

Children's social relationships: Making friends at school



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Roadmap

- **The nature of friendship**
- **Relationships between children and adolescents with and without disabilities**
- **Role of the school**
- **Students' stories of their relationships**
- **A framework of barriers to positive social experiences**
- **Students' stories within the framework**
- **Reflection**



Guy



What is friendship?



What does it look like?

What does it sound like?

Friendship....

**“It is friendship, more than skills, money, power and control that makes life worth living”
(Strully & Strully, 1993).**

**Friendships “are the core aspects of our lives”
(Fehr, 1996).**

“Whilst we are alive we have the right to live, love, to have fun, to make mistakes, and to fly in our own direction with our friends” (Forest, 1991).



Stages and Processes of Friendships

ABCDE Model (Levinger)

- Attraction
- Building the relationship
- Continuation
- Decline/Deterioration
- Ending

Contributing Factors

- Personal factors
- Reciprocity
- Proximity
- Opportunity
- Facilitation



Young Children's Friendships

- **Early parent-child interactions**
- **Young school children**
- **Children 7-11**
- **Proximity**
- **Stability**
- **Gender**
- **Social skills**



Adolescent Friendships

- **Six functions of friendship**
 - **Companionship**
 - **Stimulation**
 - **Physical support**
 - **Ego support**
 - **Social comparison**
 - **Intimacy and reflection**
- **Close friends**
- **Peer groups**
- **Gender**



Relationships between children with and without disabilities

- **Six core questions:**
 - Is this person fun to be with?
 - Is this person trustworthy?
 - Is this person similar to me?
 - Does this person help (and not undermine) my goals?
 - Does this person make me feel good about myself?
 - Do we influence each other in ways that I like?

- **A range of relationships**
- **Rejection**



Relationships between adolescents with and without disabilities

- **The secondary school context**
- **The six frames of friendship**
 - **Ghost/Guest**
 - **The Inclusion Kid**
 - **I'll Help**
 - **Just Another Kid**
 - **Regular Friends**
 - **Best Friends**



What is the role of the school?

- **School as a context for developing friendships**
- **School as a context for learning social behaviours**
- **Key competencies**
- **Implications for schools**



The Social Skills Argument!

- **Social skills training**
- **Facilitating social skills**
- **The ecological model**
- **Worst Case scenario**



Sam



Adam



Sarah



Gemma



Stories of being a Guest/Ghost

“Mr Chomley, oh my goodness! That teacher! I don’t like him! He stood in the doorway once... didn’t know I was there although I said, ‘Excuse me!’” He didn’t move so all the students were around and said “Move Mr Chomley, he wants to get in!” He thinks I’m invisible half the time! The only time he talks to me is when he notices me. Sometimes he doesn’t even know I’m in his class. Hands out books...misses me! It’s really annoying. He’ll look straight over the top of you like you don’t exist”(Adam).



Stories of being The Inclusion Kid

“I got an award! A special one from the Principal! At the end of the year for science. Oh boy you should have seen everybody’s face! They were like, ‘Ohhhhhhhhh!’ It was a special award for Year 11 science and it was special because I was in the Taylor Block...so everybody was like, ‘Oh my goodness, how the heck did he get that? He’s in a wheelchair! Supposed to be stupid!’ You should have seen the look on their faces. Like how dare he get an award! I just looked at them and smiled at them. So I might make some more friends now! I’m not so stupid. Show them I’m not a stupid idiot like people think. Yeah, surprise a lot of people!” (Adam)



“Ashley...I’ll talk to him in economics because he’s the only one I know in that class” (Sarah).

“I work with the two other kids that my teacher aide works with” (Sarah).

“If the teacher aide is there then the other kids still see it as, ‘Oh he still needs help!’ kind of thing” (Sam).



Stories of I'll Help

“The other students help me if I can't see something, like on a sewing machine I can thread the whole machine up but I just can't thread the needle...they write the work in their books and that night I bring it home and I write it out” (Gemma).

“There's one guy that's real helpful. He'll ask me if I'm ok and if I want him to take my bag up as I have to go up in the chairlift thing. He just asks” (Sam).



Stories of Just Another Kid

- **“I enjoy working in groups better. It’s like you don’t have to do *all* the work. It’s like you *share* the work instead of having to do it all yourself” (Sam).**
- **“Like now in seventh form all of us merged together. We’re just like one big group” (Gemma).**
- **“Science, I’m sitting with people at a desk which is really good” (Adam).**
- **“Social studies, I’ve got some other students in there with me. Ones that are in my science class” (Adam).**



**“I have friends in class but not good friends
kind of thing” (Sam).**



Stories of being a Regular Friend

“Usually I spend morning tea with Paul and his friends” (Sam).

“I sit with Karen’s friends. She’s got lots of them and they’re all my friends as well...I think that’s good. I’ve got tons of friends” (Adam).

“Last year I got a present from Fiona and Karen but that was just special” (Adam).



