ability to wait and share.

Another behaviour, suggesting that another child takes a turn in play activities, was included in the questionnaire as Gesell (1940) lists this behaviour in his developmental sequence of play activities for the four year old. Mothers but not teachers were asked to supply ratings for this behaviour. Evidence for this behaviour was felt to require closer observation than the other two as any failure to wait or share would be far more quickly noticed; teachers might not be able to observe children sufficiently closely to provide ratings for this behaviour in large infant reception classes.

## Results.

No significant correlations were obtained between the mothers' ratings for waiting and sharing and all the categories of dramatic play activity with one exception. Childrens' ability to wait for their turn correlated negatively with the extent they engaged in reality play ($r = -0.308$, df 48, $p < 0.05$). This result indicates that the more children engage in play involving the acting out of real life situations the less likely they are to tolerate waiting for their turn. The other dramatic play indices, dramatic play and fantasy play, approached significant level of negative correlation ($r = -0.247$ and $-0.249$ respectively). The teachers' ratings on waiting and sharing were correlated with all the dramatic play indices. These correlations reached levels of positive statistical significance for waiting and the dramatic play and fantasy play ratings ($r = 0.318$ and $0.282$ respectively, df 48, $p < 0.05$). No other significant results were obtained. The results above are in the expected direction and as such contrast with the earlier results.

The final category of behaviour, suggesting another child took a turn in play activities did not correlate significantly with any of the dramatic play indices, but did so with other ratings, waiting and sharing, supplied by mothers ($r = 0.449$ and $0.637$, df 48, $p < 0.01$ and $0.001$ respectively). These results probably reflect the mothers' tendency to equate all three behaviours as sharing

and waiting were also positively related, $(r = 0.529$, df 48, $p < 0.001)$.

## Discussion

The apparent inconsistency between mothers' and teachers' ratings on waiting and play is not as great a contradiction as appears on first examination; the teachers' ratings were made at considerable intervals, in some cases up to nine months, after the mothers' ratings. Furthermore all the children had been subject to the socializing experience of one term's attendance at school. Though children may engage extensively in dramatic play activity when they are just four, this does not mean that the dramatic play activity has been so extensive that the behaviours that can be learnt in such situations have had time to generalize to other situations. It is not surprising that significant correlations between the dramatic play indices and waiting should only be found when the children are older. Children can only participate in joint activities from about the age of four and a half. Parten/(1943) have demonstrated the association between age and Newhall and social participation. It seems reasonable to assume that dramatic play activity as a variable affecting a child's behaviour, will be subordinate to age. Marshall (1961) found friendly and hostile behaviours positively related. It may be that the child of four, who is outgoing and friendly and therefore likely to engage in dramatic play frequently, will express his sociability in outgoing participant behaviours, which may or may not be socially acceptable. The negative correlation discussed earlier can be explained along these lines, and the subsequent positive relation between dramatic play activity and waiting can be explained by the fact that the positive social skills he has learnt in dramatic play situations have had time to generalize to other situations and in general the child's increasing experience of the world has led to his behaviour becoming more socially acceptable. Cruse (1966) indicates that children from three to six demonstrate an increasing awareness of socially desirable behaviour.

However, it is also of interest that the dramatic and fantasy play ratings should correlate positively with the teachers' ratings. The reality play measure has appeared throughout as the more sensitive measure in contrast to the other two measures. The reality play measure for the relationship discussed above was in the expected direction as it was positive and nearly reached statistical significance ($r = 0.256$, df 48). There were only few instances of dramatic play activity other than the reality play rating at a level which was statistically significant. The frequency with which the reality play measure appeared important indicates that this measure is of considerable significance and that mothers' ratings on this area of their children's behaviour are meaningful. However, the correlations are only significant at the 5% level and should be interpreted with some caution. Furthermore, though mothers and teachers could consider sharing in basically the same light, it is unlikely that they could view a child's ability to wait in the same way. Children have to wait in an orderly fashion, however free the infant school, whereas children do not have to wait in this manner in their own homes. A mother could only consider waiting in the same way as a teacher if she has experience of her child in a nursery group. Mothers' and teachers' ratings on waiting and sharing failed to correlate significantly. This can be explained in terms of the differences discussed above but also in the light of the growing social maturity of the children.

RANGE OF PEER CONTACT

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter IV peer group contact was assessed by obtaining information from the mothers on the number of contacts their children had both on a formal basis and an informal basis. The latter represents the peer contacts the children came into contact with through the informal play situation i.e.

children living near enough for there to be casual and unsupervized contact. This group excluded siblings, as the emphasis of the study was on contacts and experiences outside the immediate family, and children met at formal nursery groups. The formal contacts represents children met through attendance at a formal supervized nursery group. The pattern of the peer group contacts enjoyed by the children in the sample are discussed in terms of total peer contact and in terms of contact on a formal and informal basis. Though peer contacts are described in the above terms, contact on both a formal and an informal basis does allow children to play and interact with each other. Other means of coming into contact with peers which do not allow opportunity for prolonged play and interaction, such as attendance at dancing classes and Sunday School were discounted for the purposes of calculating peer contact numbers.

## Results

The table on page 109 shows the contribution made to total peer group contact by contacts enjoyed on an informal basis and contacts enjoyed through nursery groups.

## Discussion

Within the sample of 50 there was considerable variation in the number of contacts enjoyed; the range of contacts extended from no contacts with peers at all to contact on some level with 55 children. The table on page 109 indicates that nursery groups contributed the most substantial proportion whenever a child had a large number of peer contacts.

Table 17

| Children in sample | Informal contacts | Nursery contacts | Total Peer contacts |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 5 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 6 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 7 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| 8 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| 9 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 10 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 11 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 12 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| 13 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| 14 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| 15 | 0 | 9 | 9 |
| 16 | 4 | 7 | 11 |
| 17 | 4 | 8 | 12 |
| 18 | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| 19 | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| 20 | 6 | 9 | 15 |
| 21 | 6 | 9 | 15 |
| 22 | 2 | 14 | 16 |
| 23 | 10 | 9 | 19 |
| 24 | 1 | 19 | 20 |
| 25 | 1 | 19 | 20 |
| 26 | 1 | 19 | 20 |
| 27 | 2 | 19 | 21 |
| 28 | 2 | 21 | 23 |
| 29 | 1 | 23 | 24 |
| 30 | 5 | 19 | 24 |
| 31 | 6 | 19 | 25 |
| 32 | 6 | 19 | 25 |
| 33 | 3 | 23 | 26 |
| 34 | 2 | 24 | 26 |
| 35 | 3 | 24 | 27 |
| 36 | 4 | 23 | 27 |
| 37 | 8 | 19 | 27 |
| 38 | 4 | 24 | 28 |
| 39 | 2 | 27 | 29 |
| 40 | 5 | 24 | 29 |
| 41 | 10 | 19 | 29 |
| 42 | 6 | 24 | 30 |
| 43 | 2 | 29 | 31 |
| 44 | 0 | 34 | 34 |
| 45 | 5 | 29 | 34 |
| 46 | 0 | 38 | 38 |
| 47 | 2 | 49 | 51 |
| 48 | 4 | 49 | 53 |
| 49 | 4 | 49 | 53 |
| 50 | 6 | 49 | 55 |

## FORMAL PEER GROUP CONTACTS

### Introduction

The peer contacts which are described below are the contacts enjoyed by the children in the sample through attending nursery groups. These groups were either informally conducted playgroups or more structured nursery schools.

### Results

Attendance at a nursery group was a well established feature in the lives of many of the children in the sample as the table below indicates.

Table 18

| Attenders | Non-Attenders | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 38 (76%) | 12 (24%) | 50 |

The fact that the majority of the children in the sample attended some type of pre-school institution at the time of interview could be ascribed to the fact that many children in the survey were recruited into the sample through contacting nursery group leaders. However, closer examination of mothers' remarks showed that 52% of the children, who were recruited into the sample through contacting the Medical Officer of Health, had attended a nursery group at some time.

Table 19

| | Attenders | Non-Attenders |
|---|---|---|
| Nursery group | 15 (30%) | 0 |
| M.O.H. group | 26 (52%) | 9 (18%) |

Attenders in the above table refers to children who had attended a nursery group at some time in the past.

### Discussion

For the children attendance at a nursery group depended more on their mothers' attitude than any other factor such as finance, availability of a nursery group place. Only one child, who had attended a nursery group but no longer did

so, was removed because of financial reasons. Two children had ceased to attend for different reasons. One mother felt that her child had not learnt sufficient formal skills and had removed her child. The other mother had to study and work since the birth of her child and had removed him from nursery school when she had been able to stop working in order to enjoy his company for a few weeks prior to entry to infant school. The importance of mothers' attitudes will be discussed later. The Newsons (1968) found that only 11% of their sample attended any sort of nursery group. The difference between the number of children reported as attending a nursery group in the Newsons' study and the present study is accounted for by (1) the survey was conducted in largely middle class areas, (2) facilities for pre-school children expanded rapidly in the second half of the 1960s.

