

Pirjo Pölkki

Self-concept and social skills  
of school beginners

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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of school beginners.  
Summary and discussion

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Pirjo Pölkki

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## ABSTRACT

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The study is part of a larger project called "Way of life of the family, parental consciousness of parenthood, and children's social development", which started in 1976 at the Department of Psychology of Jyväskylä University. The present summary and discussion is based on five publications.

The purpose of the research was 1) to study the stability and change of social skills and self-concept 2) to explore the relationship of general cognitive and linguistic abilities and self-concept, especially social self-concept, to social skills and 3) to study the socialization of social skills and self-concept during the transition from preschool settings to school. The socio-ecological approach to socialization was used as a general theoretical frame of reference.

The subjects consisted of 213 children and their parents from towns and the countryside. The analysis of children's social skills was based on parents', kindergarden teachers', and first grade teachers' evaluations as well as on observations carried out in preschool and at school. Three self-concept measures were used. The first data were collected 4-5 months before and the last one 7-8 months after beginning school.

The results indicated moderate continuity of social behaviour from preschool to school. At school beginning transitional problems of social skills were revealed. The social behaviour patterns started to stabilize during the first term at school in children belonging to different types of social skills. About 10 % of the boys had continuing problems with peers and adults. The children belonging to different types of social skills differed significantly in central aspects of their social self-concept as well as socialization background.

Keywords: self-concept, social competence, social skills, socio-ecological approach, parental consciousness of parenthood, first grade pupils, school beginning

## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This study is based on the following reports referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Pölkki, P. 1978a. Lasten minäkäsityksen kehittyminen, determinantit ja merkitys sosiaalisten taitojen kannalta. Katsaus kehityspsykologiseen minäkäsityskirjallisuuteen. Jyväskylän yliopiston psykologian laitoksen julkaisuja 206.
- II Pölkki, P. 1978b. Koulutulokkaiden minäkäsitys eri kasvuympäristöissä. Jyväskylän yliopiston psykologian laitoksen julkaisuja 210.
- III Pölkki, P. 1979. Koulutulokkaiden yhteistoimintataidot ja niiden yhteydet sosiaalisten kognitioiden tasoon ja tilannetekijöihin. Jyväskylän yliopiston psykologian laitoksen julkaisuja 217.
- IV Pölkki, P. 1985. Lasten yhteistoimintataidot päiväkodista kouluun siirtymisvaiheessa. Jyväskylän yliopiston psykologian laitoksen julkaisuja 277.
- V Pölkki, P. 1989. Stability and change of social skills and self-concept at the beginning of school age. Reports from the Department of Psychology 309. University of Jyväskylä.

## PREFACE

This study has a long history which can be seen from the years of publication of its parts. The data has followed me during the changes of residence and employment and has not left me in peace. After years of clinical work and personal sorrows and after settling down again in a university setting I got - at last - the impetus to finish this study. The long interval between the different parts has naturally influenced the theoretical formulations and empirical basis of the later reports.

This is not only my study because several people participated in the research project "Way of life of the family, parental consciousness of parenthood and children's social development" during its different phases. My contribution to the studies summarized and discussed in the present paper lies partly in continuing to answer and integrate the original questions of the project, and partly in dealing with new complementary questions; the latter especially include the problems of self-concept and its relation to social development.

I should like to express my warmest gratitude to professor Martti Takala, who introduced me into the captivating and demanding world of research. Although the original project was largely based on his ideas, he has supported and respected the contribution of his assistants and coworkers. The wise and kind tuition of professor Lea Pulkkinen has been both valuable and encouraging during the finishing phases of this study. As previewers of my work, professors Isto Ruoppila and Jorma Kuusinen gave critical and constructive advice.

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For their patience and support I thank my husband Vesa and sons Pauli and Jussi who both started their school careers during the years of this project. My grieving and grateful thoughts go also to my late sister, who often encouraged me to finish this study.

Vuorela, August 1990

Pirjo Pölkki



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When examining the social competence of children who are starting their school career, a complex view of the nature of social and individual development is needed. Competence as a general concept refers to an ability to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands, and to generate opportunities in the environment and to capitalize on them (Waters & Stroufe, 1983). Studying social development only as social personality traits, as internalization of social and moral norms, as learning new skills cumulatively or as mere adaptation into existing circumstances is not enough for understanding the dynamics of the social competence needed in a changing world.

Social skills are important in both the early and more advanced stages of relationships. In peer groups they assist children in gaining social status, which has been shown to be very stable during school years (Coie & Dodge, 1983). Isolated and rejected children have been suggested to be at risk for later emotional and social problems (Parker & Asher, 1987). Also in task-centred group work, evolved social skills contribute to the reaching of individual and shared goals as well as to influencing them

actively. School beginning may cause a transient or a more longstanding crisis and may form a hindrance to school work for a child who has problems in interacting with age mates and adults in a new social network.

Although detailed descriptions of social competence, skills and strategies for children have been presented, plenty of work both at the theoretical and the empirical level has to be done. During the last decades great changes have taken place in the basic paradigms concerning the socialization, and the role of the nuclear family and other socializing agents has been questioned. The development in context is emphasized in theories of heterogeneous origins (Ingleby, 1986).

The socio-ecological approach provides a contextual and systemic frame of reference for developmental studies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Takala et al., 1979). It recognizes the intimate interdependence of individual and social, and tries also to specify some of the central mechanisms through which cultural and social influences are mediated.

In recent psychological microanalyses of social competence and social skills there has been a movement from behaviouristic or psychoanalytic orientations to more cognitive models as well as from a purely individual perspective into reciprocal and social emphases (Trower, 1984; Dodge et al., 1986). The cognitive models have been constructed both on the functionalistic and structuralistic basis. More complex models of system theory have especially grown in infant research, often based on ethological and ecological traditions.

Before the stabilization of social status and many aspects of social behaviour there is an important transition period from the age of five to seven or eight. It can be paralleled with that around the age of three in the intensity of the internal changes which have relevance for social development and self-development. In particular, children's independent goal-directed action increases and their role-taking and self-reflection abili-

ties develop (Maccoby, 1984; Kegan, 1986).

Interest in the significance of self-knowledge and self-evaluation for social competence has increased during the last ten years. When coming to school, children already have elementary self-concepts and certain social skills as well as social motives. In interacting with people and coping with the environment, school beginners' concept of their social and other competences may change. In self-concept research, the questions have mainly and unproblematically concerned the role of positive self-concept or self-esteem in social adaptation. The studies have more seldom dealt with other aspects of self-concept, e.g. perceived competence or self-reflection as essential for social development.

In order to understand and influence the cumulative social and interpersonal problems of pupils, it is important to study intensively the transition from various preschool settings to school. The socialization process before school beginning, the demands of the school world, and the child's inner resources and developing social skills should be taken into consideration.

This study belongs to the project entitled "Way of life of the family, parental consciousness of parenthood, and children's social development" which started in 1976 at the Department of Psychology of Jyväskylä University under the supervision of professor Martti Takala. My contribution can be seen in five individual reports and also in two joint publications (Alanen et al., 1978; Takala et al., 1979). My study partly continues the analysis of the original problems of the project, and partly answers the new complementary questions which were raised during the project.

In the present paper, my purpose is to summarize and discuss the problems concerning 1) the stability and change of social skills and self-concept during the transition period from preschool settings to school, 2) the relationship between cognitive factors, self-concept and

social skills, and 3) the acquisition of social skills and self-concept, especially the role of communication and interaction patterns of the family and parental consciousness of parenthood in this process. As school beginners' social skills, interaction and cooperation with peers and adults in task-centred settings as well as in informal group situations were studied.

In the entire research project, there was a heavy methodological loading. Many methodological problems are also discussed in this paper. The stability found in social behaviour during school years has often been based on the same kind of data, e.g. teacher and peer ratings. Therefore, in parallel fashion, both estimations by teachers and by parents as well as naturalistic observations were used in different phases of the longitudinal study. New methods, which would be more sensitive to the way of thinking and conceptualization of preschool-aged children, had also to be developed during the project.

## 2. ACQUISITION OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

### 2.1. Nature of social competence in childhood

Competence as a general construct is multifaceted. The competence definition by Waters and Stroufe (1983) emphasizes the ability to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate opportunities and capitalize on them in the environment. Skills have been understood to comprise processes or specific behaviours involved in the identification of the task and its objectives, and in the use of concepts and rules to translate the chosen objective into a sequence of behaviour (Schlundt & McFall, 1984).

Thus social competence has been held as an evaluative term based upon judgments that a person has performed a task adequately. One should ask, however, what are the central social tasks or contexts for children, as well as who are the judges and whose criteria are used in the estimation of competence.

Anthropological and historical analyses, official and unofficial goals of the institutions relevant to children,

developmental theories, and empirical evidence give a basis for more detailed analyses of children's social competence.

The examination of social development from the standpoint of social competence is often descriptive without any explicit theoretical background. It is also based on learning theories, ethological, ecological, cognitive, psychoanalytic or social psychological theories and models (O'Malley, 1977; Waters & Stroufe, 1983; Gresham, 1986). Inside the cognitive tradition, both structuralistic models (e.g. the cognitive-developmental model by Selman, 1980) and functionalistic ones (e.g. Dodge et al. 1986) have been presented. The complete analysis of social competence should also contain the mediation processes through which children's qualifications are produced.

In social-psychological literature, the interpersonal competence is analyzed in terms of two-dimensional models. These have often been depicted as dominance-submission and positive-negative affection (e.g. Kohn & Rossman, 1972). Power and positive feelings are considered to represent the most developed social skills.

Taxonomies concerning the functions of children's relationships include affection, intimacy, reliable alliance, instrumental aid, nurturance, companionship, enhancement of worth and sense of inclusion (Furman & Robbins, 1985). Situations also vary in relation to the contexts, goals and participants. An intensive analysis of social competence should be ecologically valid.

The general ideas of social competence and skills remain abstract unless they are bound with the developmental and contextual analysis of children's social skills at different ages. According to O'Malley (1977), social competence of preschool- and early school-aged children can be defined as productive and mutually satisfying interactions between a child and peers or adults.

The pioneers of children's social skills research emphasized prosocial or moral behaviour as central for the



definition of social competence in childhood (e.g. Murphy, 1937). They also found the type of behaviour that is presently called assertiveness essential for children's social skills (e.g. Williams, 1935). After a long silence, social skills research started again in the USA (e.g. Zigler & Phillips, 1960) and in the United Kingdom (e.g. Argyle, 1969) with the invention of new data recording and analyzing devices and conceptual tools.

The cognitive-developmental tradition supposes that cognitive and social-cognitive structures are essential for the appearance of children's social skills. It has concentrated on the analysis of thinking (Piaget, 1968), the levels of role taking and self-reflection (Selman, 1980; Selman & Demorest, 1984), impulse control (Lane & Pearson, 1982) as well as cognitive executive processes and goal-directness (Sternberg & Powell, 1983). In all of the above-mentioned aspects there is an important developmental period during the years from five to seven or eight.

The egocentricity of preschool-aged children is not a proven fact. Young children have been shown to be able to modify their messages according to the listeners (Pölkki, 1976; Schantz, 1983). There are specific characteristics in social competence if compared with cognitive competence. For example, the developmental sequences are not unambiguous and situational factors must be considered.

The micro level models of social skills based on the functionalistic standpoint emphasize an individual's contribution in social situations. Argyle (1969; Argyle et al., 1981) postulates that in social situations each participant is trying to achieve some goal regardless of whether he is aware of it or not. By social skill they mean behaviour which is effective in realizing the goals of the individuals who are interacting. Such goals may be linked to more basic motivational systems. Patterns of responses are directed towards goals and subgoals. They have a hierarchical structure: a larger unit of behaviour

is composed of smaller ones, and at the lowest levels there are those behavioural patterns that are habitual and automatic, outside conscious awareness and planning.

