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**STABILITY AND CHANGE OF SOCIAL SKILLS AND SELF-CONCEPT
AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL AGE**

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of this study was on the analysis of stability and change of social skills and self-concept, the relationship between self-concept and social skills as well as the influence of family socialization, especially parental consciousness of parenthood, on this process. The material was collected as part of the research project "Way of life of the family, parental consciousness of parenthood, and children's social development" (Takala et al., 1979). There were 213 subjects consisting of 6 to 7 years old children from the cities and the countryside. The sample included only families with two parents, and was homogeneous with regard to the schooling of the parents.

The estimation of children's social skills was based on parents' and kindergarten teachers' ratings, as well as on the observations made by teachers in natural settings and by researchers during four problem solving situations requiring cooperation between the participants. Three verbal social self-concept measures were used in order to study the integration level and contents of self-concept as well as social self-concept. Parents and kindergarten teachers differed in their estimations of childrens' social skills.

The results indicated high stability of social behaviour from preschool settings to school and during the first school year especially among the active, constructive children and children who had problems both with classmates and adults. Important transitional phenomena were found. Significant differences in social self-concept were found between the groups with different social skills in the middle of the first school term. Perceived peer-acceptance of the active constructive children was high and stable. The children who had problems both in adult and peer relations at school had quite negative social self-concept before beginning school and suggested defensiveness in self-concept 7-8 months after beginning school. Among the aspects of socialization, the goals presented for child rearing as well as the guidance and control system of the family were especially related to children's social skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General background of the study

Children start their school career with heterogeneous social skills and with a core self-concept adopted at home and at other preschool settings. Complex human interaction demands a variety of social strategies, and also the ability to take situational demands into consideration. Both individual and interpersonal systems can be considered essential for social competence to develop.

Emotional and behavioral problems may be more or less transitional at the beginning of school age. There is also evidence that children with inadequate social skills and problems in peer relations are vulnerable to later interpersonal and social difficulties (Parker & Asher, 1987), and that social competence predicts academic success (Smith, 1967). The prolonged experience of positive or negative social status or reputation may also influence children's self-perceptions (Hymel & Franke, 1985).

Among the different estimators of children's social competence there is some unanimity about the basic social skills and strategies needed in school settings. In addition to interpersonal skills, task-related skills, and certain self-related attitudes are also necessary for social competence to appear, e.g. a general belief in one's ability to influence events and successfully pursue goals. The estimators of children's social skills often form a natural part of a child's daily setting and themselves influence children's development. It is important to analyse what kind of differences there are in the estimations of children's social skills by parents and teachers before school age.

For children the transition period from preschool settings to school is normally an intensive time for the development of social-cognitive skills and social competence with peers. There are conflicting findings concerning the continuity and stabilization of central aspects of social competence in children, e.g. cooperation.

Before school age, children's concepts of themselves are rather vague and unstructured (Pölkki, 1978a; 1978b; Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 1983). The concepts contain perceptions of their physical appearance as well as action and social competence. Children also learn, whether they are persons worth paying attention to. During social interaction, children adopt new self-interpretation techniques which may gradually become automatized and also defensive.

At the time when children are most unsure of who they are, the influence of the significant others, especially parents', teachers', and peers', may be great and determine both the contents of their self-concept and their self-evaluation. Early self-concept may also govern their future in large measure. It may act as "a filter" in perceiving and interpreting new social situations (Dodge, 1985).

Central questions concerning the relationship between self-concept and social behaviour have mainly dealt with the role of general self-esteem. Research has shown, unquestioningly, that a high level of self-esteem is related to social adaptation. A developmental point of view should, however, be taken into consideration. The connection between self-concept, especially self-evaluation, and social competence need theoretical and empirical clarification. One should ask, what is the role of general developmental level of self-concept in social behaviour, and what are the aspects of social self-concept relevant for young children, e.g. how early do children think of their influence on others and how self-perceptions of competence and morality are intertwined.

Social structures provide different possibilities for action and the development of competence. School beginners come from heterogeneous social backgrounds. When studying children's social competence it is important to trace the familial origins of social skills and perceived social competence. Parental consciousness of parenthood is supposed to be an important me-

diating link between children and society or subculture. It especially concerns the goals and resources parents have in child rearing. In addition to child rearing practices, also the parents' educational goals, models, and guidance given to children influence child development.

This paper is based on the data collected during the project "Way of living of the family, parental consciousness of parenthood, and children's social development (Takala, 1975; Takala & al., 1979). The basic data concerning children's self-concept and social skills has been reported by Pölkki (1978b; 1979; 1985). In this study, children's social skills, their stability and change as well as their interrelations with family socialization factors and children's self-concept during the transition from preschool settings to school are explored. Using estimations of the parents and the teachers as well as observations by the researchers, the process of the stabilization and socialization of the basic interaction patterns and self-concept is analysed.

1.2. Problems inherent in the conceptualization and examination of social competence and self-concept

When analysing the interconnections between self-concept and social skills in children, one cannot avoid the problems in the theoretical analysis and operationalization of these basic concepts (Takala, 1975; Pölkki, 1976; 1978a; Harter, 1983; Pölkki, 1985; Gresham, 1986; Pölkki, 1989). Social skill theories have moved from the earlier behavioristic models towards a more cognitive direction (Trower, 1984). Among cognitive theories, there are both functionalistic (e.g. Dodge et al., 1986) and structuralistic emphases (e.g. Selman, 1980).

Social competence has been defined in general terms as the utilization of resources or as the success in achieving one's goals or shared goals. This leads to the use of mainly molar research methods, e.g. ratings by experts. Competence is treated as a trait-like phenomenon. The second approach emphasizes elementary aspects of social skills. Researchers have therefore presented long lists of discrete social skills, which have been summed to form the estimation of competence. This approach has

implications for research and training methodology, e.g. extensive use of detailed molecular observations of social skills. (Cartledge & Fellows Millburn, 1980; Gresham, 1981; 1986; Trower, 1984).

To bring order to the large body of research on children's social competence, Dodge (1985) has presented a model depicting components of social interaction. The essential element in this scheme is the notion that social behaviour can be conceptualized as occurring in response to tasks, situations or contexts. It is proposed that the child comes to this task with a set of prior experiences which help him to cope with the complexity of the tasks. These past experiences form some kind of "filter", which includes a child's self-concept and a set of goals for social interaction. These may be unconscious, but still they influence the encoding and interpretation of social cues as well as enacting in social situations. The behavioral response is viewed and evaluated by others in the environment. This information processing model is also transactional: the "other" is involved in a social task, he is presented with social cues and he becomes a processor of social information as well.

One must ask, however, who are the judges (e.g. parents, teachers and peers) and which are the criteria used in the evaluation of social competence (e.g. developmental data, experts' opinions, etc.). Also the nature of social tasks and contexts for children should be clarified. One must remember that the unquestioning adaptation into existing circumstances, e.g. into school settings, does not always characterize social competence but even the lack of it.

When examining the contents of children's social competence many researchers conceptualize it as being comprised of adaptive behaviour (e.g. self-maintenance, independence) and social skills (e.g. cooperation, helping and other forms of prosocial behaviour) (Anderson & Messick, 1974; O'Malley, 1977; Pölkki, 1985). Early studies (e.g. Page, 1936; Murphy, 1937) emphasized ascendant behaviour, called at the present time assertiveness, and prosocial behaviour as the central aspects of preschool-aged children's social competence. Often an act can be considered from both the competence and morality perspective and in many cases the perspectives promote conflicting self-evaluations.

As concerning school beginners' social skills in this study, communication and interaction abilities are emphasized which are needed in both early and later phases of relationships. They help children to attain individual and shared goals in social situations. They also assist in influencing other participants and in the formulation of the goals (Pölkki, 1985). In the school world there are both informal and task-centered situations requiring cooperation and related skills (e.g. conflict resolution strategies, prosocial behaviour) with individual classmates and groups of children.

Essential in the definitions of cooperation is that a situation can be regarded as cooperative if the goals of the participants are intertwined in such a way that one can attain his goal only if the other also reaches his own (Deutsch, 1962). The definitions of children's cooperation include role playing, playing formal games, work toward the achievement of a common goal, and play in such a way that there is a division of labor in which the efforts of one child supplement the efforts of another. Cooperation may be prosocial, but it is not solely for the benefit of the other (Lindholm & Lundquist, 1973; Pölkki, 1985; Marcus, 1986).

The most distinctive problems of social skills of pre-school-aged and school-aged children are difficulties in participating in group activities, making contacts and forming friendship relations as well as a lack of constructive ways of social behaviour. These problems have often been described as social withdrawal or shyness and aggressiveness. However, the approach should be more analytical, and also take inner resources, especially role taking and social information processing skills as well as self-concept into consideration. One should also differentiate between assertiveness and aggressiveness, especially in young children (LaFreniere & Stroufe, 1985). Problems of social skills cannot be understood without reference to contextual and situational factors.

Gresham (1986) has described four kinds of social skills problems. He differentiates between skills deficit or learning deficit, performance deficit (social skill is in the repertoire, but the child has no opportunity or motivation to per-

form), self-control skill deficit (the child has not learned a particular skill because some type of emotional arousal has prevented the acquisition of the skill e.g. social anxiety and fear prevent social approach behaviour or impulsivity prevents the acquisition of new skills), and self-control performance deficit (the child has learned the skill but emotional arousal, e.g. fear or anger prevents its use; the latter can result in social rejection from peers and adults).

An important question is, how self-perception and social behaviour are intertwined. The basic tenet of both cognitive psychology and phenomenology is that behaviour is influenced not only by the past and current influences but also by the personal meanings an individual attaches to his perceptions (Kelly, 1955; Burns, 1979). From the cognitive-developmental point of view, the self has been analysed as a cognitive construction continually undergoing change. The different aspects of perceived self or self-concept have been the main area of empirical psychological studies. However, the dimensions of self-process, e.g. continuity and volition, and self-reflection have been gaining empirical interest (Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 1983).