The children went on average to their nursery groups for three morning sessions. Eight children enjoyed their nursery groups so much that they went to every session, but only two of the children attending nursery groups at the time of interview attended on a full-time basis.

Two other formally organized groups for pre-school children were noted in the course of interviewing, Sunday School classes and dancing classes. Five children were reported as already attending Sunday School regularly, while three girls attended dancing classes. The majority of children (44) went to children's parties.

## PEER CONTACT WITHIN DIFFERENT FORMAL GROUPS

### Introduction

It was not a major aim of this study to report and assess variability in types of pre-school institution; however, it became apparent through discussion with the mothers that the nursery groups differed considerably in their aims and methods and were valued accordingly by mothers, and consequently children's contact with peers could be affected by the ethos of the group they attended.

Swift (1964) in discussing research findings of the effects of attendance at nursery groups points out that there has been a tendency to treat the nursery situation as representing a constant and given set of stimuli that can be expected to have a specified effect on individuals exposed to the situation. She indicates that there has been comparatively little attempt to define the nursery situation psychologically in particular the situational variables that are presumed to bring about expected changes in behaviour. The general pattern of studies, which have attempted to assess the effects of nursery school training has been to match children on variables such as I.Q. socio-economic status, ordinal position in family etc. and then to compare children as to whether they attended a nursery group or not. The tendency has been to ignore the nursery situation as a variable, though there have been a number of studies investigating specific programmes, e.g. Jersild and Bienstock (1931) investigated programmes designed to increase children's ability to sing.

The material provided by the mothers in this study indicates that the considerable variety in nursery groups must be taken into account when assessing the effects of nursery attendance. The groups the children in the sample attended varied in their size, organization, aims and social status. This variability is not surprising as the supervision of facilities for pre-school children has come under the province of local Medical Officers of Health, through the provisions of The Nurseries and Child Minders Act of 1948. (This area of responsibility was transfered to the Social Service Department of local authorities in April, 1971.) This Act lays down criteria for registration which include specified provision of lavatories, food and fireguards etc. but does not specify quality of attention or type of equipment to be provided. Consequently the woman who wishes to take a child into her home to mind, while the mother works, simply to supplement her income is assessed under the same regulations as the woman who is genuinely interested in pre-school education and wishes to make a worthwhile contribution in this area.

## Results

The children in the study attended groups, which ranged in size from 50 children, meeting in a large church hall, to eight children playing in the front room of a small semi-detached house. The opportunities enjoyed by children meeting in groups of such diverse size must be affected by the physical setting and space available. The size of the group also determines the number of adults the child meets and his opportunities for socialization by adults other than his parents. Not surprisingly there was a significant positive correlation between the number of peer and adult contacts ($r = 0.741$, df 48, $p < 0.001$). Nursery groups varied not only in size but in the sex of children attending; one group apparently recruited only girls. Other nursery groups were valued locally in that they had apparently become the accustomed nursery groups for the preparatory departments of local independent schools. Even this section of the educational system does not appear to be immune from socially divisive forces. Furthermore nursery groups varied in their aims and were valued accordingly by mothers. One mother spoke disparagingly of a local nursery group and said that "they only play there" and preferred to send her child to a more formal nursery school which aimed to teach children verbal and numerical skills. Such nursery groups are probably the exception rather than the rule. A more disconcerting type of pre-school institution are nursery groups to which mothers send their children only because they have to work and no alternative nursery is available. Individuals who run such groups can apparently capitalize on the mothers' need and run institutions which ignore mothers' wishes as to how their children are treated. An example of this was provided by one nursery where mothers were not allowed, despite their expressed requests to do so, to accompany their children on their entry to the nursery and were not allowed to participate in any nursery sessions. The consequence of this was that young children were left on the doorstep on their first day and introduced abruptly into the nursery without the presence of their mothers to allow them to become gradually accustomed to the new situation.

This resulted in one child in the survey being very unhappy. Arsenian (1943) indicates that the presence of a familiar adult is crucial to the successful adjustment of the young child to an unfamiliar situation; the adult's withdrawal in such a situation results in the child exhibiting a high degree of insecurity and non-adaptive behaviour such as crying, withdrawal etc., while the adult's continued presence enables the child to explore and come to terms with the new situation with the result that once the child is familiar with the new situation the adult's withdrawal does not result in anxiety and disturbed and disruptive behaviour.

## Discussion

The above material has been recorded in order to point out how variable pre-school institutions can be and that as Swift (1964) indicates there has been a tendency to regard experience in a nursery group as having a specified effect on the individuals attending such groups. Attending a morning playgroup with his mother is likely to be a completely different experience for a child to being left in a completely strange situation, which he is probably unable to comprehend. Such an experience must seem like rejection for the child. The variability in nursery provision has been insufficiently considered in discussions on the effects and value of pre-school provision. It is likely that there will continue to be great variability in the emotional, physical and intellectual climates found in voluntary nursery groups, where supervision has passed from local health authorities to Social Services Departments. Moreover differences in standards and aims between voluntary nursery groups and the nursery classes, which form part of the responsibility of Local Education Authorities, are likely to increase with the recent increased financial provision and interest on the part of local and national authorities in this part of the educational system.

FORMAL EXPERIENCE - IMPORTANCE OF MOTHERS' ATTITUDES

Introduction

Mothers were asked about their attitude to their childrens' peer contacts and for their opinions about the importance of nursery experience for young children, and their reasons when appropriate for sending a child to a nursery group in Part I of the questionnaire. In the areas the sample was drawn from, there were several nursery groups and it was assumed that in these areas attendance at nursery groups would be determined by mothers' attitudes rather than lack of places. Furthermore the sample was mainly middle class and again it was assumed that financial difficulties within a family would not prevent children attending nursery groups.

Results

The majority of mothers in the survey regarded nursery experience as a matter of some importance.

Table 20

| Favourable attitudes | | | Unfavourable attitudes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very important | Important | Quite important | It didn't matter | Not particularly keen |
| 20 (40%) | 13 (26%) | 7 (14%) | 7 (14%) | 3 (6%) |

As the figures above show when mothers were asked to rate the importance with which they regarded nursery experience the overwhelming majority of mothers (80%) were prepared to assign some degree of importance to nursery experience; while only a minority (20%) had neutral or unfavourable attitudes. (Mothers' attitudes to attendance was found to correlate positively with peer group contact $(r = 0.331, df = 48, p < 0.05)$.)

The replies are not surprising in view of the recent expansion and interest in pre-school facilities. Within the sample mothers, who had brought up other children without having pre-school facilities available sent or did not send their

children to nursery groups according to their opinion of nursery groups. Mothers of three children or more did not differ in their attitude from mothers of smaller families ( $x^2$ < 0.01, df 1, N.S.).

Table 21

|  | Mothers of one or two children | Mothers of three or more children | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Favourable Attitudes | 26 | 14 | 40 |
| Unfavourable Attitudes | 7 | 3 | 10 |
|  | 33 | 17 | 50 |

Furthermore within the sample Class I and II mothers did not differ significantly in their attitudes to Class III mothers ( $x^2$ = 0.13, df 1, N.S.).

Table 22

|  | Class I and II Mothers | Class III Mothers | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Favourable Attitudes to nursery group attendance | 25 | 15 | 40 |
| Unfavourable Attitudes | 5 | 5 | 10 |
|  | 30 | 20 | 50 |

Failure to establish class differences within the sample is not surprising as though Class III families, as defined by the Registrar-General's classification, could be distinguished from other families the fact that the families lived in these areas meant that their life styles could be described as oriented to middle rather than working class values.

When appropriate mothers were asked for their reasons for sending a child to a nursery group and were required to rank three reasons in order of importance. Thirty-nine mothers answered this question (Question 22, Part I of the questionnaire) although only 38 children attended a nursery group at the time

of interview. One mother whose child attended a group was unable to place any
reason as being the most important: two other mothers whose children no longer
attended nursery groups gave reasons for originally sending their children.
Twenty-three mothers ranked first in order of importance the fact that nursery
groups provided children with the opportunity to mix with children of their own
age: 16 mothers rated as the major reason for sending a child to a nursery
group the fact that they considered that experience in such a group would be
of some educational value to their child when he started school: no mother rated
as most important the fact that attendance at a nursery group for her child gave
her some relief from looking after her child.