In emphasizing the hierarchical structure of social performance, the social skill model by Argyle takes the goal-directed behavioural episodes into consideration. It does not, however, operate only on the conscious level like the purely cognitive models (e.g. Carver & Schreier, 1984). It cannot be held totally behaviouristic although it recognizes the elementary learning mechanisms. This kind of model is best suited to asymmetrical social situations, in which one of the participants is in charge, e.g. teaching.

The social exchange model by Dodge (1985; Dodge et al., 1986) emphasizes the integration of an individual's cognitive processes with those of others in the social environment. The model describes the sequence of cyclical relations between social behaviour and social information processing, which especially includes encoding, interpretation, response evaluation and self-monitoring. Essential elements in this scheme are also the tasks, situations, or contexts.

It is proposed that the child encounters a task, e.g. tries to gain entry into a new playgroup, with a set of prior experiences, which help him to cope with the complexity of the task. These past experiences form some kind of a "filter". It may include among other things his self-concept and a set of goals for social interaction. Although these may be unconscious, they are supposed to influence the encoding and interpretation of the social cues as well as their enactment in a social situation. The action is viewed and evaluated by others in the social situation. This information processing model is transactional: the "other" is involved in a social task, he is presented with social cues stemming from the first person and he becomes a processor and evaluator of social information as well. This analysis also outlines some of the

key elements of the problems of social skills e.g. deficits in information processing.

Gresham (1986) has tried to trace the internal dynamics of children's social difficulties. He differentiates skills deficit (the child has not learned the skill) and performance deficit (social skill is in the repertoire, but the child has no motivation to perform). Self-control skill deficit means that the child has not learned that 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. The child may also have a self-control performance deficit: he has learned the skill but emotional arousal, e.g. fear or anger, prevents its use; the latter can result in social rejection by peers and adults.

The microanalyses of social skills problems by Gresham and Dodge help in understanding different kinds of problems children may have. They do not, however, analyze social factors like the goal structure of the institutions and situations satisfactorily. There is still a lack of developmental analyses which take also social tasks and situational demands of children as well as the information processing into consideration. These are discussed after the main themes of socialization of social competence have been presented.

## 2.2. Acquisition of social competence from the socio-ecological standpoint

In socialization research, the psychologists have traditionally studied some basic inter- and intraindividual processes, e.g. parental child rearing attitudes and

identification through which the influence from socializing agents to children is mediated, and ignored the contents and contexts of this process. There is still much debate about the role of biological, cultural, historical and individual factors as well as their interrelations in human development.

In heterogeneous approaches (Ingleby, 1986) there is an emphasis on the fact that the social and the individual are necessarily and inextricably interlinked. These include e.g. symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), the Soviet cultural-historical approach (Vygotsky, 1978), socio-ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Takala et al., 1979), and critical psychology (Holzkamp, 1983). These schools differ in their concepts of society, mediation mechanisms and subjectivity.

R.G. Barker, known as the founder of ecological psychology and the Kansas school, was greatly influenced by Brunswik (1956) and Lewin (1951). In ecological psychology (Barker, 1968; Barker et al., 1978) the environment is constructed in multidimensional, molar terms, and the focus of analysis is on the interrelations between people and their sociophysical milieu. The central concept is the behavior setting, which is a complex interdependent pattern of behaviour, e.g. school class, basketball game. It is not meant to be a constructed abstraction, but it is part of the real world and has clear time and place loci.

Later, the socio-ecological approach to socialization presents a more complex, systemic view of the socialization process than the traditional direct-line predictions from a few antecedents to later behaviour. It tries also to take into account macro level social and cultural factors influencing human development through different mediating mechanisms. Based on ecological psychology, Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Takala (Takala et al., 1979; Takala, 1984a, 1984b) have presented their approaches to socialization which include various levels of environmental influences.

Bronfenbrenner and Takala call their approaches "ecology of human development" and "socio-ecology", respectively. Both of these are heuristic frames of reference which emphasize contextual aspects of socialization and criticize the ecological psychology of the Kansas school for restricting the environment to the immediate, concrete environment and the present time. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 3, 1986), the environment should be understood as a set of nested structures, each inside the next. He termed the elements of the socio-ecological system the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels.

In his socio-ecological approach Takala (1984a, 1984b) emphasizes three general classes of factors which are closely interconnected in the socialization process: 1) living conditions, 2) activity structures and interaction patterns, and 3) goals, expectations and other aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood through which the macro level influences are mediated.

In early childhood, the life of a child intertwines with that of adults, and his independent actions are infrequent. The development of the activity structure is indicated by differentiation and increased independence. When studying the life-span of individuals, the description of their common and individual activities could be a starting point. The activities of the individuals have both objective meanings, which a group of people share, and subjective meanings, which differ according to the level of consciousness of the people (Takala et al., 1979; Takala, 1984a).

The view presented above thus emphasizes tasks and contexts as central to the psychological structures and processes of personality. Especially when social competence is considered, it cannot be held as something completely isolated inside the individual, who then carries it from situation to situation. A true analysis of social competence must also take into consideration the goals presented and models and guidance given to children. Also

developing independent action and subjectivity of children should be noticed.

The transition from one micro-level setting to another, and coordination of influences of different settings is often problematic. School, as the activity environment and institution, has official goals for social and ethical development. In addition to these, there may be unrecognized goal structures such as an emphasis on competition or individual work, and reinforcement of those kinds of social skills which emerge as unquestioning adaptation into the behavioural settings of the school (Johnson & Johnson, 1973; Broady, 1986).

Research based on the ecology of human development has analyzed micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-level settings in relation to children's development (Andersson, 1984). It has often concerned the content of individual and joint activities and social relations in different settings without specifying social development in detail. Parental consciousness of parenthood as a mediating mechanism of child development is discussed after the following section.

### 2.3. Developmental trends in social skills, especially in cooperation

The central question is, what are the ontogenetic origins and developmental sequences of early intersubjectivity and goal-directed activities. Are the adult-child relations the precursors of social skills in peer relations or is there an independent world of peer relations? The functions of peers compared with the ones of adults should also be questioned.

Ethologically and psychoanalytically oriented re-

searchers have held early attachment relations as precursors for cognitive and social competence (Brazelton, 1986). Research has shown that secure attachment is associated e.g. with the child's subsequent willingness to explore novel environments, to interact positively with adult strangers and enter into positive relationships with age mates (e.g. Matas et al., 1978; Waters & Stroufe, 1983).

The microanalyses of children's social skills suggest that the early organization of interaction is greatly dependent on the social skills of the adults, even if the infants are always active. In the interaction between an infant and an adult, there is "a competent dyad", where the more competent partner accommodates her/his behaviour into the behaviour of the child and behaves as if the infant were an equal partner (Bruner, 1975; Rocissano, 1984).

During the first year such exchanges begin which are connected with a common task or object. Toddlers already recognize the peer as a social partner and they may have complementary and reciprocal play structures with peers (Howes, 1987). As the child grows, he progresses from a strictly joint mode to an individual mode, once he is able to perform certain actions independently. The adult retreats into a monitoring role (Abramenkova, 1983).

Instrumental help - using adults and peers as positive resources - and a sense of inclusion and companionship can be held as especially central for social competence at the beginning of school age. Specific social skills contributing to these are e.g. entry strategies to play groups. Cooperation and other forms of prosocial behaviour (e.g. helping) as well as conflict resolution methods assist in making friendships and gaining peer acceptance and social status (Dodge, 1985; Hartup, 1983).

In the empirical studies of small children, elementary cooperation has been defined as coordination of activities or sharing the content of the activity (Cook &

Stingle, 1974; Pölkki, 1976). In general, the situation has been defined as cooperative, if the goals of the partners are intertwined in the way that one of the partners can attain his goal only if the other also attains his goal (Lindholm & Lundqvist, 1973).

Coordination of actions and simple forms of cooperation change during the school years into organized group activities, where the group has a division of labour and a sense of solidarity. After the child has acquired the repertoire of social skills, peers regulate acceptable, normative group behaviour (Combs & Slaby, 1977; Nieciński, 1978). Cooperative interactions may take e.g. the following forms: role playing, formal games, working to achieve a common goal, and playing in such a way that there is a division of labour in which the efforts of one child supplement the efforts of another (Marcus, 1986). Cooperation may be prosocial, but it is not solely for the benefit of others.

The high level of cooperation necessitates a certain amount of independent goal-directed action (Lindholm & Lundqvist, 1973). Conscious cooperation of people supposes unanimity of the motives and of the goal to some extent. The participants should orient to the goal and to each other and also to each others' aims. The individual points of view have to be adapted and a common orientation has to be created. Communication abilities, empathy, mutual helping and negotiation strategies also belong among the general prerequisites presented for cooperation (Virkkunen, 1983; Bürtchen, 1983; Marcus, 1986).

Evidence shows that both maturing capacities and socialization practices influence cooperation and other forms of social skills. Certain developmental sequences can be found, although they may differ in different cultures (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Generalizations about stability of social behaviour in childhood are difficult to make. There are few naturalistic longitudinal or follow-up studies. Some evidence exists about the stab-



ility of prosocial behaviour from preschool to school (review Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983). Stability of activity level from preschool to school has also been found (Buss et al., 1980).

The problems of social behaviour especially include aggression and loneliness. There is growing evidence (Cummings et al., 1986) that prosocial and aggressive behaviour are often positively linked in childhood. Aggression has been shown to be stable at school age (Pulkkinen, 1982), even since the preschool years in males (Olweus, 1979). Stability coefficients around .80 have been found.

Social isolation has been shown to be stable at least since the middle school age (Coie & Dodge, 1983). Kagan and Moss (1962) found in their classical longitudinal study that passivity proved to be relatively stable. It became generally evident during the second year, and it was expressed in various ways during the school years, for example by timid behaviour in social situations, and conformity to parents.

Research should be directed to identifying the conditions and experiences which shape social behaviour and which determine its stability over the course of development.

Gender differences in social behaviour have been found but few of them have been proved to be reliable. Boys are more active and aggressive than girls. Conclusions about over-all gender differences in compliance or prosocial behaviour cannot be drawn because differences are functionally connected with the socialization of girls and boys (Block, 1983; Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1989). Group behaviour seems to be differentiated by gender and children impose pressures for conformity to group standards concerning sex-typed behaviour (Maccoby, 1986).

#### 2.4. Specific adult influences in the acquisition of social competence

In psychological socialization studies there has been a tendency to correlate parental characteristics or child rearing attitudes or practices with children's characteristics. A two-dimensional model of parental attitudes, e.g. accepting-rejecting and authoritarian-democratic, is often presented.

Newer theoretical and empirical analyses on children's prosocial and antisocial behaviour (Radke-Yarrow et al., 1986; Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1989) have asked, how well are the parental modes of influence adapted to the child's unique capabilities and sensitivities. There has also been an emphasis on the family as a mediator of culture and society.

Parental modes of influence have been divided into the following categories: parents as models, parents' structural and anticipatory management of the behavior settings and the experiences that comprise the child's life, and reactive methods in controlling and disciplining the child. In addition to these, various approaches contain some kind of emotional bond between the socializing agent and the child, e.g. attachment (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Radke-Yarrow et al., 1986).