The most general hypotheses concern the relationship between general self-esteem and social adaptation (Burns, 1982). Without questioning, high self-esteem has been supposed to be essential to competent social behaviour. When children are concerned, many other aspects of self-concept may also be essential. Piaget (1966; 1970) already discussed the problems of cooperation which are due to the egocentrism and the lack of self-refection in children. The general level of self-reflection influences the validity of self-perception of children and also research methodology.

The hierarchical self-concept model by Epstein (1973) suggests that the postulates one has about the self are hierarchically arranged. **Self-esteem** presents the superordinate construct under which other subcategories are organized. Under the postulate evaluating overall self-esteem, there are second-order postulates relating to general competence, moral self-approval, power and love-worthiness.

Shavelson et al. (1976) see social self-concept as hierarchically organized, descending from general perceptions about one's social relationships to evaluations of one's social behaviour in social situations. Specific evaluations of social behaviour are supposed to be most closely associated with actual performance in social situations. This is an important point of view in studying children's social self-concept. Perceived competence can be considered as an essential part of self-worth, but there is fragmentary information concerning the contents and dimensions used by young children in the self-perception of social competence. Harter (1983; Harter & Pike, 1984) consider perceived peer acceptance or popularity to be essential for young children's perceived social competence. Damon and Hart (1982) emphasize that children's social self-concept consists of social relations and interactions, and social personality characteristics.

1.3. Developmental trends in social competence and self-concept at the beginning of school age

The transition period from preschool settings to school is important for the development of social competence and its evaluation as well as general self-reflection. Children's social comparison processes strengthen at the beginning of school. The six- to seven-year-old children are especially preoccupied with the "correctness" of their own or their friends' behaviour (Kohlberg, 1969). On the basis of the old studies by Gesell and Ilg (1946), Harter (1983) has concluded that at about the age of eight, "the I"-aspect of self (self-process) has matured enough to observe not only others but "the Me"-aspect (perceived self) as well. Gradually children become more conscious of themselves as persons and are able to use personal criteria in their self-evaluation.

There is an unresolved debate within psychology concerning the stability and change of individuals' social behaviour and self-concepts. This can also be seen in children's research. Cognitive approach can be divided into ontogenetic-cognitive

and situational-cognitive approaches. The former suggests that one's sense of self-identity is formed relatively early in life as a result of ineluctable developmental processes. A situational approach emphasizes that one's sense of self-identity varies as a function of contemporaneous circumstances and is rather flexible throughout life (Tesser & Campbell, 1983).

Generalizations about developmental trends of social skills, especially cooperation and helping, are difficult to make. An extensive review by Radke-Yarrow et al. (1983) fails to document an unidirectional trend with age. Relatively few studies have been made in natural settings. According to Marcus (1986) a common error made in most studies is, that cooperation is considered an "act" rather than "interact". Also the cooperative attitude may be easier to observe than real cooperation in children. There is also growing evidence (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1986) that prosocial and antisocial behaviour may be positively linked.

The lack of constructive ways of behaving, aggression, has been shown to be very stable already at school age (Pulkkinen, 1982), even from the preschool years in males (Olweus, 1979). Solitary behaviour is normal in early childhood but the children who remain withdrawn relative to their age group consistently throughout the early and middle childhood years may be at risk for interpersonal problems (Parker & Asher, 1987). Social isolation has been shown to be stable in sociometric studies at least from the middle school age (Coie & Dodge, 1983). The stability of isolate behaviour from kindergarten to grade was moderately stable in the observational study by Rubin (1985).

Research findings show the following widely replicated ontogenetic patterns in the contents of self-concept from infancy to adolescence: a shift from physicalistic to psychological self-conceptions, the emergence of stable social personality characteristics of the self, the increasingly volitional and self-reflective nature of self-understanding, and the tendency toward conceptual integration of diverse aspects of self into a unified self-system. Preschool-aged children emphasize their physical aspects as well as action and social competence,

although their self-descriptions may contain also more or less valid psychological aspects of self (Damon & Hart, 1982; 1986).

In empirical research, children's social behaviour and self-concept have naturally shown changes with age, but still some consistency and stability in content remains (Damon & Hart, 1986). The **evaluative dimension**, general self-esteem has been shown to stabilize around the age of 8 (Drummond et al., 1977; Ouvinen-Birgenstam, 1984; Kääriäinen, 1986).

The evaluative dimension should also be examined from a developmental perspective instead of using only global self-esteem estimates which are based on the difference between ideal and actual self. Wylie (1974) maintains that one's reported ideal self may represent a cultural stereotype rather than the image to which one truly aspires. Rosenberg (1979) has emphasized one's committed image that people take seriously as an aspiration. Harter and Pike (1984) have found that preschool-aged children can already make elementary differentiations between their perceived physical, social, and cognitive competence.

In Aho's study (1987) **social self-concept** became more negative during the first three school years, and then started to become stabilized. One should study in detail, whether there are differences between children in the stabilization of their social behaviour and self-concept. In peer interaction children develop social strategies and methods of self-interpretation which may become modularized and automatic with the passage of time. Also so called "false self", different kinds of defensive self-concepts may appear in unfavorable circumstances (Burns, 1982; Ouvinen-Birgenstam, 1984). In addition to judgments on specific domains, children about the age 8 and older can also make reliable judgments about their general worth as a person.

Bem and Allen (1974) believe that there are at least two types of variation in individuals' self-concepts. Individuals may vary not only to the extent to which they define themselves according to certain personality traits, but also whether the traits are applicable in the first place. There may be special groups which show significantly greater-than-average stability

in their self-concept. For example, socially oriented males have been found to show high longitudinal stability in their use of certain self-schemes (Damon & Hart, 1986).

1.4. Relationship between self-concept and social behaviour

In the literature on self-concept, there are mainly general hypotheses concerning the relationship between self-concept and social behaviour (Pölkki, 1978a; Burns, 1982). Piaget (1966) already discussed the problems which arise in cooperation stemming from the participants' low level of self-reflection and egocentrism.

Research findings concerning the relations between the evaluative aspect of children's self-concept and social behaviour are heterogeneous (Pölkki, 1978a; 1978b; Burns, 1982). In general, school-aged children with high self-esteem are described as being assertive, and eager to participate in social situations expecting that they are welcome. On the contrary, people with low self-esteem are characterized as shy and cautious in social situations (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1979).

Aho (1987) found that children with positive self-concepts tended to be leaders and favorites. Children with negative self-concept disturbed others during lessons and often performed poorly. They were often shy and exposed to teasing, or they teased others. Bandura (1981) suggests that self-perception affects not only the course of action people pursue but their thought patterns, and the emotional arousal they experience. People tend to avoid situations they believe to exceed their capabilities. Active engagement in activities contributes to the growth of competence.

Empirical evidence also shows that there are two kinds of high self-esteem, genuine and defensive. The people with genuine high self-esteem are supposed to be better at ignoring failure. When failing, defensive high-esteem individuals will be strongly affected by and more dependent upon the evaluations of others for their feelings of self-worth (Burns, 1982).

Research with children suggests that an extremely positive self-concept is less related to positive behaviour and to positive peer relations than a positive but more moderate self-concept. Children with very positive self-concept may feel self-sufficient and less concerned with their connection to other children (Staub, 1986).

On the basis of longitudinal evidence Rubin (1985) supposes that the "costs" of withdrawal at the beginning of school age (from kindergarten to second grade) involve negative developments with regard to the self-system. With continued experiences of peer domination and lack of social success children's self-perception of their social competence may become negative.

There are also indications that a low self-esteem contributes to aggression. It increases the likeliness that the behaviour of others is perceived as threatening, as dangerous, if not physically, then at least to one's self-esteem. Certain kinds of danger, or threats to self will be more acutely experienced, by people who have low self-esteem or a vulnerable self-concept. The need to desire to protect the self will more easily arise and dominate other motives. The clinical literature suggests that young aggressive delinquents tend to perceive the other's behaviour as threatening, and they respond with what might be called preretaliation (Staub, 1971).

Children with social problems may have extraordinary difficulties in self-reflection. This is due to the inability to view themselves from another person's point of view at the age it normally is possible for children (Selman & Demorest, 1984). Clinical psychologists have presented hypotheses about the negative consequences if the individuals are not aware of certain impulses or emotions within themselves, or not accept them and incorporate them into their conscious self-concept. The denial of feelings of such as anger, can lead to the projection of such characteristics onto other people (Staub, 1986).

By far, there are more interesting hypotheses than clear-cut answers concerning the relations between contents of self-concept and social skills or problems connected with them. Block and Gjerde (1986), among others, have shown with entirely independent and fundamentally different kinds of data that the

characteristics of self-concept associated differentially with the indices of undercontrol and antisociality. Antisocial adolescent boys described themselves as being more self-controlled, more likely to plan and less impulsive, than the undercontrolled boys. There were also some sex differences.

In general, there is no equivocal evidence of sex differences in self-concept in early school age (for reviews see Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Block, 1976; 1983; Wylie, 1979). Feshbach and Feshbach (1986) found, however, that the relationship among self-concept, altruism, and aggression was strongly influenced by the child's gender. For boys, prosocial behaviours were linked to empathy, cognitive skills, and a low self-concept, while in girls, prosocial behaviour was linked with empathy and positive self-concept. The cognitively less skilled boys and the boys with higher self-esteem were likely to be aggressive. For girls aggression appeared to be unrelated to cognitive competence and self-concept.

1.5. Social psychological mediating mechanisms of social skills and self-concept

General cultural and socioeconomic factors are often correlated with self-concept and social skills measures without specifying and discussing the mediation mechanisms in detail. In psychological socialization studies there is a tendency to correlate parental characteristics or child rearing attitudes or behaviour with children's characteristics. A two dimensional model of parental attitudes, e.g. accepting-rejecting and authoritarian-democratic, is often presented. Recent socialization research has recognized that the beliefs and cognitions of parents are important in parental functioning (Goodnow, 1988).

Psychological theory and research lean heavily on the concepts of identification and learning in trying to examine and explain the development of social skills and self-concept. Bandura (1982) has specified the personal and socially mediated experience by which self-knowledge, whether accurate or faulty,

is gained. These include vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities; and the states of physical arousal from which people partly judge their capability and vulnerability. Social experiences are not, however the only sources of self-conceptions. People also receive feed back from their own performances.