## Discussion

The implications of these rankings can only be judged in the light of addit-
ional comments that mothers made and these will now be discussed. Mothers may be
influenced in any decision to send a child to a nursery group by the strength
of their wishes to retain complete care and control of their child for as long
as possible or whether they wish their child to be exposed to the care and
control of other adults. Some mothers are apparently reluctant to allow other
individuals to have any part in the socialization of their child. In fact such
mothers may only reluctantly send their child to infant school. Of 10 mothers
who expressed neutral or unfavourable attitudes to nursery attendance, one
mother expressed her wish to keep her child with her as long as possible while two
other mothers had rather more hostile attitudes. They passed remarks to the
effect that they "could do better for their child" and one mother went so far as
to say that she believed mothers who sent their child to nursery groups were
"shelving their responsibilities". Five other mothers, who did not regard nursery
experience as of considerable importance for a child, indicated that little could
be gained from attending a nursery, as their children had sufficient peer
contacts. The general trend of the comments made by these mothers was that
nursery experience was only valuable if a child had very few peer contacts or if
the child had no siblings. They considered that only an eldest child would benefit

from a nursery group. In contrast six mothers from the group of mothers who

valued nursery experience primarily because it afforded their child the chance

to mix more with peers, also made comments to the effect that children needed

to get away from their mothers, one mother even believed that a stranger could

"do more" with her child. Willingness to send a child to a nursery group may

depend very much on the emotional climate parents establish in bringing up their

children and to what extent parents are restrictive. Baldwin (1949) found

generally favourable effects for the socialization of children for children,

who came from what he characterized as "democratic homes". He found that

children who came from such homes had considerably more nursery experience than

children who came from more restrictive homes.

The majority of mothers valued nursery experience precisely because it

enabled their child to widen their contact with peers and that their children

could have the experience of belonging and learning to co-operate within a

group. As stated above 23 mothers ranked as their first reason for sending a

child to a nursery group the fact that such experience gave a child the opportunity

to mix with his peers. A smaller number of mothers, 16, ranked first the fact

that nursery experience would be of some educational value for their child.

However, these two groups of mothers may not differ to any great extent. Only

three mothers of the group of 16 valued nursery experience in that it might

increase a child's cognitive and motor skills. For instance, one mother, a

teacher, spoke of the opportunities her child had in cutting, sticking paper etc.

and said she could not possible provide these opportunities for her child at

home. Nine mothers within this group of 16 passed comments to the effect that

they valued nursery experience as it gave their children the opportunity to

learn how to behave in a group and that children could learn how to wait for

their turn and queue for things. These mothers referred to the organized routine

of a nursery group and that nursery experience gave children a "regular pattern"

to be accustomed to. The mothers in this group could be said to value nursery experience primarily for the opportunity it gave their children to acquire social skills. These mothers may not be so very different from the larger group of 23 mothers many of whom stressed that their children needed "to mix more" and as discussed earlier these mothers were also concerned that their children learnt to adjust to other adults.

No mother placed as a major reason of importance for sending to a nursery group the fact that doing so could give her a break from looking after the child. In fact only 14 mothers were prepared to rank this reason second in order of importance. Though the need to give socially desirable responses cannot be ruled out here, this may well represent the truth as sending a child to a nursery group can cause a mother more rather than less bother when the effort involved in taking and collecting the child from the nursery group is considered. One mother pointed out that sending a child to a nursery group gave her less rather than more time and another mother said that she had delayed sending her child until she had got over the initial bother of a new baby. However, one mother who ran a playgroup as well as having a child attending a playgroup indicated that the mother-child relationship improved considerably as a result of attendance and consequently younger siblings were often enrolled in nursery groups at an earlier age than the first child.

In general mothers were fairly enthusiastic about nursery attendance for their child. Six mothers spoke of improvements in their child's behaviour which they attributed to the child attending a nursery group and when questioned as to whether their child's improvement might simply be the result of maturation they would not agree with this and would still attribute the improvement to nursery experience. Mothers in this group valued nursery experience as it had according to them helped their children to overcome difficult or unsettling experiences. For instance, one mother believed that nursery experience had helped her child to settle down after moving from the U.S.A. to this country and another thought

that her child had been helped over the effects of a traumatic stay in hospital. For the most part mothers valued nursery experience for the opportunities for social adjustment it provided but three mothers indicated that nursery experience was of no value if a child was not taught formal skills. One mother removed her child from a nursery group as her child learnt nothing in the traditional sense and another sent her child to one particular nursery school precisely because the school was concerned to start formal teaching. Though mothers by and large were happy for their children to mix with other adults and children of their own age there were two other mothers who, although they sent their children to nursery groups, spoke in a hostile and disapproving manner of mothers who used nursery groups as "dumping grounds" and whose attitudes were very similar to the mothers discussed earlier who did not send their children.

## INFORMAL PEER GROUP CONTACTS

### Introduction

The peer contacts which are described below are the contacts enjoyed by the children in the sample independently of nursery groups. Such contacts will be children living near by either very close in age to the children in the sample or older children who were often friends of siblings. The data came from the mothers' replies to Question 14 in Part I of the questionnaire.

### Results

Table 23

| Number of children in sample | Number of Peer Contacts |
|---|---|
| 5 (10%) | 0 |
| 7 (14%) | 1 |
| 9 (18%) | 2 |
| 3 (6%) | 3 |
| 8 (16%) | 4 |
| 6 (12%) | 5 |
| 8 (16%) | 6 |
| 1 (2%) | 7 |
| 1 (2%) | 8 |
| 2 (4%) | 10 |

## Discussion

From the above table it will be apparent that the peer contacts enjoyed on this basis by the children in the sample varied considerably. Swift (1964) in discussing whether nursery experience is a necessary one for all children points out that in early childhood social play is usually limited to small groups of two to three children and she goes on to indicate that groups of this size are often available to children in their own neighbourhood. Her discussion tends to indicate that as a consequence nursery experience is not necessary for all children. However, as the table shows 12 of the children only met one other child or had no peer contacts at all outside nursery groups. For such children nursery experience is likely to be a vital one. Children cannot be assumed to easily come into contact with sufficient children of their own age. However, 9 children in the sample did have one peer contact with whom they spent 15-20 hours a week. Such peer contacts lived nearby and were obviously the type of contact which the Newsons (1968) refer to as ideal as they indicate that the ideal arrangement for a child of four is to have a "special friend" who lives a safe running distance from a child's home. A safe distance could be under 100 yards as the Newsons found that children of four are rarely allowed further than this from their homes.

Of more interest are the children who had little peer contact. Though the children in the sample enjoyed by and large favourable conditions in that the majority lived in semi-detached houses with gardens in uncrowded roads, nevertheless nearly a half (21) had minimal or no contact with peers outside nursery groups (i.e. 0-2 children). Twelve children did not attend nursery groups and had peer contacts of 6 or less. Six of this group could not be described as disadvantaged in terms of peer contact through not attending a nursery group as they had 4 to 6 peer contacts whom they met frequently during the day as they were fortunate enough to live near other children of their age.

However, the other 6 had little or no contact with their peers and the mothers'

replies as to the amount of time their children spent with each of their peer

contacts was particularly important in that the near isolation of these

children was revealed.

Table 24

| Number of children | Number of Contacts | Hours spent with peer contacts |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 | 1 | 4-6 hours per week |
| 2 | 2 | 1 hour only spent with each contact per week |
| 1 | 3 | 1 hour only spent with each contact per week |

As indicated above these children were more or less isolated and though they

had peer contacts the contact was in fact minimal.  Three mothers in this group

possessed unfavourable attitudes to nursery attendance and their general

attitude appeared to be that, as their children had contact with siblings or

cousins, nursery experience was not necessary for their children.  The mothers'

own relationships affected the peer contacts of their children but this will be

discussed more fully later on.  Sixteen children attended nursery groups but had

under three peer contacts on an informal basis.

Table 25

| Number of children | Number of Contacts |
|---|---|
| 3 | 0 |
| 6 | 1 |
| 7 | 2 |

The number of contact hours have not been included in the above table as they

varied considerably and the mothers' reports lacked precision regarding the

longer periods of contact.

As discussed in Chapter IV the problem of overlap was not pursued.  However, the mothers' conversation made it quite clear that in the majority of cases children met through nursery groups and children met on an informal basis were for the most part two separate groups.  Children would only play with the same children at nursery groups and on an informal basis only if the children lived close to each other or if their mothers were themselves friendly.

## PLACES OF PLAY AND RESTRICTIONS ON PLAY

### Introduction

Material on these points was obtained from questions 15, 16 and 17 in Part I of the questionnaire.