There are increasing numbers of studies which emphasize cognitive aspects of parental functioning (Goodnow, 1988). Parental consciousness of parenthood can be seen as a mediating link between children and society. Both its level and content can be studied. Its content concerns the perception of an educators' role, goals, values, principles, attitudes and methods for child rearing (Takala et al., 1979; Luolaja, 1979; Takala, 1984a).

A number of studies suggest that parents differ in their child rearing practices in terms of support or

warmth and control. The impact of the second dimension on social competence 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 socio-emotional development was related to environmental conditions and child rearing in a more complex way than what is usually supposed in socialization studies. Child-centred 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 and adjustment problems.

Both the quality of interactions and the child's role in initiating and terminating them alter as development proceeds. While we may search for principles relevant to the stability of adult relationships, the principles are constantly changing throughout childhood. Parental sensitivity must involve sensitivity to these changes as well as to the child's moment-to-moment needs (Hinde, 1979). The content and power structure between adults and children change during different phases of life.

Researchers have called attention to cyclical processes, whereby either mutually benign or mutually aversive processes build up between a pair of persons interacting over time. Interaction in socialization changes both children and those with whom they interact. The children bring their own temperament, dispositions, and characteristics to any interaction they engage in, and

they also process the adult influences in their own way. (Maccoby, 1984). Thus some of the children actively seek out social experiences and persons they will be influenced by, and some are more passive and may not learn new skills.

## 2.5. Social skills and internal representation of self

Cognitive-situational approaches emphasize the unstable nature of self-concept both in childhood and adulthood. The supporters of the cognitive-developmental tradition maintain that competent social behaviour necessitates certain cognitive and social-cognitive prerequisites and that the self-concept, after subsequent transformations, stabilizes rather early.

According to the cognitive-developmental theory of Piaget (1966) the neonate has no conception of self, of others, or of objects. Children's egocentrism refers to their inability to consider others' point of view. Thus they do not see others as different from the self and cannot have a unique sense of psychological self. As a result of interactions with the environment, the infant's cognitive structures evolve through a series of stages. It is not until middle childhood (7-11 years of age) that the child is capable of maintaining a unique, stable sense of self, although he already has the concepts of object and person permanence. Social role-taking ability may develop early in favourable social circumstances (Pölkki, 1976; Schantz, 1983).

Damon (1977) emphasizes that children's knowledge of the social world is acquired through participation in on-going dynamic interactions. Because social relations and interactions are varied in nature and purpose, the child

faces a complex task in bringing order to social networks in which he participates. There is some empirical evidence that children's knowledge system, including the early representation of self, is based on scripts. Script knowledge is near the structure of real world events and it represents a basic but restricted level of social cognition (Shank & Abelson, 1977). The development of linguistic concepts concerning people in general, social relations, and society helps children in understanding and regulating social reality (Pölkki, 1973).

Modern cognitive psychology (e.g. Cantor et al., 1986) maintains that motivation cannot be fully understood without reference to the self-concept. In cognitive theories, the self-concept has been studied as a collection of knowledge structures or schemas about the self. These are assumed to be constructed creatively and selectively from past experience and to mediate the processing of self-relevant information and interpersonal behaviour. Thus self-knowledge is viewed as a dynamic regulator of ongoing behaviour; it both makes sense of the past and provides the means-ends patterns for new behaviour (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

It can be asked, what kind of aspects of self are necessary prerequisites for social competence. Especially the general positive evaluation of one's self, or self-esteem, has often been connected, unproblematizingly, with good social adaptation and social skills (Wylie, 1979; Burns, 1982). The significance of the perceived competence for general self-evaluation has been emphasized by Harter (1985). Bandura (1982) has presented that people's efficacy and outcome expectations influence their behaviour, and the environmental effects created by their actions in turn alter their expectations.

When studying the necessary elements of self-concept for children's social competence one has to ponder both the existence and nature of early self-concepts, problems of true self-reflection, and the aspects of self-evalu-

ation which may promote or hinder the activity and skillful behaviour in social situations. This theme will be continued in sections 2.6. and 3.

## 2.6. Essential elements in the conceptualization and assessment of children's social competence

Conceptualizations of social competence in children have emphasized effective and successful social functioning. A widely accepted definition characterizes a socially competent person as somebody having an extensive repertoire of social skills, the ability to analyze the nature and goals of situations, to take the role of others and to react adequately to the demands of the situation (e.g. Dodge et al., 1986).

Many open questions exist concerning the nature of children's social competence. Differences between the theories and models are found particularly in the following questions: what is the role of socialization, social contexts or tasks and inner resources in the development of social competence, what are the developmental sequences, and what is the valid and reliable research methodology. The criteria and estimators of social competence should be made explicit.

There is no complete model of social functioning incorporating all the essential elements of children's social skills. There are, however, some requirements for the analysis of children's social competence. The basic elements in the psychological analysis of social competence might be presented as follows in Figure 1.

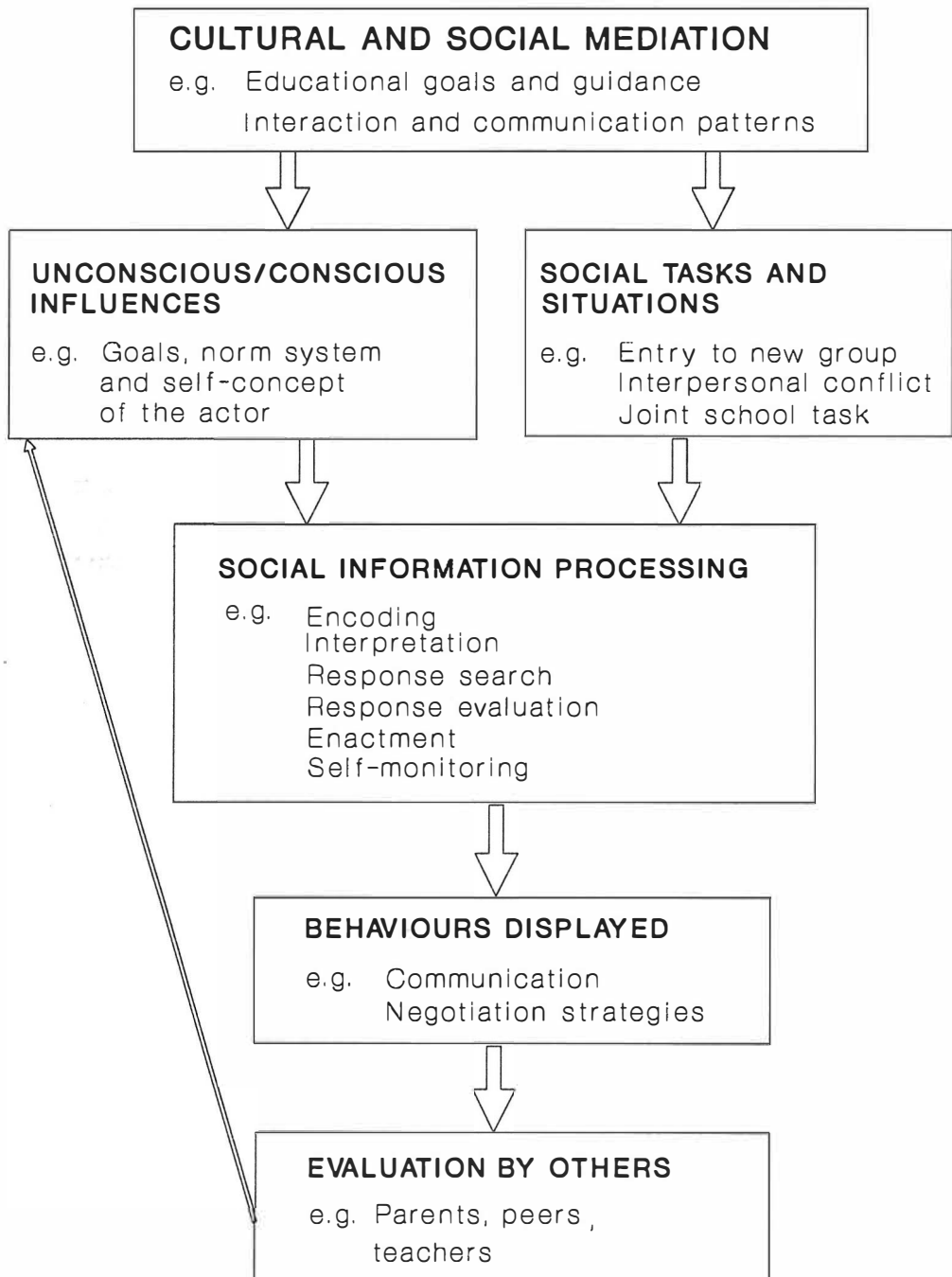


Figure 1. Basic elements in the analysis of social competence in children.

In the model presented above (modified from the model by Dodge, 1985) the definition of social competence and social tasks is dependent on culture and society. At the individual level social competence includes social information processing steps and social behaviour. The self-concept regulates both intra- and interpersonal processes, e.g. influences on the interpretation of the situation. The others evaluate the actor's social competence and respond to it continuing a reciprocal cycle.

When targeting the basic social skills for preschoolers and first graders, historical and anthropological analyses, developmental theories, empirical research and expectations of the institutions present possible goals and norms for children's interaction with adults and age mates. Participation in dyadic and group relations, cooperation and ability to influence individual and common goals, prosocial behaviour, communication and negotiation in conflicts have been suggested to belong to the social competence of children around the beginning of school.

The information on social behaviour should be longitudinal so that transitional phenomena and early precursors of central social skills could be found. The socialization history should also be studied because the development of social competence is connected with the educational goals and values as well as the guidance and control systems. The cases where the social skills might be estimated as lacking or being inadequate also depend on the social skills definitions.

Sociometric techniques cannot be recommended as the only method because they identify only popular, rejected, neglected and controversial children (Coie & Dodge, 1983). If estimations and observations are used, the selection of the level of analysis (molecular vs. molar) has consequences for the research methods and the prediction value of the results (Trower, 1984).



### 3. SELF-CONCEPT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDHOOD

#### 3.1. Developmental and social interpretations of self-concept development

After the previous review by Pölkki (I), which concentrated on developmental and social explanations of self-concept, the literature concerning children's self-development has increased enormously. The diversity of theoretical approaches and concepts is perplexing. Especially the new developmental analyses of self and self-concept, based on phenomenological, cognitive and psychoanalytic theories and models, aid in understanding the function, structure, contents, and evaluation of self in childhood. Still, questions concerning the acquisition of the self-concept and its motivational role are not answered satisfactorily.

In this section some selected theoretical and empirical contributions will be presented which clarify the early acquisition of self-concept and the relations between children's self-concept and social behaviour.

### 3.1.1. Cognitive and phenomenological theories and models of self-concept development

As presented earlier, cognitive psychology emphasizes perception as an active process which is guided by the perceivers' cognitive structures, expectations, observational goals and feedback from action. According to Markus & Wurf (1987), the unifying premise of the last decade's research on the self is that the self-concept does not only reflect on-going behaviour but also mediates and regulates it. The faith in the importance of the self-concept has increased after Wylie's (1974) pessimistic conclusions.

The model for self-understanding by Damon and Hart (1982, 1986) is developmental. It is based on the ideas of William James and cognitive developmentalists. The continuity, distinctness, volition and self-reflection belong to the self-process or to the self as agent. Also these aspects can be studied empirically. The perceived self or self-concept consists of the active, physical, social and psychological self-scheme. Harter (1983) has analyzed the manner in which the "I" as a cognitive process structures and defines the "Me" at different developmental levels. She has also emphasized competence as a central motive.