Although the exact nature and direction of parent-child influence is unclear (Maccoby, 1984) children's social competence with peers and self-perception of it seem to be connected to the socialization process at home. A number of studies suggest that parents differ in their child rearing practices in terms of support or warmth and control. The second dimension is quite controversial. Hoffman (1982), among others, has emphasized that power assertion arouses hostility but other-oriented induction facilitates the internalization of parental demands and contributes to the growth of social competence.

Pulkkinen (1982; 1986) found in her longitudinal study that the individual's socioemotional development was related to environmental conditions and child rearing in a more complex way than is usually supposed in socialization studies. Child-centered guidance was a general prerequisite for the development of strong self-control and constructive behaviour, but it resulted in different kinds of development, depending on other aspects of life conditions. Control and guidance of the child's activities produced dependence on parents and a lack of social contacts if the external conditions were very stable and the child had few occasions to practice social skills with peers. Parents' inconsistent child rearing practices including corporal punishment and indifference toward the child promoted weak-self control as well as aggression, and adjustment problems.

The most quoted study concerned with the evaluative aspect of childrens' self-concept and its social antecedents is that of Coopersmith's (1967), which sought to analyse parental attitudes and child-rearing techniques in relation to the 10-12 years old boys' self-esteem. It showed that the combination of parental warmth and control was critical in the development of high general self-esteem.

The parents of the boys with high self-esteem differed from those of the boys with low self-esteem in many attitudes and behavioral practices. They were accepting, affectionate, and involved, treating the child's interests and problems as meaningful, and showing genuine concern. They were strict in the sense that they enforced rules carefully and consistently, and sought to encourage children to uphold high standards of behaviour. They preferred noncoercive kinds of discipline, for example, isolation and denial of privileges, and typically discussed the reasons why the child's behaviour was inappropriate. They also considered the child's opinions in decisions concerning him and the child participated in making family plans. The results of Rosenberg (1979) are in accordance with those of Coopersmith's.

Wylie (1979) sees in her thorough review plenty of problems in the studies concerned with the relationship between family variables and self-concept. Problems with unclear definitions of constructs, experimental design, correlational techniques employed to infer causal links, and inadequate measuring instruments limit the conclusions one can draw from this literature.

The socio-ecological approach (see Takala 1975; 1977a; 1984; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) emphasizes the intimate interdependence of social and individual. It can be useful in the studies of social competence and self-concept because it sees the tasks and contexts as central to the psychological structures and processes. It tries to also analyse contextually the social psychological mediating mechanisms in the process of socialization. Parental consciousness of parenthood is supposed to be a mediating link between children and society. It deals with the questions of what is the level and content of awareness of child rearing, especially goals for child development and practices through which these are reached (Takala et al., 1979). Communication system in the family and language used to describe people and inner experiences are also essential in the development of social competence and social cognitions about self and others (Pölkki, 1973; 1978; Alanen et al., 1984).

2. PROBLEMS OF THIS STUDY

When entering school, children already have their elementary social skills and core self-concept. They have experienced whether they are persons worth paying attention to and accepted by adults and peers, and what their competence is in social situations with peers. Children's social experiences may change substantially after beginning school. In this study, the stability of social skills and self-concept during the transition from preschool to school settings were analysed. Also the relationship between self-concept, especially social self-concept, and social skills, as well as the familial influences on these two phenomena were explored. The following questions were presented:

1. What kind of changes in social skills (especially in cooperation and related social skills) and self-concept (especially in the integration and contents of the self-concept and social self) take place during the transition from preschool settings to school? Do kindergarten teachers and parents differ as estimators of children's social skills?
2. What is the relationship between self-concept, especially integration and contents of self-concept as well as social self-concept, and social skills at the beginning of school age?
3. How are the socialization influences, especially parental consciousness of parenthood, related to children's social skills and self-concept at the beginning of school age?
4. What kind of socialization factors and aspects of self-concept are related to the problems of social skills at the end of the first school year?

The basic levels of the entire research process are presented in Figure 1.

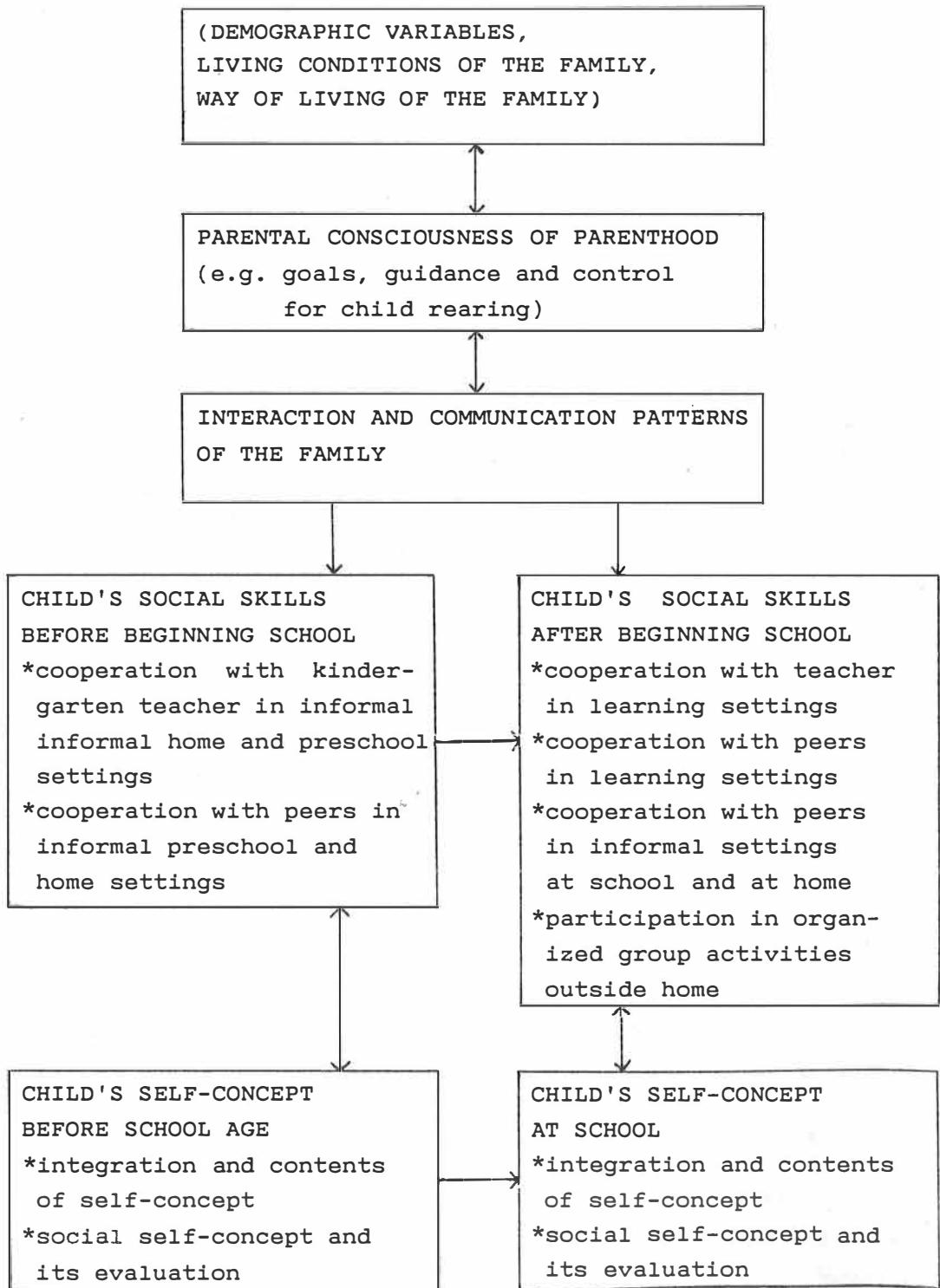


Figure 1. The basic levels of analyses of the entire project.

3. METHOD

3.1. Subjects and procedure

The subjects of the original sample were 95 girls and 118 boys between the age of 6-7 years and their parents. The parents of the children were farmers, blue collar workers, white-collar workers, and housewives by profession. The sample was nearly homogeneous with respect to the schooling of the parents, and it included only families with two parents. Also parents with matriculation examination or more schooling were left outside this research phase. Thus the number of the families was reduced to 193.

The children were interviewed and tested 4-5 months before beginning school either at home or in the kindergarten/pre-school. The parents were interviewed at home. The children attending preschool ($N=59$) were observed by researchers and estimated by kindergarten teachers.

First grade teachers observed their pupils during 2 1/2 months at the beginning of the first term. In the middle of the observation period (in September) the children participated in collaborative problem solving situations at school. The teachers also gave the ratings of children's social competence at the end of the first term.

Re-examination was carried out 7-8 months after beginning of school. 90 children from the original sample participated in the most intensive study. The social background of these children was homogenized with respect to the schooling of the parents (no schooling after matriculation examination and at least two children in the family). Re-examination consisted of paper and pencil self-concept tests, an intelligence test (Raven), a vocabulary test (Ruoppila), and a questionnaire of first grade pupils' individual and social activities (which was answered by parents). The detailed description of the research process and methods is presented in Alanen et al. (1978) and a summary in Table 1.

Table 1. Schematic presentation of the entire research process.