### Results

### Places of Play

### Table 26

| Child's own house and garden | Another Child's house | Road | Other Places |
|---|---|---|---|
| 41 | 36 | 14 | 8 |

### Table 27

### Restrictions on Play

| Lack of Play Space | Traffic Conditions | Bad Weather |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 12 | 16 |

The overwhelming majority of mothers do not restrict their children's choice of friends.  Only four mothers said that they would place restrictions on their children's friends and in these instances they were afraid of bullying by older children.

### Discussion

For the majority of children in the sample playing with another child either in their home or another child's home was a frequent experience.  Sometimes

these arrangements occurred naturally as children lived in close proximity to each other but with other mothers these arrangements were more the result of the mothers' planning and arrangements. Seven children were reported as only playing with other children in their own homes. Whilst no particular inference need be drawn for five of the children, with two of the children this was because of the children's shyness and lack of ease in unfamiliar situations. The mothers of both of the two children sent their children to nursery groups and were very much in favour of their children attending nursery groups as they felt that was the only means open to them of helping their children's shyness.

In fact one mother believed that it was only possible for her child to attend infant school in the near future because her experience at nursery group would enable her to cope with the changes involved in starting school, and the other mother believed that nursery experience had enabled her child to overcome the disturbing effects of a stay in hospital. The mothers' reactions in both these instances suggest that while children can have peer contact on an informal basis, they nevertheless felt that this was insufficient and only nursery experience could provide the preparation necessary in terms of social experience for entry to infant school. Whether a child played in the road i.e. on the pavement depended more on mothers' assessment of a child's traffic sense than on what appeared to be the actual conditions. For instance one mother reported her child as playing quite happily on a main road which was quite congested while another mother severely restricted her son's access to the pavement, although this family lived in a side road off the main road referred to above, and which was a far quieter road in terms of traffic usage. Other places referred to as places where the children played were either local parks to which the children were taken by their mothers or service roads behind the backs of old houses.

Only two mothers reported lack of play space as a restriction on their child's play. This is not surprizing in view of the fairly affluent neighbourhoods in which the survey was conducted. Nearly a quarter of the children were affected by traffic conditions but more children (16) were affected by bad weather. In fact two children who had no contacts outside nursery groups were not isolated in the summer but had some contact with other children living near by. Two other children whose mothers reported that their play with other children was restricted by bad weather made remarks to the effect that they took special trouble to arrange more contacts for their children through visiting friends of their own who had children of a similar age but who lived at a distance during the winter. This amply illustrates how mothers' attitudes and their own friendships affect their children and this will now be the subject of discussion.

The mothers' responses and their additional remarks made it clear that very often a child's peer contacts will reflect a mother's contacts with other mothers of young children. Six mothers made comments to the effect that they made special efforts to come into contact with other mothers of young children for their own benefit and their children's. All the mothers who passed remarks of this type reported that their children had four or more peer contacts enjoyed independently of a nursery group. One mother described how she and her friends took their children out almost every afternoon to the local park and it was clear that the children of this group of mothers never lack peer contacts. Another mother whose son had no peer contacts whatsoever outside nursery group lived very near this mother. The isolation of the lonely child was mentioned to the first mother described above and this mother felt that the child's isolation was very much his mother's fault in that it was very easy for mothers to come into contact with other mothers with children of the same age and so provide their children with contacts. She pointed out that mothers of young children

could easily meet each other at local authority clinics or similar institutions. The same point was made in a different way by mothers whose children had few peer contacts on this informal basis. For instance one mother remarked that she felt it was her own shyness that prevented her from making the effort to meet other mothers with children in the same age group and she wondered whether she ought to make a deliberate effort to overcome her shyness. Another mother who was somewhat older than the mothers in the sample and appeared somewhat diffident in her maternal role mentioned that she was glad she was not a "young mother" as she felt that young mothers were competitive over the upbringing of their children and she tended to avoid contact with mothers of young children. Working mothers, who worked either full-time or part-time, could be viewed as having less time to cultivate friendships with other mothers of young children. The children of such mothers enjoyed the same mean number of peer contacts on an informal basis (3) as the children of mothers who did not work. This gives added weight to the suggestion above that mothers' own friendships can affect their children's peer contacts to a considerable extent.

## PEER CONTACT AND OTHER SOCIAL VARIABLES

### Introduction

As discussed in Chapter IV mothers supplied data on the number of contacts their children enjoyed through informal playgroups and through nursery groups. The total number of contacts children enjoyed through these two sources was taken as their total contacts with peers. Though the data can only be regarded as approximate for children, who enjoyed many contacts with peers, it is likely to be precise in the case of children, who have little or no contact with peers. Nevertheless despite the variability and lack of precision that cannot be ruled out in collecting data of this type, the measures obtained do indicate relationships between extent of peer group contact and other measures.

## Results

### (a) Mothers' ratings

Peer group contact was not found to correlate significantly with either of the mothers' reports on their children's behaviour with other peers i.e. their children's ability to get along with other children without needing their mothers' attention or their children's reaction to strange children (Questions 1 and 2, Part IV) (r = 0.054, -0.036 N.S.). This result is to be expected and it reflects the middle class nature of the sample. The Newsons (1968) point out that middle class mothers consider the provision of suitable companions for their children as much part of their task as mothers as the provision of food and clothing. Peer group contact also correlated positively with adult contact. (r = 0.741, df 48, p < 0.001). Again this result is not surprising and should be expected on a common sense basis, as the average child is often only supervized on a regular basis by adults other than parents through attending nursery groups, and many nursery groups only operate through the efforts of mothers prepared to play a part in the running of the group.

As the table below indicates more children in the study (41) had had the experience of supervision by adults other than parents through attending nursery groups than by other arrangements.

Table 28

| Children supervised by adults through nursery attendance | Children supervised by relations | Children supervised by friends or neighbours | Children supervised by employees |
|---|---|---|---|
| 41 (82%) | 21 (42%) | 23 (46%) | 6 (12%) |

The tester's rating of the children correlated positively with peer group contacts. This result reflects the previous statistic as the child who is exposed to many adults through attending nursery groups is less likely to react negatively to a strange adult (r = 0.331, df 48, p < 0.05). The tester found most of the children friendly despite an initial shyness on the part of some children though

a few boys (3) were so withdrawn that they would well merit being characterized as superior-immature, the description used by Ilg and Bates (1965) to describe boys of this age group whose social skills lagged far behind their motor and intellectual development.

It is of interest to note that only six mothers reported their children as taking other children's toys or bringing toys home from nursery group. However, a further nine mothers said that although their children did not behave in this way they nevertheless still had a tendency to regard everything in the home as their own. The mothers' comments suggested that their children could discriminate toys or other articles belonging to peers but could or would not make this discrimination so easily at home.

## Results

### (b) Teachers' ratings

The examination of the teachers' ratings indicated that peer group contact prior to entry to school was a variable of some importance for the child's adjustment to school. Peer group contact was found to correlate positively with the teacher's ratings for overall adjustment ($r = 0.288$, df $= 48$, $p<0.05$). The greater friendliness of children, who enjoyed more peer contacts prior to entry to school might account for the above statistic;  peer group contact was found to correlate positively with friendliness to other children at the beginning of term ($r = 0.281$, df $= 48$, $p.<0.05$). However, any advantage conferred by favourable pre-school experiences in terms of peer contacts appears to be only an initial advantage that does not persist as the correlation between peer group contact and friendliness to other children at the end of term though positive was not significant ($r = 0.171$, N.S.). Though the children who enjoyed greater peer group contact were more friendly at the beginning of term, by the end of term all the children in the sample were either assigned the same rating of friendliness or were rated as friendlier with two exceptions. Two children were rated as still "needing to warm up". These were the two children discussed

on page 103 earlier in this chapter as being at either end of the dramatic play scale. Peer group contact was not found to correlate positively with the other indices of social behaviour with peers sharing and waiting for which teachers were asked to supply ratings (r's = 0.100,-0.245, N.S.)

## Discussion

The results are of some interest in that teachers' ratings are measures in which variability cannot be ruled out, and that the results could have been distorted by one child. This child was one of only two in the sample, who was reported as having no peer contacts. This was the position at the time of interview and the child was recorded as such. However, the child had attended full-time nursery school as his mother was in full-time employment, up to a month before the interview. This child had been in a nursery since a few months old and his background was in fact that of a child with many peer contacts. He had only left nursery school as his mother had ceased to work full-time. Nevertheless despite the two factors discussed above, children with greater peer group contacts do appear to be more friendly to peers on entry to school and to be rated higher for overall adjustment. As discussed earlier, the extent of a child's peer contact depends on whether he attends a nursery group. Such groups expose a child to a changing situation with the arrival of new children and the departure of others. This exposure to new children is one of the factors involved in adjusting to infant school and the child who has had previous experience of such a situation is to be expected to do better on entry to school. However, the relationship between greater peer contact and overall adjustment can also be explained along the line that nursery groups involve greater contact with adults. The mothers' reports indicated that peer and adult contacts were positively related for pre-school children. With this underlying relationship children with greater peer contacts in the pre-school period are to be expected to adjust slightly better to infant school as they are familiar with situations where they are supervized by adults other than parents.