Cognitive developmentalists suppose that the structures of the self start to develop during the preoperational period of cognitive development. At the level of subjective role-taking, the child recognizes that there are different social perspectives, although he may focus on only one (e.g. authority). At the level of self-reflective thought the child understands that the self may be the object of cognition by the other (Piaget, 1968; Selman, 1980). Peers contribute in this process. The six- to seven-year-old children are especially preoccupied with the correctness of their own behaviour and that of their friends, and are conformists (Kohlberg, 1969).

Shavelson et al. (1976) divide the general self-con-

cept into academic (cognitive), social, emotional, and physical self-concepts. The aspects of social self-concept can be seen 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 settings. The general self-concept is supposed to be stable, but the aspects lower in hierarchy are more dependent on situations.

Also Epstein (1973) suggests that the postulates one has about the self are hierarchically arranged. Self-esteem can be seen representing the superordinate construct under which other subcategories are organized. Under a postulate evaluating overall self-esteem there will be second-order postulates relating to general competence, moral self-approval, power and love worthiness. The lowest order postulates under competence include assessments of specific abilities.

Epstein's second-order postulates are similar to the four dimensions of self-evaluation isolated by Coopersmith (1967). These are competence (success in meeting achievement demands), virtue (adherence to moral and ethical standards), power (ability to control and influence others), and significance (the acceptance, attention, and affection of others).

Also Harter (1983) assumes that under the evaluative aspect of the self-concept, self-esteem, one can consider four dimensions: competence, power or control, moral worth, and acceptance. According to Harter and Pike (1984), children under the age of eight can already distinguish between their cognitive, social and physical competence. These researchers suppose, however, that young children's self-esteem in social area mainly consists of self-perception of peer acceptance or popularity and status among peers as well as acceptance by adults. The relevance of Bandura's concept of "perceived self-

efficacy" (1981, 1982) for social competence (Wheeler & Ladd, 1983) is obvious.

Models of self-esteem are generally global. Wylie (1974) has been critical of studies that have employed a disparity between actual and ideal self as central for self-esteem because one's reported ideal self may represent a cultural stereotype rather than the image to which one truly aspires.

Recent cognitive models emphasize the self-concept as a multifaceted phenomenon, e.g. as a set of scripts, concepts or schemas. Some self-representations are actual and accessible, some possible or ideal. The concept of schema may represent both self-process and perceived self (Markus & Wurf, 1987). There are some limitations in cognitive explanations concerning the dynamic and motivational aspects of self and social mediation of self-concept.

### 3.1.2. Emotional and unconscious aspects of self-concept

Some of the cognitive theories have broadened to also include self-concept and unconscious functioning as well as emotions (Cantor et al., 1986). Epstein's newer formulation (1983) of his self-theory has much in common with the traditional phenomenological and cognitive theories. One of the differences is that it locates the personal theory of reality at the level of preconscious functioning that is not directly accessible by self-report.

Epstein emphasizes the analysis of emotions and moods because they are considered to be intimately associated with the preconscious level of functioning, and to provide a path to the basic postulates in a person's implicit personality theory. Epstein also stresses the importance of early experience and the use of defence mechanisms in maintaining integrity - along the lines of psychoanalysts. Also Guidano (1986) assumes that self-representations in-

clude both affective and cognitive components.

Self-representations differ in form and function depending on when, how and why they were formed. They may be verbal or nonverbal, e.g. motor or sensory. When coming to school the child already has more or less conscious or valid self-concepts, which act as a filter for new experiences. In peer interaction children also develop techniques of self-interpretation which may become modularized and automatic with time (Swann, 1983). These may include defence mechanisms which help in coping with threatening experiences.

### 3.1.3. Social psychological mediation of self-concept

The researchers of the self and social structure question the relationship between the individual and society. Both deterministic and nondeterministic interpretations have been presented.

Wiley and Alexander (1987) emphasize that the social person is shaped by interaction and that the social structure determines the possibilities for action. Settings and actors evoke typified combinations of dispositional dimensions which result in 'situated identities'. As particular actors repeatedly engage in certain role-related activities, they become typified as the sorts of persons who do these sorts of things. Thus Wiley and Alexander see selves as being generated by social action.

According to Stryker (1987) the proper question for research is not whether behaviour is either constrained or constructed, but under which circumstances it will be relatively constrained or constructed. For Stryker, structural features are understood in terms of peoples' involvement in particular social networks which "embed" them in particular identities. Identities can be understood as internalized role designations corresponding to

the social location of persons. Individual identities comprising the self are seen to be organized hierarchically by the probability of their invocation.

The symbolic interactionism of Cooley, Mead and Baldwin stresses the interpersonal relations as the matrices from which the self develops. The self is not regarded as a simple biological entity or as an essence, but as part of a dialectically elaborated social polarity. Self and other develop in *pari passu* through a process of interpersonal interaction at the symbolic or ideational level (Broughton & Riegel, 1977).

According to Mead (1934), one reacts to the other as someone similar to oneself, takes the role of the other, and is thus able to respond to himself as an object. For Mead the self was a reflected entity and mind a social product, which implies a form of social determinism. However, Mead's writings stress that the self implicates a dynamic, self-reflexive process, evidenced in the dialectics between the "I" and the "me". Thus the self is both the agent acting and the agent reflecting.

In Mead's theory a stage of spontaneous activity is followed by a stage of reflexion and evaluation. Action and reflexion are two phases of the same process. The "I" and the "me" alternate their positions and one changes into the other. This kind of reflexion does not lead to alienation; it is a stage in the developmental process of self-knowledge (Markova, 1987). Thus self-presentations differ in their origins. Some of them result from inferences that people make about their dispositions while watching their own actions or internal reactions (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Mead's theory has been criticized for its causal ordering: the inferences about how the self is perceived by others constitute the primary source of information for the self-image although the causal path could be interpreted as flowing in the opposite direction. There are empirical and theoretical grounds for assuming that

this relationship will vary throughout the course of development. It must also be remembered that it was the ideal of social behaviourists of Mead's time to describe development in terms of the submersion of the individual in the group (Leahy & Shirk, 1985).

### 3.2. Studies of self-concept in the formation of early social competence

#### 3.2.1. Developmental trends in structure, contents and evaluation of self-concept at the beginning of school age

According to Rosenberg (1979), the self-concept of young children is likely to consist of relatively specific components which can be readily observed. Their self-concept is relatively unreflective and stable, and they are generally satisfied with themselves. Their attention is turned outward, toward the interesting and important activities of life, not inward toward self-discovery. Not yet viewing himself from the perspective of others, the child has only a rudimentary propensity to view himself as an object. The child's conclusions about what he is like rest heavily upon the perceived judgments of external authority, particularly of adults.

Harter (1983) has analyzed the developmental changes in self-consciousness during the years from 6-9 utilizing the descriptive data of the old Gesell and Ilg study (1946). At about the age six the "I", as knower, seems to be able to judge or critically evaluate others, but not the self, the "me". However, the "I" cannot directly evaluate the "me". At about the age of eight, the "I"

now appears to be able to observe not only others but the "me" as well.

Research findings seem to show the following ontogenetic patterns in the contents of self-concept in childhood: 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 (Harter, 1983).

Preschool-aged children emphasize their physical aspects as well as action and social competence, although their self-descriptions may also contain more or less valid psychological aspects of self (Damon & Hart, 1982, 1986). Also different kinds of defensive self-concepts may appear in unfavourable circumstances (Ouvinen-Birgenstam, 1984).

In addition to the judgments on specific domains, children about eight years or older can also make reliable judgments on their general worth as a person. Their normative and ideal self may also start to differentiate. Also the evaluative dimension should be examined from a developmental perspective instead of using global measures, because preschool-aged children can also make elementary differentiations between their perceived physical, social, and cognitive competence (Harter, 1985).

Questions concerning the stability of children's self-concept have been partially answered. In cognitive-developmental theory, self-concept of children is supposed to change according to inner cognitive and social-cognitive resources. Damon and Hart (1986) found stability of the contents of self-concept already in young children in spite of the many changes of their self-understanding.

Studies of self-esteem show somewhat inconsistent findings. When age-groups have been studied as a whole, the general level of self-esteem has been shown to stabilize around the age of eight (Drummond et al., 1977; Ou-



vinen-Birgenstam, 1984; Kääriäinen, 1986). Aho (1987) found that the positiveness of general self-evaluation decreases during the first school years. In general, longitudinal studies of self-esteem and other aspects of self-concept of children under eight years are few.

Bem and Allen (1974) believe that there are at least two types of variations in an individual's self-concept. 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 also be in childhood 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).

### 3.2.2. Familial mediating mechanisms of self-concept

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. General cultural and socioeconomic factors are often correlated with self-concept measures without discussing their meaning and mediation mechanisms for development.

Psychological theory and research lean heavily on the concepts of identification and learning in trying to examine and explain the development of general self-concept and self-evaluation (Wylie, 1979). Also Bandura (1982) has tried to specify the personal and socially mediated experience by which self-knowledge, whether accurate or faulty, is gained. This includes vicarious

experiences, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences indicating that one possesses certain capabilities; and the states of physical arousal from which people partly judge their capableness and vulnerability. Social experiences are not, however the only sources of self-concepts. People also receive feedback from their own performances.

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 analyze parental attitudes and child-rearing techniques in relation to the self-esteem of 10-12-year-old boys. It showed that the combination of parental warmth and control was critical in the development of high general self-esteem. The results of Rosenberg (1979) are in accordance with those of Coopersmith.

The parents of the boys with high self-esteem differed from those of the boys with low self-esteem in the following attitudes and behavioural practices: 1. They were accepting, affectionate, and involved, treating the child's interests and problems as meaningful, and showing genuine concern. 2. They were strict in the sense that they enforced rules carefully and consistently, and sought to encourage children to uphold high standards of behaviour. 3. They preferred noncoercive kinds of discipline, for example, denial of privileges and isolation, and typically discussed the reasons why the child's behaviour was inappropriate. 4. They also considered the child's opinions in decisions concerned with him, and the child participated in making family plans.

One can suppose that the specific mediation mechanisms for self-concept are connected with the aspect of self-concept studied. If the self-perception of social competence is concerned, the mediation mechanisms probably resemble those associated with the development of social competence, especially child-centredness and rather strict limits for behaviour.

### 3.2.3. Self-concept and the development of social skills in childhood

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

Research findings concerning the relations between the evaluative aspect of children's self-concept and social behaviour are heterogeneous. 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. People with low self-esteem are characterized as shy and cautious in social situations (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1979).

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. Aho (1987) found that children with positive self-concepts tended to be leaders and favourites. 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.

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 a very positive self-concept may feel self-sufficient and less concerned with their connection with 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 and dangerous 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 (Dodge, 1980). The need 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 preretaliatioin (Staub, 1986).

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 when 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 do not accept them and incorporate them into their conscious self-concept. The denial of such feelings 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 under-controlled boys.

In general, there is no equivocal evidence of sex differences in self-concept in early school age (Wylie, 1979; Block, 1983). Feshbach and Feshbach (1986) found, however, that the relationship between self-concept, altruism, and aggression was strongly influenced by the child's gender. For boys, prosocial behaviour was related 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.

#### 3.2.4. Conceptual and methodological problems in studying young children's self-concept

In the investigation of the contents of self-concept and self-evaluation of young children, their short attention span, the instability of their responses, linguistic problems, and their tendency to give socially desirable responses must be taken into consideration.

Traditionally, the free description of one's personality ("The Who Am I -method" by Bugental and Zelen, 1950) has been proved to be suitable even to three-year-

old children (L'Ecuyer, 1974) and has been widely used. In the 70's only a few pictorial self-concept scales for preschool children were available, among these the scale constructed by Bolea et al. (1971). A pictorial self-concept scale was later developed by Harter and Pike (1984).