TIME	PROCEDURE
MARCH - APRIL 1977	<p>Children's examination (N=213)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Self-concept tests Free Description of One's Own Self-concept Verbal Self-Concept Test Verbal Description of One's Socia Behaviour *Interview Peer relations and activities <p>Parents' interview (N=213)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Activity structure of the family *Parental consciousness of parenthood *Children's social skills <p>Kindergarten teachers' and naturalistic observations (N=59)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Adaptation to preschool settings *Social skills in adult and peer relations
AUGUST-OCTOBER	<p>First grade teachers' observations (N=213)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Adaptation to school setting *Social skills in adult and peer relations <p>Small group research (N=147)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Skills in collaborative problem solving
DECEMBER	<p>First grade teachers' ratings (N=90)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Participation in school work *Adaptation to peers
MARCH-APRIL 1978	<p>Children's tests (N=90)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Self-concept tests *Intellingence tests <p>Parental questionnaire (N=90)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Children's individual and social activities

3.2. Tests and research procedures

3.2.1. Parent and child interviews and questionnaires

The following aspects of the parental consciousness of parenthood and child rearing practices were examined by using a structured interview (for details Alanen et al., 1978; Pölkki, 1979). The questions dealt with:

- * Parents' expectations concerning the main tasks of the school system
 - knowledge
 - good manners
 - good social skills
 - values
- * Parents' goals and principles for child rearing
 - practical (e.g. schooling, profession, good salary)
 - humanistic/human relations (e.g. altruistic)
 - humanistic/individual growth (e.g. happy, independent)
 - moral/undifferentiated (e.g. fair civilian)
 - moral/differentiated (e.g. industrious, reliable, responsible)
- * Regularity of discussions
- * Contents of guiding purposeful discussions at home
 - child's activities
 - leisure time activities of the family
 - internal, emotional matters of the family (positive and negative emotions, conflicts)
 - domestic work
 - social activities in general
 - parent's work
 - parent's interests and communal activities
- * Variety of rule areas at home
- * Contents of rules at home
 - interaction with family members
 - interaction with peers
 - interaction with adults
 - responsibilities in general and esp. for domestic work
 - safety
 - health

- * **Control system of the family** (corporal punishment/threatening/scolding/flexible methods/induction, explaining)
- * **Socialization into work** (no ideas about work/models parents' work or participates in household work/participates willingly into parents' work or home work)

Activity structure of children 7-8 months after school beginning was studied using questionnaire which was filled by parents. The parents presented, how often (never, seldom, 1-3 times a week, more than 3 times a week) and how long time children participated in the following activities:

- school tasks at home
- domestic work
- individual interests and hobbies (e.g. TV, music)
- activities with peers (e.g. action plays, role plays, formal games, sports, construction)
- common activities with parents

3.2.2. Self-concept tests and indices

Free description of one's own self concept (FDSC)

Detailed description of the test and indices is presented by Pölkki (1978a; 1978b). The test includes the following indices:

- * **Level of integration of self-concept:**
 - Casual outside characteristic/action
 - Casual stereotypical outside characteristics/action
 - Outside characteristic/activity, complex description
 - Individual characteristic/psychological activity
 - Complex description of characteristic/psychological activities
 - General description in which different kind of information (also contradictory) is specified and combined
- * **Contents of self-concept**
 - Activities
 - Physical self
 - physical characteristics
 - general identification knowledge (name etc)
 - Social self
 - social relations and interaction

-social characteristics

Psychological self

-capacities

-interests and preferences

-mood

-action with psychological connotation

-psychological characteristic

Diffuse self-evaluation

Verbal Self-Concept Test (VSCT)

On the basis of children's verbal self-concept scales (Jerskild, 1952; Perkins, 1958) and the research concerning children's use of person concepts (Takala, 1977b), 44 item verbal self-concept test (Pölkki, 1978b) was constructed. The social self-concept scale consisted of the following items having relatively high loading on the positive main factor: I am popular, I am nice, I have plenty of companions, I like to be with other children, I get easily acquainted with others, and I help others.

The content of these items reflect perceived peer acceptance or popularity and social competence. The number of the items was limited e.g. due to the fact that the negative social skills statements used in the original test were found to be unsatisfactory in the sample of this age. The internal consistency of the scale on the basis of Cronbach's alfa was .54.

Verbal Description of One's Own Social Behaviour (VDSB)

The original test was developed during the preparatory phase of this research project (Pölkki et al., 1977) and modified in the present examination. Only eight of the original 16 stories were used in this analysis. Half of the stories depict situations provoking helping or some other constructive solutions and the other four are conflict situations where the needs of the participants are contradictory (for details see Pölkki, 1979). After presenting a picture with a story following questions were asked: "What would you do/say in this situation?" and "Why would you do so?"

The answers into the first question in helping situations were categorized as follows: 1. Negative, unkind behaviour 2. Consents to seek for help 3. Passive helping 4. Active helping with minimal effort 5. Active helping specifically directed to the needs of others. The responses of conflict situations were divided into following categories: 1. Negative, unkind behaviour 2. Defending behaviour 3. Submissive behaviour 4. Constructive behaviour from the actor's (the subject's) point of view 5. Constructive behaviour from the perspective of both participants.

Sum indices for the social self-concept (defined in this connection as the constructiveness and activeness of social behaviour) were calculated. The internal consistency of the helping and conflict scales based on Cronbach's alfa were .69 and .70 respectively, and .70 for the total scale.

Table 2. Interrelation between the self-concept indices.

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Level of integration (FDSC)	.05	.11*	.09*	
2. Evaluation of social self: peer acceptance (VSCT)		.13**	.10	
3. Evaluation of social self: constructiveness in helping (VDSB)			.47***	
4. Evaluation of social self: constructiveness in conflicts (VDSB)				

As can be seen from Table 2 there was no significant intercorrelation between the integration level of self-concept and aspects of social self-concept before school age. Also correlation between indices of self-concept test and verbal description of one's behaviour was low ($p < .07$). This probably points to the fact that the two social self-concept scales tap different dimensions of social self-concept.

3.2.3. Social skills research methods

Parents' ratings

Parents estimated following aspects of their children's social interaction skills (for details see Pölkki, 1979):

- * Easiness in getting acquainted with peers (difficult/cannot say/easy)
- * Possession of a best friend (no/yes)
- * Initiating cooperation (seldom/cannot say/often)
- * Prosocial behaviour, especially helping (seldom/cannot say/often)
- * Participation in conflicts (often/cannot say/seldom)
- * Conflict resolution strategies (asking an adult to help/escaping from the situation/submission/defending/constructive conflict resolution strategies)

The sum index was counted (Appendix 1) and the children were divided in three groups on the basis of their social skills: poor level (26 %), mediocre level (46 %) and excellent level social skills (28 %).

Kindergarten teachers' ratings

The children who went to kindergarten or preschool were the object of kindergarten teacher's ratings 4-5 months before beginning school. Social interaction skills included the following ratings:

- * Relationship with adults (dependent, demanding/positive, open/shy, restrained/negligent, offensive)
- * Ability to cooperate in general (yes/no)
- * Initiating cooperation (seldom/quite often/cannot say/quite often/often)
- * Empathy (seldom/quite seldom/cannot say/quite often/often)
- * Prosocial behaviour, especially helping (seldom/quite seldom/cannot say/quite often/often)
- * Aggressive initiatives (yes/no)
- * Participation in conflicts (seldom/quite seldom/cannot say/quite often/often)

* Conflict resolution strategies (see parents' ratings)

An estimate of the general level of social interaction skills was counted (for details, see Pölkki, 1985). The children were divided into groups of poor (22 %), mediocre (54 %), and excellent level social skills (24 %).

Small group research

The pupils participated in problem solving situations requiring cooperation in three person groups 1 - 1 1/2 months after beginning school. The four tasks were designed to provoke and promote cooperation (e.g. by providing too few tools in a construction task). The observers' tasks varied from molecular recordings to molar ratings (for details, see Pölkki, 1985). Only the following two indices were selected for further analyses as components of social skills:

1. **Verbal interaction promoting cooperation during cooperative problem solving (active, initiative/active/passive)**
The interobserver reliability was estimated to be .70.
2. **Cooperative problem solving (initiative, constructive cooperation, leading/rather constructive/working lonely/disturbing others, negative attitude)**
The interobserver reliability was .84.

First grade teachers' observations

First group teachers systematically observed their pupils during the first 2 1/2 months. These observations gave information on the pupils social competence in school settings. The teachers had training and consultation for the observation tasks in addition to written instructions. They were asked to observe their pupils' social behaviour and adaptation into the school work and write down their observations in the form of free descriptions.

The teachers made their notes on the basis of their observations at three points of time (end of August, September and October). The observations were originally classified into 16 categories (intercoder reliability 89 %). Some of the categ-

ories were combined (for details Pölkki, 1985) and thus the situation at the end of October could be described on the basis of the following categories:

1. **Interaction with the teacher**
(open, positive/neutral/dependent/negligent/hostile)
2. **Participation in the classroom work**
(active/initiative, active/impulsive, passive, negligent)
3. **Participation in cooperation during free time** (active, initiative/actively with many peers/actively with certain peers/mainly following other or lonely)
4. **Prosocial behaviour with peers, especially helping**
(spontaneously constructive, constructive when asked/inconsistently constructive/seldom constructive)
5. **Participation in conflicts and their resolution**
(participates seldom, negotiates actively/participates seldom, avoids conflicts, asks for adults' help/partic-

The following **types of social skills** were constructed (for details see Pölkki, 1985):

1. Active, constructive, independent, excellent social skills (15 % of all)
2. Passive, constructive, good social skills (26 %)
3. Adult-dependent, difficulties in peer relations (9 %)
4. Active, impulsive, conflicts with peers (13 %)
5. Very lonely, shy, problems in peer relations (6 %)
6. Aggressive, offensive, problems in adult and peer relations (7 %)

The types of social skills reflect the activeness and constructiveness of participation in group activities as well as the independence and the ability to lead the activities of the age-mates.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Stability and change of social skills and self-concept during the first school year

The information concerning the social interaction skills of the whole sample before school age was based on the parents' ratings. In addition to this, the kindergarten teachers rated the social skills of those children who were either in kindergarten or in preschool. The correlation between the sum indices of the general level of social skills (Appendix 1) in parents' and nursery school teachers' ratings was .23 ($p < .05$).

The intercorrelations between the components of social skills in the ratings of parents and kindergarten teachers were generally low; even significant negative correlations were found (e.g. in the estimation of conflict resolution strategies). However, the difficulty in getting acquainted (parents' estimation) and the aloof withdrawn behaviour at preschool correlated .46 ($p < .001$). This aspect was not included in the sum indices of social skills.