However the results indicate that there is only a slight initial advantage as the relevant correlations are only at a low level of significance. None of the children in the sample could be described as disadvantaged. On the contrary the children were middle class and in some cases came from fairly privileged environments: it is interesting in view of the generally supportive and favourable background that the children enjoyed that peer group experiences could have any difference at all. It seems reasonable to suppose that with children who enjoyed less favourable conditions especially children living in high rise flats, that variability in peer group experience might prove to be a more influential factor. Furthermore the classic studies by Parten et al show that pre-school children will only play in small groups and Swift (1964) argues as a consequence nursery experience (that is experience in far larger groups) is not a necessary one for the socialization of children. The finding in the present study suggests conversely that though play may be restricted to small groups children nevertheless benefit from being exposed to large groups of peers.

## (c) Social Experience

A pre-school child's range of social experiences is determined by his total life situation and not simply by nursery experience or the lack of it. Children are affected by their parents' attitudes and activities and the responses to the questions in Part III of the questionnaire, which explored parental attitudes and participation in their children's activities, provided information on the children's experiences outside the home and nursery situations.

## Results

In scrutinizing the data it became apparent that although the majority of the children could be regarded as coming from highly nurturant homes in that the children received a considerable amount of attention from parents, the extent to

which children had wide social experiences outside the home depended on their

social class and the extent to which their fathers took an active role in the

children's upbringing.

The children were viewed as coming from highly nurturant homes on the

basis of the replies to questions 8 and 9 in Part III. These questions showed

that the majority of children were read to frequently as the table below indicates.

Table 29

| Frequency of reading: | Every day | Most days | Once or twice a week |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 68% | 20% | 12% |

Similarly the overwhelming majority of mothers would participate in their

children's games:  90% of mothers would participate by either actually joining

in or providing suggestions;  of the 10% minority who did not participate with

6% of the mothers the lack of participation stemmed from their children's

independence and refusal to allow their mothers' participation in their activities

rather than from the mothers' unwillingness to come down to their children's

level. By and large the children in the sample could be viewed as coming from

favourable nurturant homes with a high degree of verbal communication between

mother and child. There were frequent references to "piles of books" when

mothers were discussing the books their children had and how often they were

read to. However, although no child in the sample could be viewed as deprived,

the experiences of some of the children were so vast at the age of four that they

made the other children appear very limited in their social experiences by

comparison.

The children of professional fathers, who took an active role in their

children's upbringing had wider social experiences than children of non-

professional men. The Newsons (1968) found that the higher the social class of

a father the more he is likely to be highly participant in his children's

upbringing. The Newsons suggest that this trend occurs because the parental

role can be more educative than nurturant **and** professional men are ahead of other fathers because they enjoy contact with a child, for whom at the age of four verbal communication is now meaningful. In this survey it was the children of the Class I and II fathers who had the unusual and unfamiliar brought into their lives. The children's lives were extended beyond the immediate home situation by their fathers' participation in their care. This was not only because the fathers attempted to interest their children in specific topics but also because the children were **able simply to** accompany their fathers in their own activities. Children were reported as accompanying their fathers into hospitals, going into laboratories, collecting biological and geological specimens and going into art studios. It is very likely that only professional men who enjoy a certain amount of freedom in their work are in a position to provide their children with this type of experience. No child of a non-professional father was reported as accompanying his father on any activities other than those associated with the upkeep of a home such asgardening, cleaning the car etc. Neither did the activities of the mothers apparently widen their children's experiences outside the normal domestic routine. Only one mother reported her child accompanying her on a non-domestic activity. This child occasionally became involved in the mother's art teaching. However, for the majority of mothers their activities did not widen the children's experiences but the professional fathers' activities were able to do so to a great extent. One striking illustration of this was provided by a child who occurred during the piloting of the questionnaire. A small boy of only three and a half was reported as accompanying his father into a biochemistry laboratory every Saturday morning **and** was said to be already familiar with various pieces of laboratory equipment.

The same class differences were apparent when the responses to question 6, Part III, were considered. This question provided information on efforts parents made to bring their children's attention to **topics** outside the normal domestic

routine. Thirteen mothers prefaced their response to this question by remarking

"Nothing in particular" or words to that effect. Of this group of 13, ten of

the mothers belonged to Class III. No Class III child was reported as having

been to a museum or a building of historical or architectural interest, whereas

children of professional parents had been taken on visits to cathedrals,

castles, churches and museums. Needless to say the child, who had the greatest

experiences, belonged to the highest social class. This child by the age of

four years and four months had been swimming, riding, attended dancing classes,

had been taken to museums in English and Scottish cities, had been to air displays,

to the pantomine, had attended playgroups in Los Angeles and in Newcastle, and

had been to zoos in England and to natural game reserves in Florida. Again

professional fathers were reported as bringing the unusual into their children's

lives: a history teacher's child had been along the entire length of the

Roman Wall and round the adjacent museums, a pathologist amused his children by

letting them look at objects under a microscope, a biologist interested his

son in birdwatching and an architect took his children into churches of

particular architectural merit.

Other topics that mothers reported as topics that they were trying to bring

to their children's attention were usually associated with family activities.

Mothers reported that they would try and interest their children in whatever

happened to be the particular family hobby; camping, hill climbing, sailing,

swimming etc. As many of these activities would be in the open air and in the

countryside the mothers stressed that they would bring their children's

attention to whatever wildlife they saw. The other topic that mothers mentioned

was music, 10 mothers reported that they were trying to interest their children

in music. Again this was very much in the context of joint family participation.

Though the numbers occurring in this study are too small to draw any

general conclusion, some mothers did provide examples of how middle class

children are exposed to high levels of verbalization and conceptualization,

which as the Newsons point out are probably too difficult and complicated for
the child to grasp intellectually.  Of the six mothers who were trying to
establish the idea of church membership two mothers, who both belonged to Class I,
indicated how they wished to inculcate not only the idea of Sunday attendance
but complicated moral ideas about inequality of wealth and appropriate standards
of behaviour.  Other examples of complicated ideas came from the same Class I
mothers, who obviously expected their children to acquire geographical concepts
through discussion of the family's holiday plans, and to understand the fermentation
of yeast when watching their parents make wine.

## Discussion

The material provided in this last section illustrates how rich and varied
the life of a middle class child can be, particularly for the child whose father
takes a considerable part in his upbringing.  Nursery experience for such a
child can only supplement an already favourable environment and the child probably
gains most value from nursery attendance through contact with peers as his
home environment is as stimulating intellectually if not more so than the nursery
situation.  In this context it seems appropriate that resources should be diverted
to the specific areas where the children who most need nursery education and are most
likely to benefit from interventionist programmes, would benefit from the extension
of facilities.

The material also provided information of how important the fathers' role
can be.  Nash (1965) considers that the role of the father in child rearing has
been insufficiently studied and in particular he condemns the equation of child
rearing with only the mother's rearing of the child, which has been the tendency
in some studies.  The material in this study indicates that the father's role is
perhaps of crucial importance in the extension of the child's experiences outside
the immediate family circle and that the father's role in this aspect of
socialization should not be neglected.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The findings indicate that dramatic play occupies a major part of the activities of    four year olds, reflects their range of experience and illustrates their acquisition of sex-appropriate behaviours.  The study provided examples of play enabling children to adjust to deficiencies in their present environment or unhappy previous experiences and showed that boys resort less to play in order to facilitate their adjustment to external reality than girls. The relationship of play to various social behaviours was demonstrated in that significant correlations were found between the extent of dramatic play activity and friendliness to peers as reported by mothers, and ability to wait as reported by teachers.  Perhaps more significant is the lack of social skills related to excessive involvement in dramatic play, especially for those children who create imaginary friends.

The results on peer contact indicated that it varied considerably within the sample and, as expected, the extent to which a child enjoyed contact with peers largely depended on whether he attended a nursery group.  Extent of peer contact prior to school was found to correlate with friendliness to peers at the beginning of the first term but no difference was apparent by the end of term.  Nursery groups were found to vary considerably in their size, aims and ethos and were valued accordingly by mothers but the majority, who sent their children to nursery groups, appeared to value attendance for the social experience their children gained.  Children's contacts with peers outside formal nursery groups were affected as much by their mothers' own friendships and willingness to provide friends of a suitable age, as by physical factors.

## EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

At present there is considerable interest in the pre-school years and in the extension of pre-school education. The pressure groups operate both at a specialised academic level and on a popular level. On the former level there is an interest in these years because an ever-growing body of research indicates that differences in attainment in the later school years are already evident at this time. Hindley (1965) has shown that significant differences in intelligence test scores already exist between pre-school children belonging to different social classes. The more recent report "From Birth to Seven" produced by the National Children's Bureau has emphasised how deeply disadvantaged children from the lower socio-economic groups become in the first few years of their lives. These differences may originate in variables such as linguistic styles within the home. Bernstein (1960) has discussed how working class children are exposed to much lower levels of verbal stimulation which may in turn retard their linguistic development. Hess and Shipman (1965) have noted differences in maternal cognitive style which they argue can lead to later educational impoverishment.

The basic relationships and the family environment the child experiences may prove to be the most important in terms of length of effect; nevertheless, failures and deficiencies at this stage may be remedied by early intervention and consequently nursery provision is seen as all important. On the popular level there is great pressure for more state provision of nursery schools. There has been a National Campaign for Nursery Education, whose efforts in petitioning Governments have recently been successful with the publication of the White Paper early in 1973, authorising increased expenditure in this sector.

Support for pre-school facilities comes from many groups motivated by different interests. Those concerned with the underprivileged will see nursery groups as a means to remedy some of the inequalities that children from poor urban areas face from their birth. Other groups, more concerned with the position of

women in contemporary society, see nursery provision as vital not so much for the child as for the mother, if she is to be able to fulfil an occupational role as well as a maternal role. Less militant groups than those concerned with the liberation of women still wish to free mother and child from their isolation in their typically suburban home. This last group values nursery facilities as much for the social contacts they provide for pre-school children as for the extra interest and intellectual stimulation they supply.

However admirable and worthwhile the provision of nursery education in itself, the extent of state provision on the lines already established will not necessarily improve the situation for the underprivileged or lead to the reduction of inequalities. Even if nursery education were made compulsory, it would not so much remove inequalities but would probably reduce them to a small extent. For the forseeable future, compulsory attendance can be regarded as extremely unlikely: the feeling that state intervention should not occur at so early a stage in life is as much likely to limit nursery education as any financial restrictions on extending facilities.

Though nursery education is probably of value for all children, those children who are in a position to benefit the most, are most likely to belong to the groups in the community with the least enthusiasm for education in general and for nursery education in particular. These groups will include rural communities, certain immigrant groups who ⌐ tend to exclude outside influences, and some closely-knit urban communities, in the poorer parts of industrial cities. In such groups there may be no generally held attitudes that are favourable to education and there will be no willingness to make the effort to enrol a child in the education system. Very often the pattern in these groups is one of early leaving and a tendency to opt out the education system whenever possible. Even among the middle class mothers questioned in the present study some unfavourable attitudes to nursery education were encountered. Such mothers tended to view nursery groups as a means for a mother to evade her responsibilities and along

with this went the view that a mother wished and ought to wish to keep her child in her sole charge as long as possible.

The present study provided evidence that children benefit from nursery experience. The majority of mothers valued nursery attendance for their children as they had greater opportunities to mix with peers and to learn to adjust to novel surroundings. A few felt that this experience was crucial in that their children had appeared to have been helped through various emotional crises and difficulties such as emergency hospitalization, moving from abroad, extreme shyness and undue dependency on mother. It is remarkable that nursery experience should be seen as so valuable since the children in the study in many instances came from privileged homes and had nurturant parents, who made great efforts to extend the children's interests and experiences. Moreover the majority of the children had frequent social contact with peers outside nursery groups. Very often these social contacts were the direct result of their parents' activities.

Thus the data serve to show how valuable nursery experience could be for under-privileged children. It has many components including social interaction with peers, supervision by adults outside the nuclear family and varied intellectual stimulation. A middle class child could be viewed as gaining most from interaction with peers while an underprivileged child might be expected to gain relatively more from all the components of nursery experience. Let us consider three examples, children living in unfavourable housing and children from Asian and West Indian immigrant groups.

Poorer families are often forced into accommodation which is undesirable from some points of view. A report issued by the N.S.P.C.C. in 1970 indicated that families living in multi-storey flats had happily moved from otherwise inferior accommodation but had changed their minds because of difficulties with the children. Of particular interest was the finding that children under five were seldom allowed outside their own flat. There was a strong link between the lack of play facilities for young children and both the loneliness expressed by

mothers and the general dissatisfaction with flat living. In contrast for the children in this sample play in another child's house was a common experience and most mothers had frequent contacts with other mothers of young children.

The second example concerns Asian children. A report issued by the Advisory Centre for Education in 1968 describes the difficulties encountered in setting up a playgroup in an immigrant area of Birmingham. Despite house visits, contact with schools, appropriate language notices in public places, there was still little interest shown by the immigrant groups and few places were taken up. This project met with difficulties because of the wish of the Asians to keep to their own communities. The report stressed that such pre-school groups can only work as part of a total community project. Though there were no immigrant children in the present study, there were children whose peer contacts were restricted because they belonged to families who had little contact with individuals or groups outside the immediate family circle.

The problems of West Indian children are rather different in this respect. These children suffer because their mothers are often employed outside the home. The traditional pattern of extra-marital and marital relationships amongst West Indians means that very often a mother has to support her children herself. If she fails, as she probably will, to find a nursery place for her child, she is forced to place the child with child minders of variable quality. A report in "The Sunday Times" of March 19th, 1972 indicated that the conditions many West Indian pre-school children have to tolerate, are detrimental to their emotional and intellectual development. Precise figures are impossible to establish in this area but of the 120,000 West Indian children under five in this country at that time 50% were estimated to be looked after by child minders. The contrast with the children in the present sample could hardly be greater. The latter were well provided for in emotional and intellectual terms; most parents took pains to supply their children with companions of their own age, to help them over emotional problems, to talk and read to them and to provide them with

varied and novel experiences.  If anything, the children were exposed to concepts which were too complex for them to understand.

The recent White Paper authorizing the extension of nursery provision includes proposals that resources should be concentrated in areas of social deprivation.  The above discussion serves to show how essential is the direction of resources.  Furthermore, it poses the problem as to whether any resources should be diverted for children coming from privileged homes.

It is reasonable to assume that far more pre-school children are likely to attend nursery groups in the future than at any previous time, save wartime.  Furthermore such groups are likely to be seen as a basic way of reducing social inequalities and there may be pressure in socially deprived areas to use nursery groups to teach formal skills.  Under such pressures the value of free play activity as central to the curriculum of a nursery group will probably be undermined.  Emeritus Professor M.D.Vernon in a letter to"The Times" on 10th June, 1972, referred to free activity and creative and constructive play as "one of the glories of English education".  She indicated that it would be deplorable if the teaching of formal reading skills were substituted for free play activities for disadvantaged nursery school children.  Indeed she regarded the teaching of reading as detrimental at this stage as it may lead to frustration, which will retard learning to read.  The value of play has been widely recognised by psychologists and educationalists in this area.  However it is not likely that play will be regarded in this light by the general public.  Parents, who may not in any case be willing to take up nursery places for their children, could be reinforced in their attitudes when they become aware that free play activity is part of the nursery school curriculum.  Examples of this attitude were found even amongst the middle-class mothers of the present study.  Mothers spoke disparagingly of a nursery group where children only played.  One can only conclude that the education of parents as to the value of nursery provision and play as part of its curriculum must run parallel with the education of their

children in nursery groups, if not precede it. In this context it is relevant
to point out that the involvement of parents in the groups run by the Pre-
school Playgroups Association has meant that it has become a vehicle not only
for pre-school but for adult education as well.

Another problem concerns the diversity of nursery groups. Much research on
the effectiveness of nursery attendance discussed previously has involved the
comparison of attenders and non-attenders. Given the differences in size of groups,
number of adult helpers, facilities provided and meeting place, a simple
comparison may neglect important variables. For instance, in the present study
some single sex nursery groups were found. More important nursery groups were
found to range in size from 8 to 50. Smaller groups obviously provide fewer
opportunities for mixing with peers. This study has shown that extent of peer
contact correlates positively with friendliness to children on entry to school.
It is probable that smaller nursery groups are less effective in helping
children to adjust subsequently to infant school. Small groups will often involve
only a handful of children, one adult and will probably meet in the familiar
surroundings of an ordinary house.

In addition facilities in small groups will probably be inferior to those in
larger groups. The lack of official attention to the curricula and play
activities of pre-school groups reflects the fact that physical considerations have
dominated the health regulations, which have governed until recently the care and/ supervision of young
children. These regulations include proper provision of lavatories, fireguards
and food but are not concerned with toys or quality of attention. The limitations
of current regulations were apparent from mothers' reports. One young mother, who
had to work, spoke bitterly of the distress her son experienced through
attending nursery school, as his mother was not allowed to accompany him beyond
the front door.