Children may not be very accurate judges of their competence. A comparison of their estimation with objective indices should not be held as an index of validity. The degree to which children's judgments are inaccurate is an interesting finding in itself.

It may also be that the phenomenal self as measured by currently used instruments, does not provide a sufficient basis for accurate predictions of a subject's behaviour. This lack of predictive power may stem in part from the fact that methods which are meant to measure the phenomenal field will offer an incomplete inventory of relevant variables. One might expect that important characteristics of a subject and his relationships with his environment would be unavailable to his conscious awareness (Harter & Pike, 1984).

There are also problems in studying the aspects of self-concept supposed to be relevant for social behaviour and development of social skills. The evaluation of the social self has been called perceived social competence. According to Harter and Pike (1984), it is involved in childhood especially in the perceptions of social acceptance or popularity. The self-concept of young children may be coded verbally or in the form of actions or scripts in which the self is in intimate connection with the actions of others. All these viewpoints are important in designing self-concept tests for children.

#### 4. PURPOSE AND PROBLEMS OF THE STUDY

Social competence as a general ability necessitates a variety of social strategies and consideration of situational factors. As central social skill for school beginners, the ability to participate in informal and task-centred cooperative relations and situations with age-mates and adults as well as to influence actively the goals of joint work was analyzed.

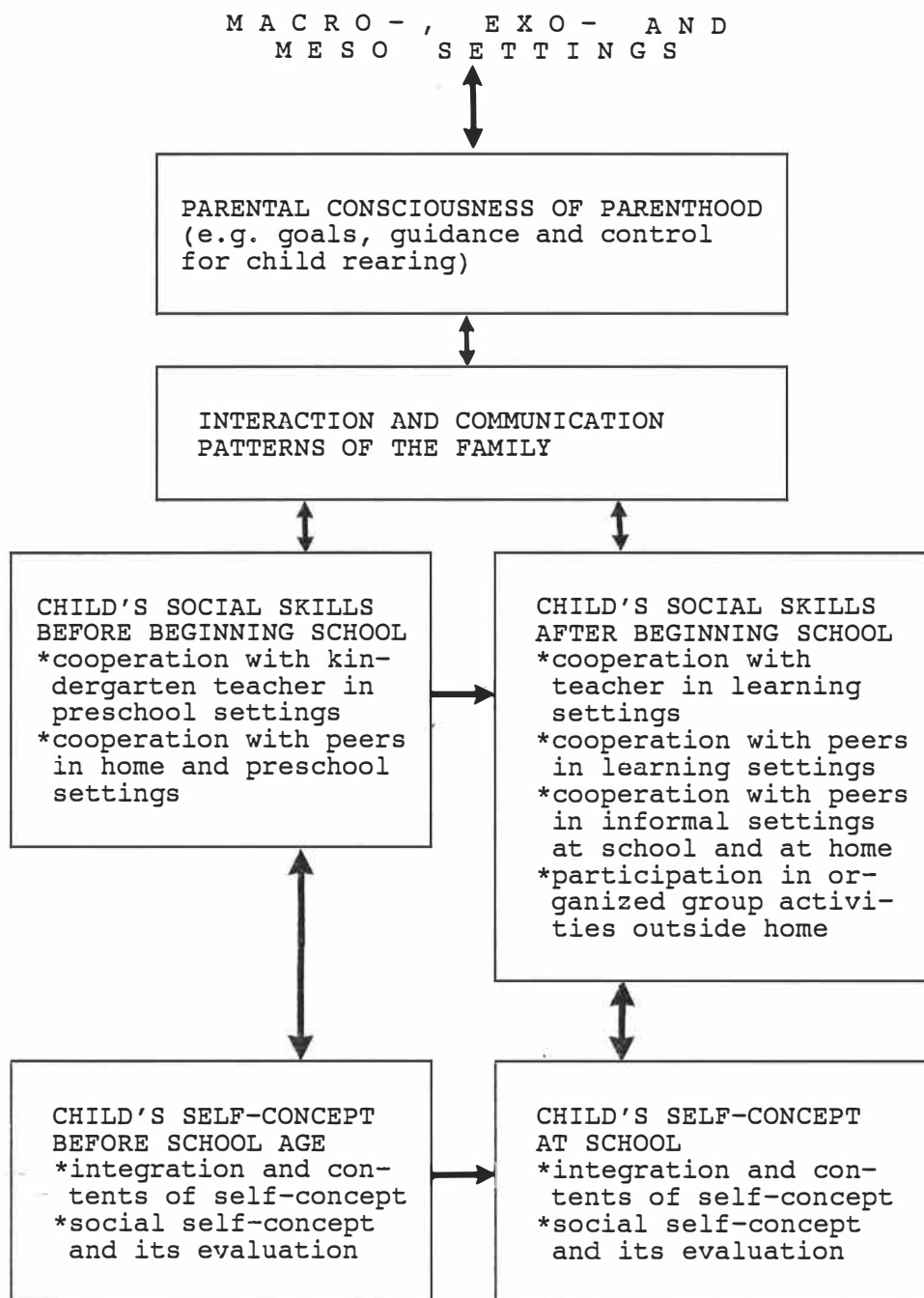
In developmental studies, social status and problems of social behaviour, e.g. aggression and loneliness, have been shown to stabilize at school age. The dynamic and transactional nature of social behaviour should be emphasized. There is conflicting evidence about the quality of self-process and self-knowledge which is necessary for the development of social competence at school beginning. Therefore, children's social skills and self-concept as well as their socialization during the transition from preschool settings to school were analyzed contextually and using both estimations, observations and self-reports.

The following problem areas were examined:

1. What kind of changes in social skills and self-concept take place during the transition from preschool to school?
2. What is the relationship between self-concept (especially the contents and integration level of self-concept as well as social self-concept), general linguistic and cognitive factors and social skills (especially cooperation in informal and goal-directed, task-centred settings)?
3. How are the socialization influences, especially the communication and interaction patterns of the family and parental consciousness of parenthood (e.g. the educational goals as well as guidance and control systems) related to social skills and self-concept at the beginning of school? Which factors predict continuing social problems at school?
4. What kind of differences in social skills, self-concept and socialization process exist between boys and girls?

The basic research levels of the entire project are presented in Figure 2.





**Figure 2.** The basic levels of analyses of the entire project.

## 5. METHODS

### 5.1. Subjects and procedure

The subjects of the original sample were 95 girls and 118 boys between 6-7 years and their parents. The parents of the children were farmers, blue and white collar workers, or 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 more than compulsory education were eliminated in the last phase of the analysis of results. Thus the number of families was reduced to 193. The original sample was collected with the help of health care personnel. The research process is presented in Table 1.

The children were interviewed and tested 4-5 months before beginning school either at home or in the kindergarten/preschool. The parents were interviewed at home. The children attending preschool (N=59) were observed by researchers and rated 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. Teachers also gave their ratings of children's social competence at the end of the first term.

Re-examination was carried out 7-8 months after beginning school. 90 children from the original sample participated in the most intensive study. The social background of these children was homogenized in respect of schooling of the parents and the number of siblings (at least one). Re-examination consisted of self-concept tests, an intelligence test, a vocabulary test, a short interview, and a questionnaire of first grade pupils' individual and social activities (which was answered by the parents). The entire research process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Schematic presentation of the entire research process.

| Time                | Procedure   |
|---------------------|---|
| March-April<br>1977 | Children's examination (N=213)<br>*Self-concept tests<br>Free Description of One's Self-Concept<br>Verbal Self-Concept Test<br>Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour<br>*Interview<br>Peer relations and social activities<br><br>Parents' interview<br>*Interaction and communication patterns of the family<br>*Parental consciousness of parenthood<br>*Child's social skills<br><br>Kindergarten teachers' ratings (N=59)<br>*Adaptation to preschool settings<br>*Social skills in adult and peer relations |

(continues)

Table 1. (continues)

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
|                  | Naturalistic observations (N=59)<br>*Social skills in adult and peer relations  |
| August-September | First grade teachers' observations<br>*Adaptation to school setting<br>*Social skills in adult and peer relations<br><br>Small group research (N=147)<br>*Skills in collaborative problem solving |
| December         | First grade teachers' ratings (N=100)<br>*Interaction with peers<br>*Participation in school work   |
| March-April 1978 | Children's examination (N=100)<br>*Self-concept tests<br>*Intelligence tests<br><br>Parents' questionnaire (N=100)<br>*Child's individual and social activities and relations                     |

## 5.2. Tests and research procedures

### 5.2.1. Parent and child interviews and questionnaires (II, III, V)

The following aspects of the communication and interaction of the family and parental consciousness of parenthood were examined by using a structured interview:

- \* Common activities at home and outside home
- \* Parents' goals and principles for child rearing

- \* Parents' expectations concerning the main tasks of the school system
- \* Regularity of common discussions
- \* Contents of guiding purposeful discussions
- \* Variety of rule areas
- \* Contents of rules
- \* Socialization into work
- \* Control system of the family

Activity structure of children was characterized mainly by describing their individual activities and their connections with the peers' and parents' activities both before beginning school and at the end of the first school year. The categories were:

- \* School work
- \* Household work
- \* Individual interests and hobbies
- \* Common activities with peers
- \* Common activities with adults
- \* Participation in organized activities outside home (e.g. clubs)

#### 5.2.2. Self-concept tests and indices (II, III, V)

##### Free Description of One's Self-Concept (FDSC) (II, V)

The test included the following indices:

- \* Level of integration of self-concept
- \* Contents of self-concept
  - activities
  - physical self
  - social self
  - psychological self
  - diffuse self-evaluation

## Verbal Self-Concept Test (VSCT) (II, V)

The social self-concept scale consisted of the following items having a relatively high loading on the positive main factor: popular, nice, has plenty of companions, likes to be with other children, gets easily acquainted and helps other children. The content of these items reflects perceived peer acceptance, social orientation and social skills. 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 which is not high but can be considered acceptable.

## Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour (VDSB) (II, III, V)

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.

After presenting a picture with a story, the following questions were asked: "What would you do/say in this situation?" and "Why would you do so?".

The answers to the first question in helping situations were categorized as follows: 1. Negative, unkind behaviour, 2. Consents to help, 3. Passive helping, 4. Active helping with minimal effort and 5. Active helping specifically directed to the needs of others.

The responses to conflict situations were divided into the 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 and 5. Constructive behaviour from the perspective of both participants.

The social self-concept index of this test was defined as the constructiveness and activeness of social behaviour. It reflects also the ability to coordinate the perspectives of the participants. 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 self-concept tests

| Self-concept scales  | 1. | 2.  | 3.    | 4.     |
|--|----|-----|-------|--------|
| 1. Level of integration (FDSC)                               |    | .05 | .11*  | .09*   |
| 2. Social self-concept: perceived peer acceptance (VSCT)     |    |     | .13** | .10*   |
| 3. Social self-concept: constructiveness of helping (VDSB)   |    |     |       | .47*** |
| 4. Social self-concept: constructiveness of conflicts (VDSB) |    |     |       |        |

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

Table 2 shows that there was no significant intercorrelation between the integration level of self-concept and aspects of social self-concept before school age. The correlations between indices of the Verbal Self-Concept - Test and the Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour were significant but low. Thus the self-concept as revealed by the different measures tends to be closely related to some particular characteristics of the test.