When the stability of social behaviour from preschool to school settings was analyzed (Figures 2a and 2b), the trends based on the ratings of the parents and those of the kindergarten teachers differed from each other. Parents' ratings suggested more changes of social behaviour during the transition period than kindergarten teachers' ratings. It was also noticed that the most problematic group at school, aggressive offensive children, were estimated by the parents as competent as the active constructive children.

The children estimated as socially competent at preschool belonged to the groups of active and passive constructive (50 %), adult-dependent (33 %) and impulsive children (17 %) at school. All the children estimated as active constructive at school had excellent or mediocre social skills at preschool. No one of the aloof and withdrawn or aggressive offensive children had excellent social skills at preschool.

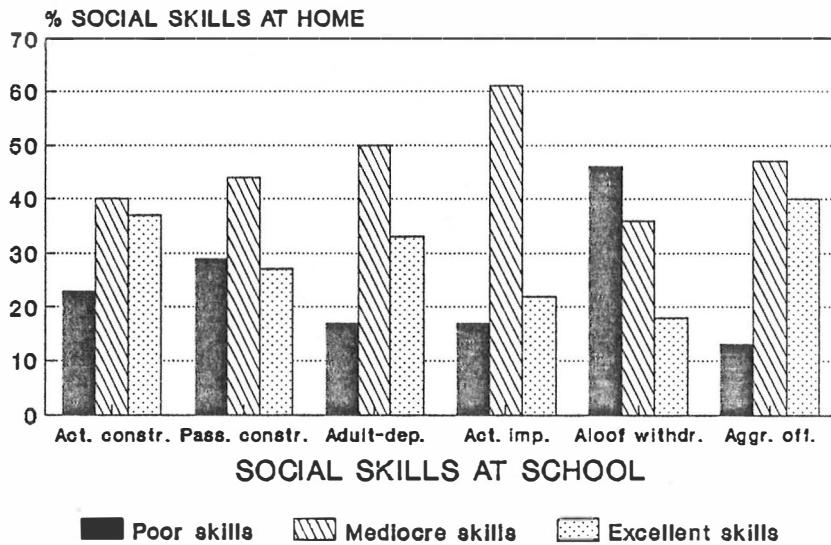
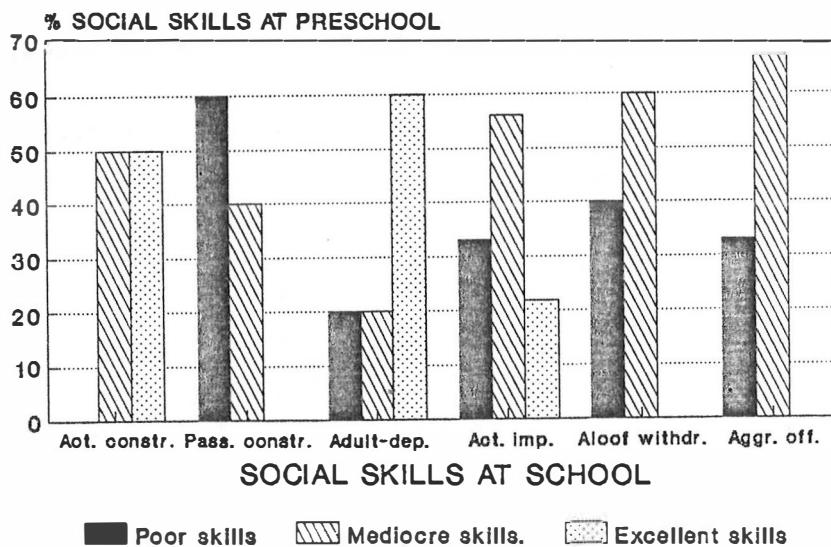


Figure 2a. Social skills 4-5 months before beginning school (parents' estimation) and the types social skills in the middle of the first term at school (based on the teachers' and the researchers' observations) (%).



$F=2.50$, $df=5$, $p<.05$

Figure 2b. Social skills 4-5 months before beginning school (kindergarten teachers' estimation) and social interaction skills types in the middle of the first term (based on the first grade teachers' and the researchers' observation)(%).

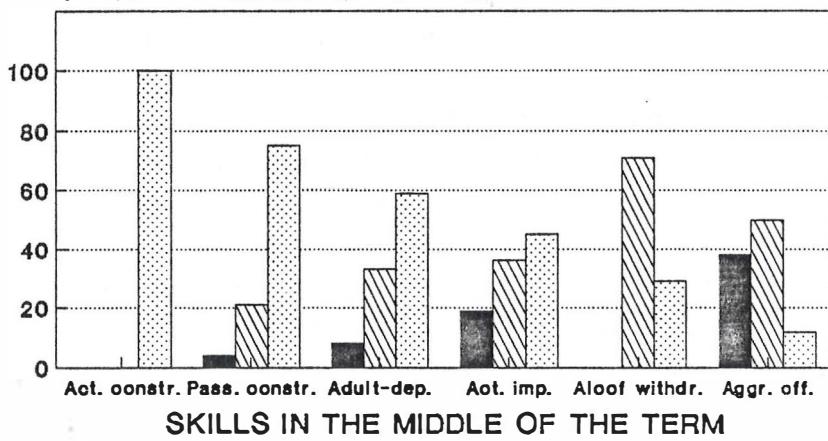
The sum index of social interaction skills at preschool correlated significantly with the type of social skills in the middle of the first term at school ($r=.29$, $p<.03$), with the social skills with peers ($r=.21$, $p<.10$) and the participation in school work ($r=.30$ $p<.03$) at the end of the first term as well as with the variety social activities with peers ($r=.18$, $p<.10$) and participation in children's clubs (.30, $p<.03$) 7-8 months after beginning school. The correlation between the type of social skills (reflecting the activeness and constructiveness of social behaviour as well as independence and leadership, if used as a continuum) and the social skills with peers at the end of the term was .53 ($p<.001$), and with the variety social activities with peers .30 ($p<.03$) and the participation in children's clubs .40 ($p<.01$) 7-8 months after beginning school.

The amount of the peers at preschool correlated significantly (.21, $p<.05$) with the active participation in free group activities at school. The correlation between aggressive offensive behaviour at preschool and the type of social skills in the middle of the first term was .25 ($p<.05$) and the interaction with the peers at the end of the first term .36 ($p<.01$).

Figures 3a and 3b depict the stability of social behaviour during the first term at school. The estimations made by the teachers at the end of the first school term reflect the fact that childrens' interaction patterns (described as different types of social interaction in the middle of the term) or at least the teachers' concepts of these start to stabilize early. 87 % of the aggressive offensive children still had problems with their classmates but none of the active constructive ones. 54 % of the active impulsive children continued to have difficult or minor problems with peers. The teachers also estimated that 71 % of the aloof withdrawn children had some difficulties with classmates.

Parental questionnaire 7-8 months after school beginning gave information about children's activities and social skills. Children belonging to different interaction types at school differed significantly in the variety of activities with peers ($F=4.14$, $p<.001$) (Figure 3b) and in the participation in children' clubs and organizations ($F=4.52$, $p<.001$).

% SKILLS AT THE END OF THE TERM



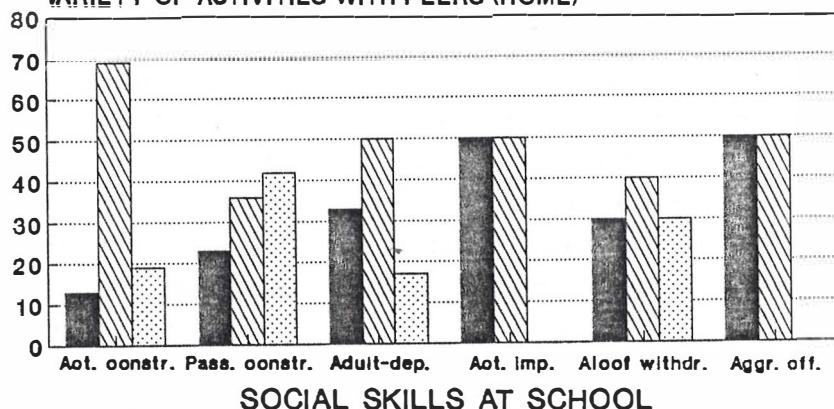
SKILLS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TERM

■ Plenty of problems ▨ Some problems ▨ No problems

$F=3.57$, $df=5$, $p<.05$

Figure 3a. Social skills with peers at the end of the first term (teachers' estimation) in children with different social skills in the middle of the first term at school (teachers' and researchers' observations) (%).

VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES WITH PEERS (HOME)



SOCIAL SKILLS AT SCHOOL

$\chi^2 = 18.27$, $df=10$, $p<.05$

Figure 3b. Participation in common activities with peers 7-8 months after school beginning in home settings (parental questionnaire) in children with different social skills in the middle of the first term at school (teachers' and researchers' observations) (%).

The variety of activities with peers (e.g. common plays, games, sports, and constructive activities) was significantly smaller in the groups of active impulsive and aggressive offensive children compared with the children in the other groups. Aggressive offensive, impulsive and aloof withdrawn children participated in the clubs for children more seldom than the others. For example, 80 % of the aggressive offensive, 70 % of the aloof withdrawn and 50 % of the impulsive children did not attend any clubs, but 70 % of the adult-dependent and 53 % active constructive children participated in these kinds of activities at least once a week.

Different aspects of the self-concept (Table 3) showed both change and stability in the total group. In free description of one's personality a significant change towards more integrated self-concepts was found ($t=-9.58$, $p<.01$). The level of integration was still low 7-8 months after school beginning. Among the subcategories of self-concept, references to one's physical aspects increased significantly (54 % of the children used it before school beginning and 73 % after school beginning; $p<.01$) as well as the references to psychological aspects including emotions, goals, abilities, and personality traits (14 % vs 42 %, $p<.01$). The psychological categories increased especially in the girls' group.