Success in attracting children to nursery groups will depend upon the
involvement of mothers and awareness on the part of organisers of the problems

mothers face. Attendance is more likely to increase if mothers are allowed
to participate in activities initially and so allow the children to settle
in strange surroundings with a familiar adult. A difficulty that could be
overlooked by organisers is the journey to the nursery group. Mothers in the
present study said that they had delayed sending a child to a nursery group
until they had overcome the time-consuming care of a new baby. A mother with
several young children will not find it easy to fit in the care of siblings and
take a child to and from a nursery group in a morning. These difficulties will
obviously be greater in socially deprived areas where arrangements for trans-
porting children might be necessary if extended nursery provision is to be
fully effective. This study illustrated how mothers' shyness towards their
contemporaries limited their children's peer contacts. Such a consequence is
probably far more common amongst traditionally reserved groups, such as Asian
women. With these groups contact with the home will be a necessary precursor to
nursery attendance.

Now let us consider the wider implications of the findings on the role of
play. This study has provided examples of how dramatic play involving the
re-enactment of events can help children to overcome distressing experiences and
how fantasy reflects the child's adjustment to the external world. It appears
that there are optimal levels at which dramatic play should occur and either
excessive involvement or no involvement can be suggestive of failure to adjust
to external social reality. Singer (1961) suggests that if the imaginary world
a child can create gains excessive value the child will not learn social skills
through direct contact. Alternatively the work of Charlesworth and Hartup (1967)
indicates that the dramatic play situation is one which fosters social interaction
amongst children. In this context it is of interest that the only two children,
who were reported as not friendly to their peers at the end of their first term
in school, were children at either end of the dramatic play continuum. One child

was extensively engaged in dramatic play and accompanying fantasy and her imaginary world could be described as having excessive value. The other child had never engaged in dramatic play or reported any fantasy.

It seems clear that the nature and frequency of dramatic play and fantasy merit further investigation. Dramatic play obviously aids social adjustment if it involves interaction with others: and, while fantasy may be a useful prop in emotional development, if it continues to feature in children's play, it could be indicative of maladjustment. Dramatic play activity could be used both as a diagnostic tool and a predictor of social behaviour, since much of nursery education is concerned with the social adjustment of the young child.

The variety of play content reported in this study is not surprising in view of the extensive social and intellectual experiences the children enjoyed. The data bear out Millar's (1968) comment that children who enjoy varied experiences and have contact with adults of wide-ranging interests are the children who play the most and with the greatest variety. In the context of current concern with deprivation during the pre-school years, a study investigating the play behaviour of socially deprived children would be valuable. Such a study could in principle indicate the paucity and improverishment of the play of disadvantaged children. An illustration of the extent to which play is related to social and cultural variables is provided by studies amongst Israeli children. Smilansky (1968) found little or no dramatic play with peers amongst the socially deprived children in the pre-school group she studied. As a consequence she suggests, contrary to Piaget, that such play is not universal but culture-dependent. Eifermann (1971) studying similar groups of children disagrees with Smilansky's conclusion and considers that disadvantaged children reach the peak of their symbolic play at a later age. Despite their different conclusions, both findings demonstrate that a disadvantaged environment can retard more complex forms of play.

A more speculative extension of this work would relate fantasy play with creativity. Wallach (1970) links spontaneous fantasy with the network surrounding associative creativity and Singer (1966) views similar fantasies, such as daydreaming, as the result of progressive internalization of play into thought. This occurs because pressures towards cognitive economy on the developing child make him increasingly unable to find the time to re-create play activities in all their full-blown form. The relationship between fantasy and the various dimensions of intellectual functioning have only been partially examined in this study. Nevertheless it is worth noting that the environment in early childhood likely to foster capacity for fantasy (that is, a close parental relationship, such as participation in games and story-telling widely found in this study) can be expected to enhance later intellectual functioning as well.

Finally, complex and sophisticated play can be viewed as important in that play has been ascribed an essential role in intellectual development by many theorists, notably Piaget. The play behaviour of pre-school children is as the Newsons (1968) indicate, largely role-taking and the re-enacting of events. Yet there has been little attempt to investigate the relationship of role-taking in dramatic play situations with role-taking skills outside play situations. For this purpose the use of Flavell's (1968) technique needs further refinement. As Flavell admits, his experiment involving the choice of appropriate gifts by pre-school children provides only the guidelines for future work. The type of stimulus material and the demands on the child need to be clarified, for example, the inclusion of a book is unsatisfactory as it can be an appropriate gift for an adult of either sex or an older brother or sister. In addition the experimenter must spend sufficient time with the children prior to testing in order to avoid the test situation becoming one of assessing outgoing behaviour rather than role-taking skills.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE - PART I

A. CHILD AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

1. Child's Full Name _____

2. Address _____

3. Date of Birth _____ Boy/Girl

4. School child is expected to attend _____

5. Date child is expected to attend school _____

6. Family size and position for each child in the family, indicating sex and age. Foster children to be shown by "F".

Sex

Age

Mother

7. Not working/working full-time/working part-time

8. Occupation if at work _____

9. If working, who looks after the children _____

10. Did you have a job before you had the children? Details: _____

_____

Father

11. Precise occupation _____

12. Does he have to be away from home at all, except during the day? _____

Home every night/away up to 2 nights p.w./away 3 nights p.w./normally away/separation or divorce/dead

Other Adults

13. Does any other adult live here, apart from your husband and yourself?

Specify

B. CONTACTS WITH PEER GROUP

14. How often does N play with other children? (The reply is to exclude any children the child may meet at an organized play group or nursery school and any brothers or sisters. The number of children the child meets is to be stated and as accurately as possible the number of hours he/she spends with each of the other children. (Prompt - the mother is to think back over the last fortnight.)

Children        No.        Male/Female        No. of hours p.w.

15. <u>Where does your child usually play with other children?</u>

In your own garden or house/in another child's garden or house/in the road/other places - specify

16. <u>Are your child's opportunities to play with other children ever restricted by any of the following?</u>

lack of play space/traffic conditions/bad weather.

17. <u>Do you ever restrict your child's choice of friends?</u>     Yes/No

18. <u>Does N go to play group?</u>   If yes, specify:

       the number of children attending the playgroup
       the number of sessions N attends

19. <u>Does N go to a nursery school?</u>   If yes, specify:

       the number of children attending the nursery school
       the number of sessions N attends

20. <u>Does N ever go to birthday parties and Christmas parties?</u> Yes/No

21. <u>Mother's attitude to play group/nursery school attendance</u>

very important/important/quite important/it doesn't matter/not particularly keen

22. <u>Mother's reasons for child attending a play group/nursery school to be ranked in order of importance</u>

allows child to mix with other children of his own age/allows mother some relief from looking after the child/believes play group or nursery school experience will be of some educational value to the child when he starts school

C. <u>CONTACTS WITH OTHER ADULTS</u> (excluding babysitters, who look after child when child is supposed to be asleep.)

23. Do any of your relations look after N for you, either in your own home or in the relation's home?

(a) Relation (i.e. degree of relationship)   Av. No of hours p.w.

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

(b) <u>Do any adults other than relations look after N for you?</u>
Adults running play group/nursery school  Av. No. of hours p.w.

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

Friends/neighbours

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

Paid Employees

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

QUESTIONNAIRE - PART II

1. How much of N's play is dramatic play, i.e., play in which he/she pretends to be somebody else or something else? (Provide examples)

   the majority/some/only sometimes/very little/none.

2. Does N like to dress up?                                        Yes/No

3. Does N like to dress up in adult's clothes?              Yes/No

4. In your child's play does he/she often act out real life situations? e.g., Does he/she play at shops, schools etc.

   Most of the time/quite often/some of the time/very rarely/never

   Mother to provide examples.

5. Does your child's play involve much fantasy, for instance, does he/she pretend to be a make-believe person or object that he knows about from some story, or he has seen on the T.V. e.g., any of the characters from "The Magic Roundabout".