## 5.2.3. Social skills research methods (III, IV, V)

## Parents' ratings (III, V)

Parents rated the following aspects of their children's social interaction skills:

- \* Easiness of getting acquainted
- \* Possession of friends
- \* Expression of positive feelings to peers
- \* Initiatives for cooperation
- \* Prosocial behaviour, especially helping
- \* Aggressive initiatives
- \* Participation in conflicts
- \* Conflict resolution strategies

The children were divided into three groups on the basis of their social skills: low level (26 %), average level (46 %) and high level social skills (28 %).

## Nursery school teachers' ratings (IV)

The children who went to kindergarten (whole day, N=12) or preschool (part-time, N=50) were the target of nursery school teacher's ratings in April-May (4-5 months before school beginning). Social interaction skills included the following ratings:

- \* Relationship with teacher
- \* Ability to cooperate
- \* Initiatives for cooperation
- \* Empathy
- \* Prosocial behaviour, especially helping
- \* Participation in conflicts
- \* Conflict resolution strategies



An estimate of the general level of social skills was formed by calculating a sum index. The children were divided into groups of low (22 %), average (54 %), and high level social skills (24 %).

#### Naturalistic observations in the kindergarten (IV)

Every child was observed 7-10 times in teacher-directed situations and in informal inside and outside settings. The researchers made some notes during the observations and completed the reports immediately after the observation. The verbal reports included detailed information about the following aspects: what the child did and spoke, who were the partners, and what was the quality of interaction. The verbal reports were analyzed both at the molar and molecular level. The molar analysis concentrated on the level of cooperation which was divided (according to Parten, 1932) into the following categories:

- \* Solitary play
- \* Observing the play of other children
- \* Parallel play
- \* Associative play
- \* Goal-directed cooperation

The categories of the molecular analysis were

- \* Interaction with the adults (catching the attention of the adults/following the directive of the adults/positive feelings towards adults)
- \* Interaction with other children (e.g. seeking the attention/leading positively or negatively/dominating/opposing/positive feelings/prosocial behaviour/hostile behaviour)

### Small group research at school (III, IV)

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

1. Verbal interaction promoting common work (active, initiative/active/passive)

The interobserver reliability was estimated to be .70.

2. Collaborative problem solving (initiative, constructive cooperation, leading/rather constructive/working alone/disturbing others, negative attitude)

The interobserver reliability was .84.

### First grade teachers' observations (IV)

First grade 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 were under consultation for the observation tasks in addition to having written instructions. They were asked to observe their pupils' social behaviour and adaptation to the school work and write down their observations in the form of free descriptions.

The teachers made their notes on the basis of their observation at three points of time (end of August, September and October). The observations were originally classified into 16 categories (intercoder reliability was 89 %). Some of the categories were combined, 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 others or aloof)
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/participates rather often, defends/initiates conflicts, few attempts to negotiate)

The following social interaction types/styles were constructed (160 of the first graders were included in these types):

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. Aloof, shy, problems in peer relations (6 %).
6. Aggressive, offensive, problems in adult and peer relations (7 %)

The types of social interaction 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.

### 5.3. Presentation of results

The following review of the main results is based to a large extent on the results of the last phase of the project (publications IV and V), because after the reporting of the basic data (II, III) in a rather elementary form, new more integrative indices were developed for self-concept and social skills.

The statistical methods are mainly cross-tabulations, t-tests and one-way analyses of variance due to the nature of the data.

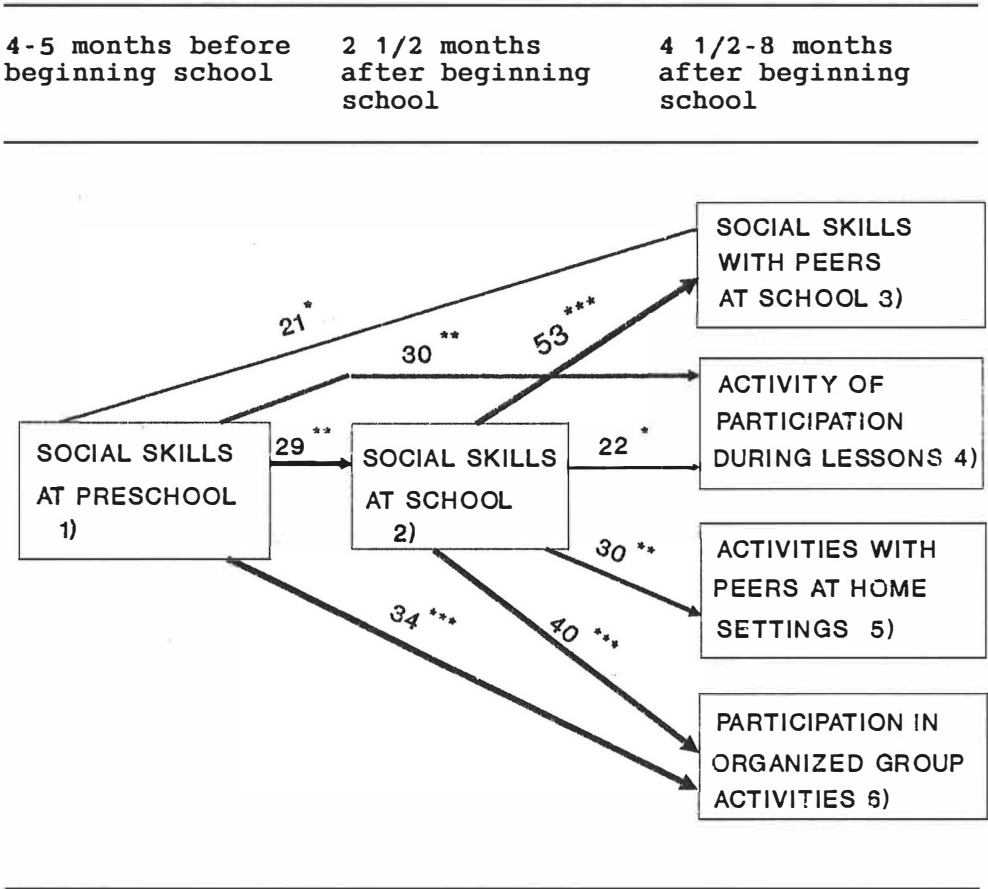
## 6. MAIN RESULTS

### 6.1. Continuity and stability of social skills during the transition from preschool settings to school (III, IV, V)

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 estimated the social skills of those children who were either in kindergarten or in preschool (N=59), and these children were also observed in natural settings. The parents' ratings suggested more changes of social behaviour during the transition period from preschool settings to school than the kindergarten teachers' ratings. Although this is an important result as such, the following results are mainly based on the information collected outside home.

Figure 3 shows the stability and continuity of the central aspects of children's social skills in peer relations during the year around school beginning. The correlations between the most global indices have been

counted although the indices are partly qualitative and not completely one-dimensional. If the type of social interaction (studies in the middle of the first term) is used as a continuum, it reflects active and constructive cooperation as well as independence and leadership.



- 1) Sum index of social skills (teachers' estimation)
  - 2) Type of social skills (teachers' and researchers' observations)
  - 3) and 4) based on teachers' estimation
  - 5) and 6) based on the parental questionnaire
- \*p<.10    \*\*p<.05    \*\*\*p<.01

Figure 3. Stability and continuity of social skills from preschool settings to school.

A moderate continuity of social behaviour exists from preschool to school. The sum index of social interaction skills in preschool correlated significantly ( $r=0.29$ ,  $p<.03$ ) with the type of social skills in the middle of the first term at school and with active interaction with peers at school after the first term ( $r=0.21$ ,  $p<.10$ ). The social behaviour patterns started to stabilize during the first term. The type of social skills had a correlation of 0.52 ( $p<.001$ ) with good interaction with peers after the first term at school.

The detailed analysis (V) revealed some transitional interpersonal problems among the children estimated as socially most competent in preschool. Children with excellent social skills in 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 in school had excellent or average social skills already at preschool. Not one of the aloof and withdrawn or aggressive offensive children had excellent social skills in preschool.

Naturalistic observations suggested interconnections of prosocial behaviour with dominating ( $p<.10$ ) and even aggressive behaviour ( $p<.05$ ). The prosocial behaviour did not correlate with the aggressive behaviour in kindergarten teachers' ratings. This refers to the central role of the informant in the estimation of social skills.

Some differences were found in child-teacher interaction from preschool to school. According to the first grade teachers, 35 % of the children estimated by the kindergarten teachers as open and positive were too dependent on adults and too attention seeking. Some continuity was found, however, between following the directions of the adults (naturalistic observation,  $r=0.34$ ,  $p<.05$ ), expression of positive feelings to adults (teachers' estimation,  $r=0.35$ ,  $p<.05$ ) in preschool and active constructive participation in goal-directed

cooperation with peers at school.

Figure 4 depicts the stability of social skills towards the end of the first term. The estimations made by the teachers at the end of the term suggest that children's interaction patterns (described as types of social skills in the middle of the term) or at least the teachers' concepts of these start to stabilize early. The groups differed significantly at the end of the term ( $F=3.57, p<.05$ ).

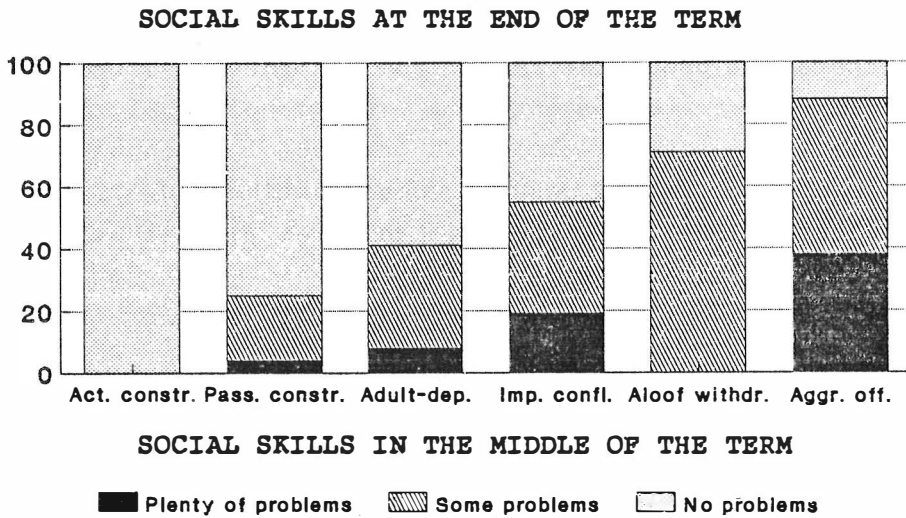


Figure 4. Social skills with peers at the end of the first term (teachers' estimation) in children with different social skills in the middle of the first term at school (teachers' and researchers' observations) (%).

At the end of the first term, 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 at least minor difficulties with peers. The teachers also estimated that 71 % of the aloof withdrawn children had some difficulties with their classmates and 24 % of them participated passively in lessons.



The parental questionnaire (7-8 months after beginning school) suggested that the interaction patterns found at school also continued with peers outside school. The children belonging to different interaction types at school differed significantly in the variety of activities with peers ( $F=4.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The joint activities with peers (e.g. common play, games, sports, and constructive activities) were significantly fewer in the groups of active impulsive and aggressive offensive children as compared with the activities of the children in the other groups.

Aggressive offensive and aloof withdrawn children also participated in the clubs for children significantly less ( $F=4.52$ ,  $p<.001$ ) than the others. For example, 80 % of the aggressive offensive and 70 % of the withdrawn children did not attend any clubs, but 70 % of the adult-dependent and 53 % of the active constructive children participated in these kinds of activities at least once a week.