On an average, the social self-concept of the school beginners was positive 4-5 months before beginning school. During the first school year there were no significant changes within the whole group in perceived peer acceptance (VSCT). Thus, on an average, the first graders found themselves socially as competent and popular among peers as they were before beginning school (78 % of the maximum value before and 75 % after school beginning). The perceived constructiveness of social behaviour in conflict and helping situations (VDSB) increased significantly in children's self-descriptions ($p<.01$). There were, however, significant differences between the groups having different social skills in the middle of the first school term; these are dealt with in section 4.2.

Table 3. The changes of the self-concept during the first school year.

Variable	Self-concept		Self-concept		
	4-5 months before beginning school	7-8 months after beginning school			
	x	sd	x	sd	t
Integration level of the self-concept (FSCT)	1.60	1.60	3.20	1.82	-9.58***
Social Self-concept: perceived peer acceptance (VSCT)	14.05	2.32	13.62	1.70	ns.
Social Self-concept: constructiveness in helping (VDSB)	17.02	5.33	20.01	4.35	-7.57***
Social Self-concept: constructiveness in conflicts (VDSB)	13.12	4.23	14.97	4.55	-4.80***

***p<.001

There were no sex differences in the perceived peer acceptance (VSCT) before school age, but the girls expressed more constructive social behaviour than the boys (p<.03 for helping and p<.02 for conflicts in VDSB).

4.2. Relationship between self-concept and social interaction skills

The results did not show a very consistent picture of the relationship between the aspects of self-concept and social skills before school age; both linear and curvilinear trends were found. There was a positive correlation between the sum index of social skills as rated by parents and one of the

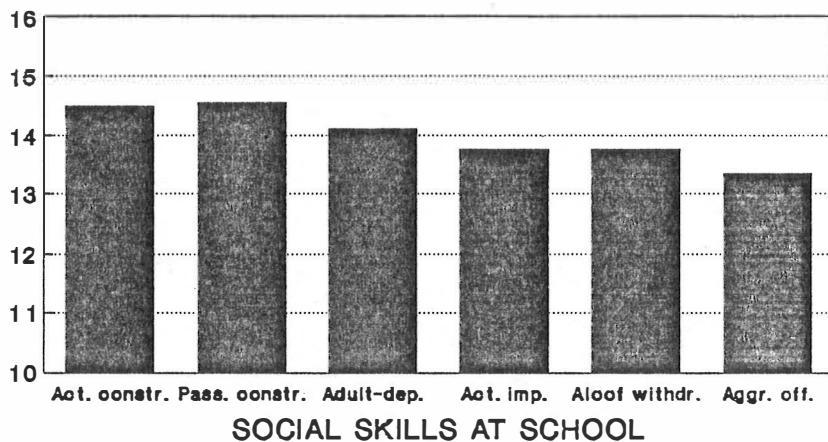
social self-concept indices, namely, perceived peer acceptance and (VSCT) ($r=.17$, $p<.02$). No significant correlation was found between social self-concept and the sum index social skills estimated by kindergarten teachers. However, social self-concept indices, especially perceived peer acceptance were related to central components of social skills at preschool, e.g. to constructive conflict resolution skills ($r=.39$, $p<.01$).

The children belonging to different types of social interaction at school differed significantly in various aspects of their self-concept. There were significant differences between the groups in the level of integration in free self-description test ($F=2.59$, $p<.03$). Passive constructive and aloof withdrawn children produced self-pictures revealing little about themselves. One cannot know if this was due more to their timidity than to the lack of self-reflection. In free self-description, the active impulsive children emphasized the category of social interaction significantly more than the other groups as essential for their self-concept. These children also presented the richest and most integrated picture of themselves at the end of the first school year.

When the social self-concept indices were analysed, the verbal self-concept test (Figure 4a) suggested that the children in the subgroups estimated to be most socially competent (active constructive and passive constructive children) also showed more perceived peer acceptance than the children belonging to the groups with problems with classmates (adult-dependent, active impulsive, aloof withdrawn and aggressive offensive children, $p<.05$).

In the verbal description of one's social behaviour the differences between the groups were significant in both helping ($p<.03$) and in conflict situations ($p<.05$) (Figures 4b and 4c). The differences between the groups reflected generally children's social behaviour in natural settings except in the group of impulsive children; these estimated themselves to behave very constructively in both helping and conflict situations. The social self-concept of the active impulsive children was thus clearly different from that of the aggressive offensive children.

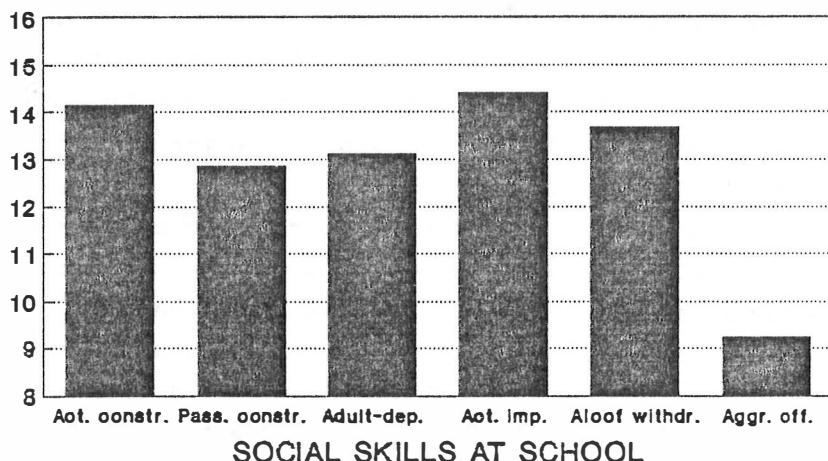
PERCEIVED PEER ACCEPTANCE (VSCT)



$t=3.85$, $p<.05$ (Active and passive constructive children vs the other groups)

Figure 4a. Social self-concept (perceived peer acceptance; VSCT) in children belonging to different types of social skills in the middle of the first school term (teachers' and researchers' observations).

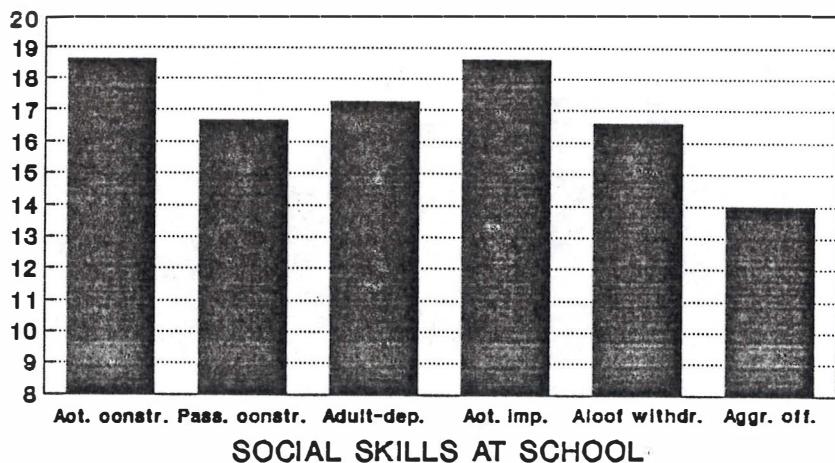
PERCEIVED CONSTRUCTIVENESS IN HELPING (VSDS)



$F=2.06$, $df=5$, $p<.07$

Figure 4b. Social self-concept (perceived constructiveness in helping; VSDS) in children belonging to different types of social skills in the middle of first school term (teachers' and researchers' observations).

PERCEIVED CONSTRUCTIVENESS IN CONFLICTS (VDSB)



$$F=3.73, \text{ df}=5, p<.01$$

Figure 4c. Social self-concept (perceived constructiveness in conflicts; VDSB) in children belonging to different types of social skills in the middle of first school term (teachers' and researchers' observations).

The greatest differences in social self-concept were found between the active constructive children and the children estimated to be aggressive and offensive. The latter group consisted mainly of boys. These children did not want to present a conventionally nice picture of themselves as most of the other children did. Their answers changed towards more constructive direction during the first school year, but they still showed a tendency to differ from all the other groups.

An examination of self-concept test-retest subgroup inter-correlations revealed some interesting differences in the stabilization of the self-concept in the subgroups. Table 4 shows that the test-retest correlations were different in verbal rating scale (VSCT) and more situation-bound self-concept test (VDSB). The indices of perceived peer acceptance (VSCT) correlated significantly ($p<.05$) in subsequent years in the group of active constructive children, but in the group of aloof withdrawn children there was no stability in this aspect of social self-concept.

Table 4. The test-retest correlations of social self-concept indices in the groups of first graders having different interaction styles in the middle of the first term.

Variable	Social skills at school					
	Active constr.	Passive constr.	Adult-dep.	Aloof withdr.	Impuls. confl.	Aggr. off.
Perceived peer-accept. (VSCT)	.35*	-.17	.36	-.49*	.31	.35
Perceived constr. in helping (VDSB)	.11	.45***	.59***	.07	.77***	.41*
Perceived constr. in conflicts (VDSB)	.01	.10	.46**	.38	.74***	-.09

*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

The index of perceived constructiveness in helping had significant test-retest correlation in the groups of passive constructive, adult-dependent, active impulsive and aggressive children, and the groups of adult-dependent and active impulsive children showed high stability also in the perceived constructiveness in conflicts. The active constructive children showed no stability in the perceived constructiveness of social behaviour in subsequent years, although their level of perceived constructiveness was high, on the average.

4.3. Family socialization factors predicting children's social skills and self-concept

Although the sample was nearly homogeneous with regard to education, the occupations of the parents represented different orientations into the sectors of society (labourers, white collar workers, entrepreneurs, and farmers) and different demands for social interaction at work. This had some consequences for family interaction and parental consciousness of parenthood (see Takala et al., 1979).

When the direct relations between the parents' occupations and children's social skills and self-concept were analysed, few significant differences were revealed. There was a significant difference in the free self-description of one's personality: farmers' children presented more integrated self-concepts and used more varied categories of self than the other groups. This does not necessarily mean that self-concept of these children corresponded with their actual social behaviour. One explanation is also that these children who often lacked peers and other comparison groups and were not inhibited, presented self-descriptions used by their parents.

Social self-concept (perceived constructiveness of social behaviour in helping before school age and constructiveness in conflicts after the first school year) was higher in white collar workers' children compared with other children ($p < .05$).