   Most of the time/quite often/some of the time/very rarely/never

   Mother to provide examples

6. Does N ever talk about imaginary people, places or animals?     Yes/No

   Mother to provide examples

7. Does your child ever refer to any imaginary friends?         Yes/No

   Mother to provide examples

8. Does he ever tell you about some happening, as if it were true when you know it is not? (Exclude lying to avoid punishment.)       Yes/No
   Mother to provide examples

## QUESTIONNAIRE - PART III

1. What activities does N watch you do?  Do you talk to him/her about these activities?

   **Mother's activities**

   **Amount of discussion about these activities?**

   a great deal of discussion/quite a lot of discussion/some discussion/very little discussion/none

2. What activities does N watch his father do?  Does he talk to him/her about these activities?

   **Father's activities**

   **Amount of discussion about these activities?**

   a great deal of discussion/quite a lot of discussion/some discussion/very little discussion/none

3. Are there any other adults in your house, who will talk to N in a similar way?                                                      Yes/No

   Any further comments _____

4. Are there any other adults you leave N with, who will talk to him in a similar way?                                             Yes/No

   Any further comments _____

5. Does N talk to his brothers and sisters?                          Yes/No

   Amount of discussion

   a great deal of discussion/quite a lot of discussion/some discussion/very little discussion/none

   (Only applicable where child has elder siblings)

6. Are you trying to interest N in any particular activities or people? Are there any topics or activities that have nothing to do with N's home or family that you are trying to bring to his attention?

   **Mother to provide examples**

7. What are N's favourite topics when he/she talks to you?

8. Do you read to N?

   every day/most days/once or twice a week/hardly ever/never

   What do you read to N about?

   Mother to provide examples.

9. Do you join in your child's games?                    Yes/No

   Any further comments?

10. How do you react, if N talks about an imaginary friend or object?  Do you humour him and encourage the conversation/do you tell him that what he is talking about is untrue?

11. How does N behave when he meets a new adult?  Which of the following categories does he fit most?

    very friendly/friendly/takes a while to warm up/shy and reserved/withdraws from the situation

## QUESTIONNAIRE - PART IV

1. How does N get on with other children? i.e. how happy is he/she playing with other children without having his mother's attention? (This excludes the need to demand his mother's intervention because of quarrels, accidents etc.)

   very happy/moderately happy/only happy for short periods/joins in with other children, but not happily for short periods/refuses to participate.

2. How does he/she react to strange children of his own age?

   very friendly and outgoing/friendly/takes a while to warm up/shy and reserved/ withdraws from the situation.

3. Is there any tendency for him/her to prefer to play in the company of children of his own sex?                                                                 Yes/No

4. If "Yes" to the above question, do the children tend to play at activities appropriate to their sex?                                                       Yes/No

   Examples if any.




5. In his/her play with other children, does he/she do any of the following things:-

   (a) suggest that other children take a turn?

        very often/often/sometimes/hardly ever/never

   (b) can he/she wait for his turn?

        very often/often/sometimes/hardly ever/never

   (c) can he/she co-operate with other children in sharing toys?

        very often/often/sometimes/hardly ever/never

6. Does he respect property rights, i.e., does he understand that he cannot take another child's toys home with him?                                     Yes/No

<u>Appendix B</u>

<u>Personal Data on Children in Sample</u>

| No. | Sex | Source | Age Yrs | Mths | Social Class | Position in Family | Number of Children in family |
|-----|-----|--------|---------|------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | M | P | 4 | 3 | I | 4 | 5 |
| 2 | M | P | 4 | 4 | I | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | M | P | 4 | 3 | I | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | M | MOH | 4 | 6 | I | 2 | 2 |
| 5 | M | MOH | 4 | 4 | III | 1 | 1 |
| 6 | F | MOH | 4 | 9 | I | 2 | 2 |
| 7 | F | MOH | 4 | 2 | III | 2 | 2 |
| 8 | M | MOH | 4 | 1 | II | 1 | 2 |
| 9 | F | MOH | 4 | 1 | I | 2 | 2 |
| 10 | M | MOH | 4 | 8 | II | 1 | 1 |
| 11 | M | P | 4 | 8 | I | 2 | 2 |
| 12 | F | P | 4 | 1 | I | 2 | 3 |
| 13 | F | MOH | 4 | 8 | III | 3 | 3 |
| 14 | F | MOH | 4 | 10 | I | 2 | 4 |
| 15 | F | MOH | 4 | 9 | I | 6 | 6 |
| 16 | F | MOH | 4 | 8 | III | 2 | 2 |
| 17 | M | MOH | 4 | 0 | III | 1 | 1 |
| 18 | M | P | 4 | 5 | I | 1 | 2 |
| 19 | M | MOH | 4 | 9 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 20 | M | P | 4 | 8 | I | 1 | 1 |
| 21 | F | P | 4 | 4 | I | 2 | 2 |
| 22 | F | MOH | 4 | 1 | I | 3 | 3 |
| 23 | M | MOH | 4 | 5 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 24 | M | MOH | 4 | 9 | III | 3 | 3 |
| 25 | M | MOH | 4 | 5 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 26 | F | MOH | 4 | 10 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 27 | F | P | 4 | 6 | II | 2 | 2 |
| 28 | F | MOH | 4 | 9 | III | 3 | 3 |
| 29 | M | MOH | 4 | 4 | II | 2 | 2 |
| 30 | M | MOH | 4 | 10 | II | 4 | 4 |
| 31 | M | MOH | 4 | 4 | I | 4 | 4 |
| 32 | M | P | 4 | 4 | II | 1 | 2 |
| 33 | F | MOH | 4 | 8 | III | 1 | 1 |
| 34 | F | MOH | 4 | 5 | III | 3 | 3 |
| 35 | M | P | 4 | 7 | II | 1 | 3 |
| 36 | M | MOH | 4 | 8 | III | 3 | 3 |
| 37 | F | P | 4 | 1 | II | 1 | 2 |
| 38 | F | P | 4 | 0 | I | 1 | 2 |
| 39 | M | MOH | 4 | 8 | II | 1 | 2 |
| 40 | M | MOH | 4 | 0 | I | 1 | 1 |
| 41 | M | MOH | 4 | 6 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 42 | M | MOH | 4 | 5 | III | 3 | 3 |
| 43 | M | MOH | 4 | 4 | III | 1 | 1 |
| 44 | M | MOH | 4 | 5 | III | 1 | 1 |
| 45 | F | P | 4 | 6 | I | 1 | 2 |
| 46 | F | MOH | 4 | 2 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 47 | F | P | 4 | 8 | III | 1 | 2 |
| 48 | F | MOH | 4 | 7 | II | 3 | 3 |
| 49 | F | MOH | 4 | 1 | II | 1 | 2 |
| 50 | M | MOH | 4 | 3 | I | 4 | 4 |

P = Playgroup

MOH = Medical Officer of Health

## APPENDIX C

Table of intercorrelations between the main variables (three types of dramatic play activity and extent of peer group contact) with ratings by mothers, teachers and the tester.

| Mothers' ratings | Dramatic play | Reality play | Fantasy play | Peer group contact |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Dramatic play | – | 0.724*** | 0.342* | -0.152 |
| 2. Reality play | 0.724*** | – | 0.270 | -0.194 |
| 3. Fantasy play | 0.342* | 0.270 | – | -0.164 |
| 4. Peer group contact | -0.152 | -0.194 | -0.164 | – |
| 5. Attitude to nursery attendance | -0.175 | -0.069 | -0.084 | 0.331* |
| 6. Discussion with mother | 0.271 | 0.388** | 0.426** | 0.028 |
| 7. Discussion with father | -0.013 | -0.049 | 0.100 | 0.090 |
| 8. Discussion with older siblings | 0.306* | 0.162 | 0.113 | 0.070 |
| 9. Adult contact | -0.075 | -0.085 | 0.005 | 0.741*** |
| 10. Reaction to strange adults | -0.062 | -0.180 | 0.057 | 0.182 |
| 11. Reaction to strange children | 0.269 | 0.323* | 0.166 | -0.036 |
| 12. Getting on with familiar children | 0.030 | -0.001 | 0.017 | 0.054 |
| 13. Allowing another child a turn | -0.215 | -0.186 | -0.047 | 0.235 |
| 14. Waiting for own turn | -0.247 | -0.308* | -0.249 | 0.202 |
| 15. Willing to share | -0.247 | -0.224 | 0.114 | 0.071 |

| Teachers' ratings | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. Overall adjustment to school | 0.120 | 0.028 | -0.024 | 0.288* |
| 17. Reaction to other children at the beginning of first term | -0.004 | 0.029 | 0.130 | 0.281* |
| 18. Reaction to other children at the end of first term | 0.060 | 0.057 | -0.016 | 0.171 |
| 19. Ability to wait | 0.318* | 0.256 | 0.282* | -0.245 |
| 20. Ability to share | 0.169 | 0.057 | 0.179 | 0.100 |

| Tester's rating | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. General sociability | -0.098 | -0.141 | 0.043 | 0.331* |

\* Significant beyond the 5% level

\*\* Significant beyond the 1% level

\*\*\* Significant beyond the 0.1% level