## 6.2. Stability of self-concept during the first school year (V)

Information concerning different aspects of the self-concept showed both change and stability in the total group. Significant changes were found in the general integration level of the self-concept (Free Description of One's Self-Concept) and its subcategories. A significant change towards more integrated self-concepts was found in both boys and girls ( $p<.001$ ) but the general integration level of self-concept was still low. Among the subcategories especially mentionings of one's action competences increased significantly in the boys' group

( $p < .01$ ), and physical and psychological characteristics in the girls' group ( $p < .01$ ). The psychological categories included e.g. emotions, goals, abilities, and personality traits.

On an average, the social self-concept of the school beginners was positive 4-5 months before school age. In perceived peer acceptance (VSCT) there were no significant changes within the entire group. Thus, as a group, the first graders found themselves socially as competent and popular among peers as they were before beginning school (78 % of maximum value before and 75 % after beginning school). There were, however, subgroup differences and individual exceptions from this general pattern. These are presented in sections 6.3. and 6.5.

The perceived constructiveness of social behaviour in conflict and helping situations (VDSB) increased significantly in children's self-descriptions ( $p < .03$ ) during the first school year. Thus the children presented, in general, that they mainly behaved in active and constructive ways in both conflict and non-conflict situations. Behaving very constructively and prosocially in conflict situations may refer to unassertiveness.

### 6.3. Relationship between general cognitive and linguistic factors, self-concept and social skills (II, IV, V)

Only a few differences in passive vocabulary and reasoning were found between the groups belonging to different types of social skills in the middle of the first term. The active constructive children had the highest cognitive and linguistic level. They differed significantly from the passive constructive children ( $p < .01$  for Raven's Progressive Matrices and  $p < .05$  for Ruoppila's Picture Voca-

bulary Test). 45 % of the active impulsive children belonged to the cognitively best group and 45 % to the lowest one (on the basis of Raven's Test).

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. A significant positive correlation between the sum index of social skills as rated by parents and one social self-concept index (perceived peer acceptance) ( $r=0.17$ ,  $p<.02$ ) was found. Social self-concept indices, especially perceived peer acceptance, correlated to central components of social skills, e.g. to constructive negotiation skills ( $r=0.39$ ,  $p<.01$ ) estimated by kindergarten teachers.

There were significant differences between the groups in the level of integration of children's free self-description ( $p<.06$ ). Before school age, passive constructive and shy children produced self-pictures which contained very few characterizations of themselves. One cannot know if this was due more to their timidity than lack of self-reflection. The active, impulsive children emphasized in their free self-descriptions the category of social interaction as essential for their self-concept significantly more than the other groups. In the Free Self-Concept Test these children also presented the richest and most integrated picture of themselves at the end of the first school year. Thus their lack of inhibitions may have contributed to their fluent self-descriptions.

The Verbal Self-Concept Test (Figure 5a) suggested that the active constructive and passive constructive children expressed higher peer acceptance than the children belonging to the groups with problems with classmates (adult-dependent, active impulsive, aloof, and aggressive) ( $t=3.85$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The greatest difference in self-evaluation was found between the active constructive and aggressive offensive children.

PERCEIVED PEER ACCEPTANCE (VSCT)

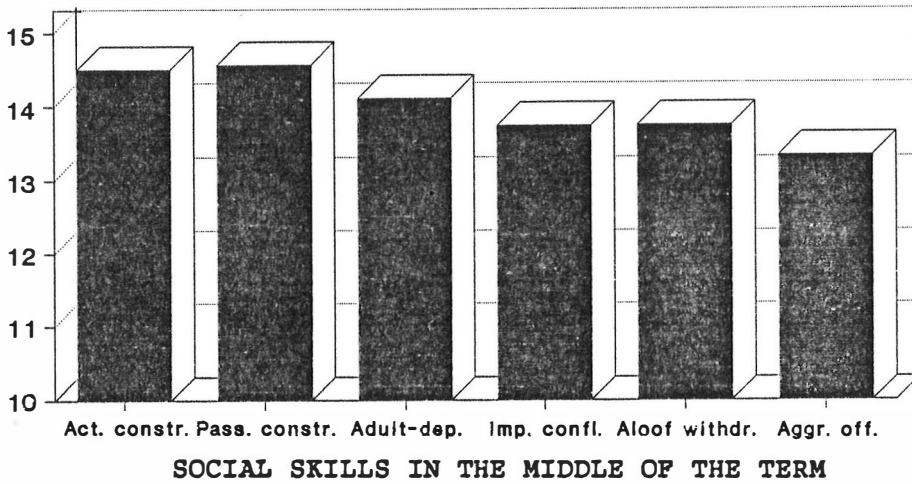


Figure 5a. Social self-concept (perceived peer acceptance in VSCT) and social interaction skills in the middle of the first term (teachers' and researchers' evaluation).

PERCEIVED CONSTRUCTIVENESS IN HELPING (VDSB)

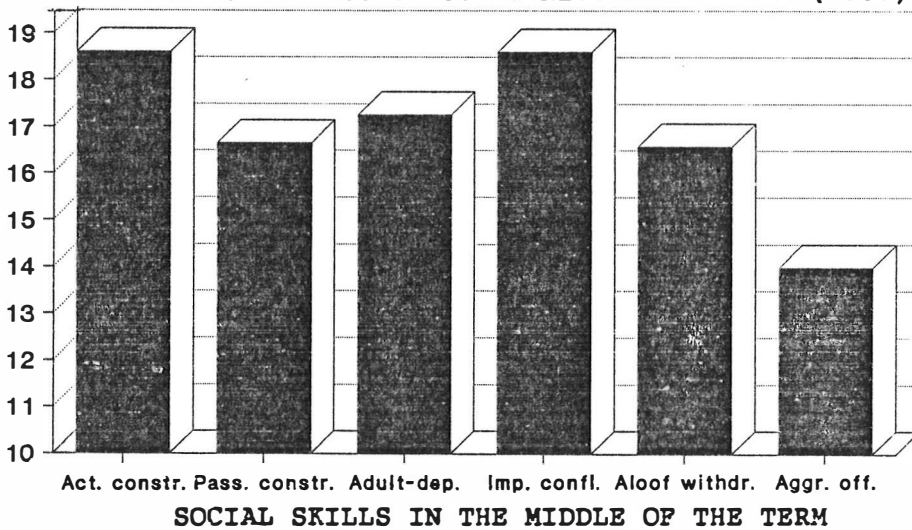


Figure 5b. Social self-concept (perceived constructiveness in helping situations in VDSB) and social interaction skills in the middle of the first term (teacher's and researcher's evaluation).

## PERCEIVED CONSTRUCTIVENESS IN CONFLICTS (VDSB)

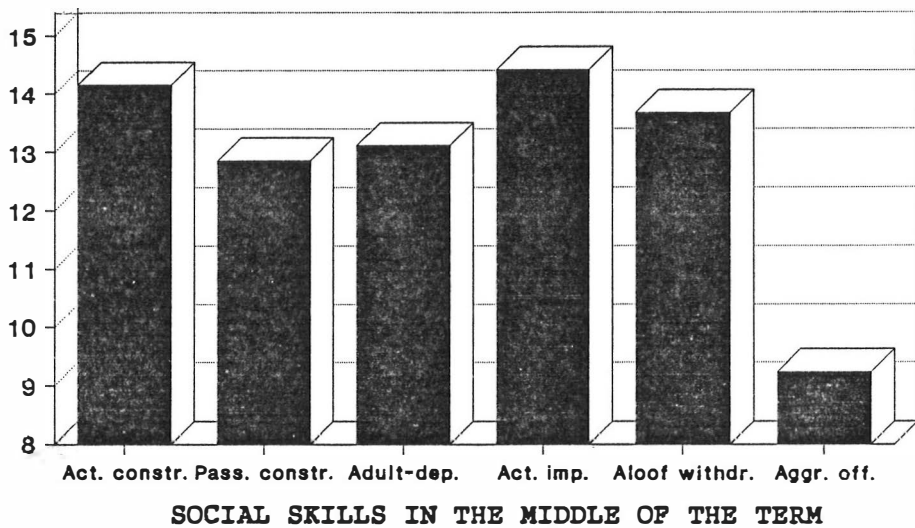


Figure 5c. Social self-concept (perceived constructive-conflictiness in situations in VDSB) and social interaction skills in the middle of the first term at school (teachers' and researchers' evaluation).

In the Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour the differences between the groups were significant in both helping ( $F=2.06$ ,  $p<.07$ ) and in conflict situations ( $F=3.73$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The differences between the groups reflected their estimated social behaviour in natural settings except for the group of impulsive children, who rated themselves to behave very constructively in both situations. The social self-concept of these children was thus clearly different from the one of the aggressive offensive children.

An examination of self-concept test-retest subgroup intercorrelations revealed some interesting differences in the stabilization of self-concept in the subgroups. The scores of perceived peer acceptance (VSCT) tended to change in the group of aloof children. The active constructive children showed no stability in the perceived constructiveness of social behaviour in subsequent years,

although their level of perceived constructiveness was, on the average, high. Adult-dependent and impulsive children presented stable constructive social self-concept (VDSB) in subsequent years.

#### 6.4. Family socialization factors in relation to children's social skills and self-concept (II, III, V)

The education of the parents has been proven to have many effects on the action structure of the family (Alanen, 1980) and on the parental consciousness of parenthood (Luolaja, 1979). Thus the families with parents having gone through the matriculation examination were excluded from the analysis in the last phases of the data analysis in order to be able to investigate the impact of parental consciousness of parenthood.

Although the sample was rather homogeneous in regard to education, the professions of the parents represented different orientations in the sectors of society (labourers, white collar workers, entrepreneurs, and farmers) and different demands for social interaction at work. This was supposed to have some consequences for family interaction and children's social development as well as to correlate with parental consciousness of parenthood.

When the relations between the parental professions and children's social skills and self-concept were analyzed both before school age and during the first year, only a few significant differences were revealed. The significant difference was found in the Free Self-Description of One's Personality: farmers' children presented more integrated self-concepts and used greater variety of categories of self than the other groups

( $p < .01$ ). This does not necessarily mean that the self-concept of these children corresponded to their actual social behaviour. It can also mean that these children, who were often lacking peers and other comparison groups and were not inhibited, presented self-descriptions used by their parents.

The family interaction, communication and socialization factors, especially indices of parental consciousness of parenthood had significant relations with the social skills at school as well as with children's self-concept. Because the most detailed analysis of social skills (based on teachers' observations and cooperative problem solving situations) was carried out in the middle of the first term, the socialization background was examined in relation to the six types of social skills.

Attempts were made to classify the families into groups on the basis of general communication and interaction climate, level of parental consciousness of parenthood, and child rearing practices, but they did not prove to be satisfactory. The amount of common activities and discussions at home was related to the goal-directed cooperation with peers at school (III).

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 favoured humanistic goals, but the first group emphasized more individual growth and the others human relations. The parents of impulsive children also favoured undifferentiated moral goals (e.g. good or fair citizen). The humanistic goals were seldom mentioned by the parents of aggressive offensive children; these emphasized practical goals (Table 3).

There were also significant differences between the types of social skills in the amount and variety of rules of their families ( $p < .05$ ). The greatest number of rules were found in the families of aloof withdrawn chil-

dren and the smallest amount in the families of active impulsive and aggressive offensive children; the latter also gave fewer responsibilities (e.g. household work) to children. The groups of children with different social skills differed significantly in the participation in household work ( $X^2=18.26$ ,  $p<.05$ ); the socially most competent groups did domestic work more than the other groups.