Attempts were made to classify the families into the types on the basis of the aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood, child rearing practices, and communication and common activities, but they did not prove to be satisfactory. In this study, the central aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood consisted of expectations concerning the tasks of school system, educational goals and principles at home, purposeful guiding discussion in different content areas and rules and responsibilities for children. Table 5 shows the interrelations between aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood and children's social skills at school.

Table 5. Aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood and child-rearing practices (parents' interview) in the families of children belonging to different social interaction types at school (teachers' and researchers' observations) (%).

Variable	Social skills at school					
	Act. constr.	Pass. constr.dep.	Adult- imp.	Imp. conf.	Aloof	Aggr. off.
Educational goals and principles						
Practical goals						
Humanistic goals/	20	27	24	13	18	33
human relations	17	25	12	29	36	7
Humanistic goals/	30	15	12	13	18	7
individual growth						
Moral goals/	13	13	12	25	0	13
undifferentiated						
Moral goals/	3	13	18	8	9	20
differentiated						
No goals	17	7	22	12	19	20
Rule areas 1)						
No rules	16	28	25	37	8	44
1-2 areas	78	57	63	63	59	56
3 areas or more	6	15	12	0	33	0
Responsibilities 2)						
No responsib.	41	57	50	63	25	75
1 responsib.	18	18	11	22	33	12
2 resp. or more	41	25	39	15	42	13
Control system						
Corp. punishment	13	23	39	33	18	27
Threatening	10	10	17	8	0	33
Scolding	20	25	17	21	18	13
Flexible techn.	47	25	6	25	36	20
Induction, expl.	10	17	22	13	27	7

1) $F=3.57$ $p<.05$ (one-way analysis of variance for the means)

2) $F=2.30$ $p<.05$ (one-way analysis of variance for the means)

Differences were found in the educational goals and guidance system between the families of the children with different social skills at school. The families of the active constructive, impulsive and aloof withdrawn children favored humanistic goals, but the first group emphasized more individual growth and the others human relations. The humanistic goals were seldom mentioned by the parents of aggressive offensive children; these emphasized practical or moral goals (good citizen, fair citizen).

There were also significant differences between the types of social skills in the amount and variety of rules ($p < .05$). The greatest number of rules were found in the families of aloof withdrawn children and the smallest amount in the families of active impulsive and aggressive offensive children; the latter also gave less responsibilities (e.g. household work) to children. The groups of children with different social skills differed (parent's interview) significantly in the participation in household work ($\chi^2 = 18.26$, $p < .05$); the socially most competent groups did household work more than the other groups.

The families of children belonging to different groups of social skills also used different ways of controlling children. Flexible methods and explaining were used more often in the families of aloof withdrawn and active constructive children. 73 % of the families of aggressive offensive children, 72 % of those of adult-dependent children and 62 % of those of impulsive children used "harsh" control methods (corporal punishment, threteaning, scolding).

The interrelations between family socialization factors and children's social self-concept were not generally high. Cross-tabulations showed that the connections were in some cases curvilinear.

Table 6. The intercorrelation of aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood and children's self-concept.

Variable	Social self-concept		
	Perc. peer- accept. and soc. skills (VSCT)	Perc. con- struct./ helping (VDSB)	Perc. con- struct./ conflict (VDSB)
Expectations concerning the main tasks of the school system			
Basic values of society (esp. humanistic)	.20***	.07	.12**
Knowledge	.04	.07	.09*
Social skills	.07	.02	.03
Good manners	.01	.00	.10*
Regularity of discussions	.24***	.14**	-.04
Guiding discussions about child's activities			
leisure time activ.	.12**	.06	.03
emotional matters	.10*	.12**	-.08
parents' work	.10*	.02	-.05
communal activities	.10*	.10*	.05
Variety of rules	.16**	.01	-.04
Responsibilities (household work)			
	-.05	.21**	-.10

*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

The parents of children with a very positive social self-concept emphasized the teaching of basic values of society (especially humanistic) as the task of the school system (see Table 6). There were consistent trends towards more intensive guidance in the families of children with positive social self-concept. Thus children's perceived social competence tended to be higher in the families where the parents and children

often talked together and also had purposeful discussions about different topics, e.g. emotional matters of the family. The children who had high perceived acceptance by peers also had plenty of rules in the family.

There were some significant sex differences in parental consciousness of parenthood in the families of boys and girls. Table 7 shows that the families of girls favoured more humanistic goals (good human relations and individual growth) and the families of boys diffuse moral goals, e.g. honesty and good citizenship. There were also significant differences between the families of boys' and those of girls' in the quality of discussions (more guiding discussions in boys' families; $p < .06$).

Table 7. Differences in basic educational principles and goals in the families of boys and girls (%).

Variable	Boys	Girls
No principles/goals	14	23
Pragmatic goals	26	16
Humanistic goals/ human relations	17	24
Humanistic goals/ individual growth	12	21
Moral goals/diffuse	17	10
Moral growth/detailed	13	7

$$\chi^2 = 11.20 \quad p < .05$$

4.4. Socialization background and social self-concept of children who had difficult problems with classmates at the end the first school term

The estimation by the teachers at the end of the first school term showed that 8 % of the children had difficult problems with classmates at the end of the first school year. These belonged mainly to the groups of aggressive offensive and impulsive children. Parental questionnaire showed that 7-8 months after school beginning these children, compared with the other ones, had less social activities with peers at home setting ($\chi^2 = 8.70$, $p < .01$) and none of them participated regularly in organized group activities outside home ($\chi^2 = 11.64$, $p < .02$).

The social self-concept of the children with social problems differed from that of the children who had no problems with classmates. This small extreme group had more positive perceived social acceptance (VSCT) than the children with no social problems. However, they showed less perceived constructiveness in conflict situations (VDSB). This may suggest that these children had a defensive, unrealistic concept of their acceptance and popularity among peers. In a more situation-bound test they did not produce any conventional constructive picture of themselves, and expressed assertiveness, even, aggressiveness in conflict situations.

The socialization factors (studied before beginning school) connected with the extreme groups of social skills at the end of the first term were quite few. Significant differences between the groups were found in educational goals at home ($\chi^2 = 21.91$, $p < .02$) and control methods ($\chi^2 = 14.06$, $p < .03$). The families of children with interpersonal problems had no humanistic goals for child rearing and mainly diffuse moral goals. The majority (57%) of these families used corporal punishment.

The small extreme group, found on the basis of the rough estimation of teachers, may not represent all the children who had serious interpersonal and social problems. The teachers included in this group mainly those children who were actively and unconstructively involved with peers. They described the problems of all the aloof withdrawn children only as moderately difficult.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Methodological problems in studying children's social skills and self-concept

The main purpose of this study was to analyse the stability of social skills and self-concept during the transition from preschool settings to school, to study the relations between self-concept, especially social self-concept, and social skills, as well as to explore the socialization of these two phenomena. The answers to these broad problem areas are heavily connected to the theoretical and methodological solutions made in the earlier phases of this project. In this report, the methodological questions concerning the estimation of children's social skills by parents and teachers as well as the study of children's self-concept are dealt with. Theoretical questions are discussed more thoroughly by Pölkki (1989).

Stability of social behaviour in childhood appear greater when sociometric measures (e.g. Coie & Dodge, 1983) or clusters of social behaviour indices have been used. Research has shown that aggressiveness in males is rather stable from early school years, even from preschool years on (e.g. Olweus, 1979), but there is relatively little knowledge of the stabilization of aloof and withdrawn or prosocial behaviour in childhood. In this study, behavioural measures of social skills were used in addition to estimations by parents and teachers to assure the validity of social skills indices.

In the investigation of necessary social skills for preschool-aged children and first graders, there were some differences between parents' and kindergarten teachers' estimations, although the sum indices of social skills correlated significantly. Also those children who were estimated as being very problematic by the kindergarten teachers, were estimated by the parents as constructive as the most socially competent group in the kindergarten.

There are many possible explanations for differences in estimations made by parents and teachers. The children may be-

have in different ways in home and school settings. Basic values concerning conciliatory or submissive behaviour compared with assertive or aggressive behaviour may also differ among different estimators. The two sources of information may also have different sensitivity to various behavioural dimensions. Compared with teachers and peers, the parents may be, less likely to see instances of group phenomena, e.g. cooperation or withdrawal. There were also suggestions that the families of aggressive children had some special features concerning the goals and methods of child rearing.

The types of social interaction skills described as active constructive, passive constructive, adult-dependent, impulsive and prone to conflicts with peers, aloof and withdrawn and aggressive offensive were based on complex information concerning the quality of cooperation in classroom and outdoor settings. The re-examination of social skills was based on rougher indices (estimation by teachers and activity questionnaire answered by parents) and the number of children was reduced in some analyses to 90. Also the follow-up for the study of social skills should have been longer. All these weaken the conclusions that can be made on the basis of this study.

In the examination of self-concept, methodological problems connected with the age of the children were obvious. The picture self-concept test used for school beginners (Pölkki, 1978b) proved to be unreliable for first graders, but Free Self-Description, Verbal Self-Concept Scale, and Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour could be accepted as self-concept measures.

Because children's self-concept scales seldom take the script-nature and situation-bound way of thinking of pre-school-aged children into consideration, Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour was used in this analysis as a situational social self-concept test. The two social self-concept scales (VSCT) and (VDSB) tapped different aspects of social self-concept and had different cognitive demands. The former emphasized perceived peer acceptance or popularity among peers, and the latter reflected perceived constructiveness and activeness as well as initiativeness of social behaviour in conflict and nonconflict situations.

High perceived constructiveness in conflict situations may suggest inassertive or submissive way of behaving. Although perceived peer- and adult-acceptance or popularity as well as constructiveness of social behaviour can be considered as central dimensions of preschool-aged and early school-aged children's social self-concept, other dimensions of social self-concept should also be studied. An important question to study would be, how early the children start to evaluate their influence on others. The perceived self-efficacy in social interaction has been included to the children's self-concept scale by Wheeler and Ladd (1982). It deals with self-evaluations of persuasion strategies in conflict and nonconflict situations in middle childhood.