“I did move around in crowds but when I said I moved around I think I like changed in each crowd. Like I was a different kind of person. I wasn’t sort of a different person. I just acted differently with that crowd of people. It’s basically just shopping round I think. Like it’s going into one store and then go into another and...yeah. I think...I think I was just looking for a crowd like me... I was probably trying too hard. You know hard out like ‘Whoa, let’s be cool!’ ” (Gemma)



Stories of Best Friendships

“Amy’s my best friend so...one of my best friends so yeah...she helps me like when we’re in class with the things I am stuck with, and she understands like I could tell her anything and everything and she understands and she’ll... she’s sort of like my counselling sort of thing. Mmmmm...she tells me everything that she doesn’t tell anyone else” (Sarah).

“Olivia is probably like my special friend. I’d probably tell my real personal stuff to Olivia; she’d be the first one that I’d tell” (Gemma).



“His name is Andrew. He’s like my best friend. He’s been my friend for the longest amount... he’s a pretty cool friend” (Sam).

“Paul, I can probably talk to him more, probably because he hangs out with a lot of girls and he’s used to having people talk. Paul can sense if I’m in a bad mood then he kind of gets it out of me whereas Andrew doesn’t like to try and find out. He’ll just leave you to it” (Sam).



“What is a Good Friend?”

“A good friend is someone who listens...yeah...just listens and respects and someone who doesn't expect you to be someone you're not...and in my case, someone who doesn't mind having to do extra things for me sometimes like getting my crutches or helping me up the stairs and stuff” (Sam).

“A good friend? Helpful...careful...caring... understanding...and friendly” (Sarah).

“At school it's more like someone to hang out with at lunchtime”(Sam).



“You have to trust them...trust, honesty, reliability. Definitely they’re always there. Always, always there. They don’t bitch about you!” (Gemma).

“I always say friends are the most important things in the world” (Gemma).



Reflect

- **So what does all this mean for you as RTLBs?**
- **What will you be looking for in the school environment?**
- **What are the barriers to students with disabilities making friends in your school?**
- **What facilitates students with disabilities making friends in your school?**



A Framework

- **Environmental Barriers**
- **Intentional Attitudinal Barriers**
- **Unintentional Attitudinal Barriers**
- **Personal and Physical Barriers**

(Pivik, McComas, & LaFlamme (2002))



Stories of Environmental Barriers

“If you have a teacher aide, people tend not to sit next to you because there’s got to be a desk free in case the teacher aide wants to come and sit next to you so they usually leave me kind of alone” (Sam).

“ Mrs Prince is always watching me and telling me to do my work and I really want to turn around and talk to my friends” (Sam).



Stories of Intentional Attitudinal Barriers

“Sometimes games do get annoying ‘cos the other kids don’t like to pass the ball to me ‘cos I might drop it” (Sam).

“Oh in third form I just got stick every day... “Oh Gemma needs a helper lady!”(Gemma)

“Some boy tried to tip me out of my wheelchair. He came up behind me...moved forward...pushed my wheelchair forward and then he ran away laughing” (Adam).



“Yeah I got spat at! He spat at us going down the ramp. Who wants to get a shower of spit? They wanted to do it and decided to go [spitting motion]. It’s not very nice!” (Adam)

“Maybe her parents don’t like disabled people either. She’s just copied them by the sounds of it” (Adam).



Stories of Unintentional Attitudinal Barriers

“Some relieving teachers say, “Does he do any work in here? They’ll say to my teacher aide, “Is *it* doing the work or something?”

It’s terrible! I’m not an “it”! (Adam)

“I wasn’t allowed to play netball for a while as the coordinator said I couldn’t play netball because I was in a wheelchair” (Sarah).

“She used to mispronounce my name!” (Sarah)



Stories of Personal/Physical Barriers

“I like to do cross-country. I only do one lap but still...” (Sam).

“Sometimes she knows I’m struggling ‘cos she’s got a sight problem as well” (Gemma).

“ ‘Oh there’s Gemma Wilson. She’s got an eyesight problem!’ And that’s how they would look at me” (Gemma).

“I can’t put my hand up. Needing more teacher aide and stuff like that” (Adam).

“I’m in hospital lots of times” (Sarah).



Stories of Agency

“I can do just basically just about everything that anyone else can...if not better! I just get on with life” (Sarah).

“ ’cos I had to find a crowd which was my own” (Gemma).

“I know I’m helped but it makes me feel different...so I kind of like being independent...you feel as if you’ve achieved it rather than someone else has helped you to achieve” (Sam).



“...It made me feel bad because I didn’t like having a disability. Going out and being with my friends helps ‘cos it makes you feel more independent ‘cos you’re not relying on the Learning Support Centre so much. You’re being a normal person” (Sam).



Reflect



- **What will you do differently when you go back to school?**

Last words...

“I hope that this research will make teachers realise what it is like for someone with a vision impairment to try and make friends at high school and make them aware that kids with a disability might get picked on, and to look out for that” (Gemma).