5.2. Stability and change of social skills and self-concept during the first school year

According to the ratings of the kindergarten teachers and those of the grade teachers, the interaction patterns of the majority of the school beginners started to stabilize during the first term at school. The behaviour of the socially most competent and problematic children especially began to stabilize early. Differences of social and nonsocial activity patterns between the children belonging to different groups of social skills at schools were also found in home settings.

However, transitional phenomena were found which need special attention at school. The first grade teachers considered as too dependent and attention-seeking many of those children who were estimated as being competent by the kindergarten teachers. Differences in the interpretations by the teachers are obvious. Some of these children may have had real problems in the development of independence (Stroufe et al., 1983), but many probably belonged to the children described as "satellites" who use the teacher as a resource for development (Ausubel, 1958).

One should notice that assertive children often show both socially competent and constructive as well as aggressive behaviour (Pelham & Bender, 1982; LaFreniere & Stroufe, 1985). They are prone to get easily involved in conflicts. The educators may be too sensitive to the expressions of independence, assertion, and negative feelings.

Rubin (1985) has argued that certain behavioral orientations become problematic for children only over time. In the early years solitary activity is quite normal, but in middle childhood, the individuals who continue to choose to remain alone in situations that strongly "pull for" social interaction, may become increasingly noteworthy. Thus, part of the children described by the teachers at the beginning of school as withdrawn and after the first school term mildly problematic may be assessed later more problematic if their withdrawn behaviour continues.

Self-concept and identity are the result of a developmental process that begins in childhood. The free self-descriptions increased quantitatively and changed qualitatively in almost all children. Perceived peer acceptance or popularity was quite positive before beginning school, but no significant test-retest intercorrelation in the entire group was found in subsequent years. It did not turn, in general, as negative as Aho (1987) found it to change during the first school years. The perceived constructiveness of social behaviour was very stable in subsequent years. It may be due to the fact that conventional morality starts to characterize children around the age of 7 - 8 (Kohlberg, 1969).

5.3. Self-concept and social interaction skills in childhood

This study suggests that the stabilization of social self-concept is connected with the type of social interaction. Social self-concept was found to vary to a great extent in accordance with the social interaction style in natural settings. Thus the data from different sources (pupils themselves, teachers and observers) showed consistent findings at the beginning of school.

Perceived peer acceptance or popularity was highest before school age among the active and passive constructive children, and significantly lower among the children having problems with peers (adult-dependent, aloof, impulsive and aggressive children), and it was also stable in active constructive children.

The groups of active impulsive and aggressive offensive children differed significantly from each other in describing the constructiveness of their social behaviour. This result supports the finding that active impulsive and aggressive children differ in the nature of their self-concept (Block & Gjerde, 1986) and that teachers are able to differentiate between them (Milich & Landau, 1985).

The active, impulsive children especially showed greater-than-average stability in their perceived constructiveness of social behaviour. This is consistent with the finding (Damon & Hart, 1986) that the socially oriented males have high stability over longitudinal testing occasions. This may be due to the fact that these children consider sociability to be one of their central and stable personality characteristics.

The deviance from social play norms may result in the establishment of negative peer reputation and peer rejection. The experience of prolonged peer rejection may also influence their self-perceptions (Hymel & Franke, 1985). This study indicated, that an originally negative self-concept may change into nongenuinely high and defensive self-concept after interpersonal difficulties. In peer interaction children must negotiate their roles and self-interpretations with other children. Thus the self-concepts may also become nongenuine or defensive high self-esteem (Burns, 1982).

5.4. Home as the socialization agent of social skills and self-concept

The acquisition of social skills can be based on learning mechanisms of different level and complexity. Parental consciousness of parenthood was supposed to be a mediating link between societal and cultural structures and processes, and the family's way of living. The goals set for the children's development and the guidance given to children were suggested as influencing the contents and evaluation of the self, and the acquisition of social and other competences.

The results showed the same kind of features in family communication, control and guidance which Baumrind (1967) also found central in the acquisition of competence and which Coopersmith (1967) held critical in the acquisition of self-esteem. The presence of humanistic educational goals, flexible or inductive control techniques, and reasonable amount of rules predicted children's social competence at school.

The intercorrelations between home background and social skills and self-concept, especially perceived peer acceptance were, however, rather low. This seemed to suggest that both the lack of control and strict guidance with an extensive variety of rules, are related to the problems of social behaviour in children. Also, the parent's role in the development of social skills with peers could be inquired of.

The attachment to parents has been shown to also be critical in the development of social-emotional bonds with age-mates (Stroufe & Waters, 1983). The impact of home may be critical in the adoption of basic trust and self-esteem (e.g. if somebody is a person worth paying attention to), but already in early childhood the evaluation of one's social competencies is dependent on the experiences with peers. Earlier results by Pölkki (1978b) refer to that direction.

5.5. Which kind of school beginners should and could be helped?

The extensive review by Parker and Asher (1987) indicates that it is not difficult to find follow-back comparisons suggesting greater childhood peer-relationship difficulties for maladjusted individuals. Group differences existed either in childhood average acceptance, aggressiveness, or shyness/withdrawal or in the proportion of individuals labeled as low accepted, aggressive, or shy/withdrawn. From 28 % to 70 % of adults who were school drop outs, delinquents or schizophrenic showed a history of problematic peer relationships. This does not by itself indicate that a child's poor peer relationships are predictive of later disturbances.

Predictability seemed to vary as a function of the type of peer-relationships measure considered: low acceptance and aggressiveness were more consistent predictors of later negative outcomes in the follow-up sense. Follow-back differences in shyness/withdrawal were frequent. Thus a sizable number of maladjusted individuals go through a period of shyness/withdrawal but, however, shyness/withdrawal has not yet been demonstrated as being predictive of later maladjustment.

The extreme group with plenty of problems with peers and negative or defensive social self-concepts 7-8 months after school beginning was small in this investigation. This may be partly due to the homogeneity of the sample. The time from 4-5 months before school beginning to 7-8 months after school beginning is, of course, a short period in the school history of children. The first transitional problems have, however, disappeared by then, and the socialization into the school system with its special rhythms and possible hidden curriculums has started. One should not put too much positive emphasis on the unquestioning early adaptation into the school system as a sign of social competence and good personality development. Especially the problems of the young boys at school should be taken into careful consideration to avoid cumulative negative developments.

According to Leahy (1987) the specific change mechanisms for self-concept include stable affective bonds, cognitive challenge and role taking opportunities. These can be supposed as being relative to each other. Negative or defensive self-concepts are often suggested to be established by parental histories or dyadic relationships in which there is a failure to establish positive, primary attachments, failure to reflect on one's values or self-concept, or a failure to accurately understand the role of others. The role of the family in the formation of the nuclear self may be great but the role of age-mates and teachers cannot be underestimated in later years.

Short superficial interventions to change self-concept and self-concept may not be effective. Kääriäinen (1986) had in her follow-up study an intervention which showed that support systems based on cooperation between school personnel and the home are helpful for individual children. The interventions (see review by Schlund & McFall, 1984) have also used peers, teachers or psychotherapists as successful agents for change.

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APPENDIX 1. Intercorrelations between parents', kindergarten teachers', first grade teachers', and researchers' estimations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Parents' estimations																					
1 Best friend (0=no)																					
2 Partic. in confl. (5=seldom)		-02																			
3 Conf. resol. strategies (5=constr.)			-09	01																	
4 Initiating cooperation (5=often)				16a	-07	04															
5 Prosocial behaviour (5=often)		07	07	09a	21c																
6 Index of soc. skills		43c	40c	36c	60c	48c															
Kindergarten teachers' estimations																					
7 Ability to cooperate (0=no)		05	04	-08	09	13	11														
8 Cooperat. initiatives (5=often)			-06	17a	-05	02	-01	18a	-02												
9 Empathy (5=often)				-22b	18a	17a	-02	10	17a	22b	39c										
10 Prosoc. behaviour (5=often)					-12	24b	21a	03	13	35c	-07	48c	64c								
11 Particip. in confl. (5=seldom)						-22b	17	12	-28b	15	01	-00	09	26b	46c						

APPENDIX 1. (cont.)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
12 Offensive attacks (0=yes)	-20a	08	10	-18a	03	-11	07	-21a	16a	11	52c										
13 Confl.res strategies (5=constr.)	-02	00	-18a	03	-15	03	02	38c	-02	18a	-13	-26b									
14 Index of social skills	-17a	29c	11	-08	06	23b	09	65c	72c	83c	60c	27b	18a								
Teachers' and researchers' estimations																					
15 Partic. in lessons (1=act. constr.)	-06	-20c	06	04	-07	-07	-03	09	-10	-16	-02	05	-10a	-07							
16 Interaction with teacher (1=constr.)	05	-11a	07	02	-10	-03	-03	17a	-13a	-17a	-12	-02	02	-09	33c						
17 Cooperation (free time) (1=act. constr.)	-12a	-01	01	-11a	02	-11a	-27c	-21a	01	-05	29b	50c	-27c	-01	21b	20b					
18 Conflict resolution (1=act. constr.)	-04	-04	09	03	-11	-01	-20a	-06	-10a	-16a	-27	-33c	-02	-26b	19a	23b	-04				
19 Prosocial behaviour (1=act. constr.)	00	-05	00	06	-07	-01	-10	26c	-24c	-21b	11	-25b	10	-21b	37c	37c	08	16a			
20 Verbal interact. (1=active)	-13a	20b	-02	-13a	-14a	-13a	01	-12a	09	-09	01	07	-23b	-04	04	13a	11a	01	20b		
21 Cooperation (goal-dir.) (1=init. constr.)	-22b	18a	-08	-03	-08	-09	-02	-18a	-24b	-15a	-19	06	-01	-20b	08	05	20b	18b	07	34c	
22 Type of social skills (1=act. constr.)	08	-03	04	11	01	06	-03	-11	-24b	-16a	-05	43c	43c	23c	28b	43c	23c	60c	09	14	37c

a=p<.10, b=p<.05, c=p<.01