Table 3. Aspects of parental consciousness of parenthood and child-rearing practices (parents' interview) in the families of children belonging to different types of social skills at school (teachers' and researchers' observations) (%).

| Variable                                | <u>Types of social skills at school</u> |               |            |           |               |            |
|---|---|---------------|------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
|   | Act. constr.                            | Pass. constr. | Adult-dep. | Act. imp. | Aloof withdr. | Aggr. off. |
| <b>Educational goals and principles</b> |   |               |            |           |               |            |
| Practical goals                         | 20                                      | 27            | 24         | 13        | 18            | 33         |
| Humanistic goals/<br>human relations    | 17                                      | 25            | 12         | 29        | 36            | 7          |
| Humanistic goals/<br>individual growth  | 30                                      | 15            | 12         | 13        | 16            | 7          |
| Moral goals/<br>undifferentiated        | 13                                      | 13            | 12         | 25        | 0             | 13         |
| Moral goals/<br>differentiated          | 3                                       | 13            | 18         | 8         | 9             | 20         |
| <b>Control system</b>                   |   |               |            |           |               |            |
| Corporal punishment                     | 13                                      | 23            | 39         | 33        | 18            | 27         |
| Threatening                             | 10                                      | 10            | 17         | 8         | 0             | 33         |
| Scolding                                | 20                                      | 25            | 17         | 21        | 18            | 13         |
| Flexible techniques                     | 47                                      | 25            | 6          | 25        | 36            | 20         |
| Induction                               | 10                                      | 17            | 22         | 13        | 27            | 7          |
| <b>Rule areas <sup>1)</sup></b>         |   |               |            |           |               |            |
| 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          |
| <b>Responsibilities <sup>2)</sup></b>   |   |               |            |           |               |            |
| No responsibilities                     | 41                                      | 57            | 50         | 63        | 25            | 75         |
| 1 responsibility                        | 18                                      | 18            | 11         | 22        | 33            | 12         |
| 2 < responses                           | 41                                      | 25            | 39         | 15        | 42            | 13         |

<sup>1)</sup>  $F=3.57$ ,  $p<.05$  (one way analysis of variance for the means)

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



The families of children belonging to different groups of social skills also used different ways of controlling children. Flexible methods and explaining were most often used 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, threatening, scolding).

The interrelations between family socialization factors and children's social self-concept generally were not high. The parents of the children with a very positive social self-concept emphasized the teaching of the basic values of society (especially humanistic) as the task of the school system (Table 4). There were consistent trends towards more intensive guidance in the families of children with a 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 felt themselves highly accepted by peers also had plenty of rules in the family.

Table 4. The intercorrelations of aspects of family socialization and children's social self-concept.

| Variable  | Social self-concept              |  |                           |
|---|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
|   | Perceived peer-acceptance (VSCT) | Perceived constructiveness: helping (VDSB) | Perceived conflict (VDSB) |
| Expectations concerning the main tasks of the school system |                                  |  |                           |
| basic values of society (esp. humanistic)                   | ***                              |  | **                        |
| knowledge   |                                  |  | *                         |

(continues)

Table 4 (continues)

|                              |     |     |   |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|---|
| social skills                |     |     |   |
| good manners                 |     |     | * |
| Common discussions           |     |     |   |
| explaining                   | **  | **  |   |
| regularity                   | *** | **  |   |
| purposefulness               | **  | *** |   |
| contents                     |     |     |   |
| child's activities           | **  | *** |   |
| family's leisure time activ. | **  |     |   |
| emotional matters            | *   | **  |   |
| parents' work                | *   | *   |   |
| parents' interests and       | *   | *   |   |
| communal activities          |     |     |   |
| Great variety of rules       | **  |     |   |
| Contents of rules            |     |     |   |
| responsibilities in general  |     |     | * |
| responsibility for domestic  |     | **  |   |
| work                         |     |     |   |
| safety                       |     | *   |   |

---

\*p<.10    \*\*p<.05    \*\*\*p<.01

#### 6.5. Socialization background and social self-concept of children who had problems with classmates after the first school term (IV, V)

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

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 tended to have a more positive perceived social acceptance (VSCT) than the children with no social problems ( $p < .10$ ). However, they showed less perceived constructiveness in conflict situations (VDSB). This may suggest that these children had started to develop 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 and 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 ( $X^2 = 21.91$ ,  $p < .02$ ) and control methods ( $X^2 = 14.06$ ,  $p < .03$ ). The families of children with interpersonal problems had no humanistic goals for child rearing and mainly presented diffuse moral goals. The majority (57%) of these families used corporal punishment.

The small extreme group, found on the basis of the rough estimation by the 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 nonconstructively involved with peers. They described the problems of all the withdrawn children only as moderately difficult.

#### 6.6. Sex differences in social skills and self-concept (II, III, IV, V)

Significant sex differences were found in some aspects of social skills and self-concept as well as in the socialization of boys and girls. There was a trend that in preschool the girls paid more attention to the adults, paid less attention to peers, and were more able to cooperate than the boys ( $p < .10$ ). They also showed more empathy to peers ( $p < .05$ ), had less conflicts with peers ( $p < .05$ ) and a lesser amount of hostile attacks ( $p < .05$ ) as compared with boys. Boys belonged significantly more often to the group with many problems in preschool ( $p < .05$ ).

At school the group of children estimated to be aggressive contained only one girl and 14 boys, and among impulsive children there were 7 girls and 19 boys. No sex differences were found among the socially most competent children. Girls participated in lessons more actively than boys ( $p < .05$ ). On the scale of social self-concept, the girls expressed more constructive social behaviour as compared with boys ( $p < .03$  for helping and  $p < .02$  for conflicts).

There were some significant sex differences in parental consciousness of parenthood in the families of boys and girls, especially in the basic principles and goals for child rearing. 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 in boys' and girls' families in the quality of discussions (more explaining in boys' families;  $p < .06$ ). Boys' families also expressed more often than girls' families that children give impulses for family activities rather than restrict them ( $p < .08$ ).

## 7. DISCUSSION

### 7.1. Main findings

This study concerned an important transition period in an individual's life: the leaving of the preschool settings for the school career, and often, especially in the countryside, the coming for the first time under the influence of the expectations and goals of the official education system and the group of age mates. The main questions dealt with the stability and change of social skills and self-concept during the transition from home and preschool to school, the relationship between cognitive factors, social self-concept and social skills, and the role of interaction patterns of the family and parental consciousness of parenthood in the acquisition of these two phenomena.

The general theoretical frame of reference to socialization was the socio-ecological approach. In recognizing the intimate relation between individual and social it provided the basis for the study of elementary social competence and its mediation. The social competence of

school beginners especially concerned the flexible use of basic social skills needed in communication and cooperation with peers and adults in class situations and during the leisure time.

In the intensive analysis of social skills and self-concept, the contextual and cognitive aspects of mediation were emphasized. These included parental consciousness of parenthood (especially the goals and different kinds of support and control systems of the parents) and social information processing and self-concept (especially the self-perception of social competence).

The answers to the above mentioned broad problem areas are heavily connected with the theoretical and methodological solutions made during this project. The general evaluation of the theoretical approach and methodology takes place in section 7.2. after the main findings have been reviewed.

#### 7.1.1. Stability and change of social skills and self-concept from preschool settings to school

The stability of social development has been widely accepted as axiomatic among developmental psychologists. On the other hand, the dynamic and reciprocal nature of developmental processes is emphasized (e.g. Maccoby, 1984). One should ask, when and how the possible stability of social competence and its problems arise. Both the environment and the person himself contribute to the stability. It can be based on biological factors, constant social networks, social learning, social evocation and mutual control, and ecological constancy (Cairns & Hood, 1983).

In this study, only a low correlation between the parents' and kindergarten teachers' estimations of school beginners' social skills was found. Almost no continuity

from home settings to school was revealed in the general level of social skills, when the parents' estimations and teachers' and researchers' observations were correlated. However, the social skills based on the kindergarten teachers' evaluations showed, on an average, moderate stability of social behaviour from preschool settings to school and during the first term.

The difference between the conceptions of the parents, preschool teachers, and first grade teachers cannot be explained only by the lack of the reference groups in parents' estimations or by the sometimes superficial observations by first grade teachers (IV, V). Children may behave in a different way in a public arena as compared with more private life spheres (Dencik et al., 1989). The continuity and stability found from preschool to school may be due to the similarity of the goals and interaction patterns of these institutions.

According to the ratings of teachers and researchers, the interaction patterns of the majority of the school beginners started to stabilize during the first term at school. Especially the behaviour of the socially most competent and problematic children began to stabilize early.

Differences of social activity patterns between the children belonging to different groups of social skills at school were also found in the activities with peers and the organized group activities outside home at the end of the school year. These were rare in the groups of aggressive offensive children and impulsive children. Thus they lack the informational and companionship support of those networks (Tietjen, 1989).

Certain transitional phenomena earn special attention in preschool and at school. The naturalistic observations gave information on the complexity of preschool-aged children's social behaviour. Among children assessed as socially competent before beginning school there were both sensitive children, who were able to intimate peer relations, and assertive children who, especially in pre-

school, showed both socially constructive as well as aggressive behaviour. This has also been found by LaFreniere & Stroufe (1985). The social behaviour of the boys contains plenty of rough-and-tumble play and it often takes place in public places. The social networks of boys and girls should be studied more intensively to understand their influence on social competence (Maccoby, 1986; Belle, 1989).

The extremely impulsive behaviour may be connected with the attention deficit disorder. Most often it is a transitional phenomenon which decreases after the age of six or seven. About half of the active impulsive boys belonged to the group with a cognitive level above the average. Creative children are also often described as impulsive and nonconformist (Ruth, 1984). The educators may be too frightened and severe towards the expressions of independence, assertion, and negative feelings.

Depicting one group of children - mainly boys - as aggressive offensive already at the beginning of the first grade may be too labeling and may provoke self-fulfilling prophecies. Part of these children may become unpopular and rejected and also to be at risk for antisocial behaviour (Parker & Asher, 1987). This result is in accordance with the earlier findings e.g. by Pulkkinen (1982). About 5-7 % of the male school beginners, their classes and families, may need special help. The nature of aggression studied is important (e.g. direct or indirect, verbal or physical).

The first grade teachers considered as too dependent and attention-seeking many of those children who were estimated as being socially very competent by the kindergarten teachers. Differences in the emotional orientations and preferences of the teachers were obvious. About 3 % of the children estimated as dependent by first grade teachers needed intensive relations with an adult and possibly had problems of individuation from primary relations. Many of them belonged, however, to the chil-



dren who could be described as "satellites" (Ausubel et al., 1980). It refers to the support of, modeling after and strong identification with the adult. This may have positive consequences for learning new skills. In this study, following the directives of the adults in preschool and expressing positive feelings to adults predicted good social skills in goal-directed activities with peers at school.

Continuity of loneliness was not very great from preschool settings to school. The lack of friends in preschool correlated, however, significantly with the low participation in free cooperation with peers at school. At the end of the first term none of the children described as withdrawn and aloof in the middle of the term had many difficulties with peers but 37 % of them participated passively in school work.

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 become increasingly more worthy of observation. Some of the withdrawn children have good social skills but they enjoy working alone (Rubin, 1985).

The overall stability of the self-concept of school beginners was not very great compared with that of the older children (e.g. Ouvinen-Birgenstam, 1984). The free self-descriptions increased quantitatively and changed qualitatively in almost all children. The amount of the self-descriptions of the Finnish first graders remained very small as compared with those presented by English (Livesley & Bromley, 1973), French (L'Ecuyer, 1974) or Polish children (Braun, 1988). It should be studied in detail whether this is mainly due to shyness or a real lack of psychosocial concepts used to describe people and inner states, which may have its origins in the Finnish culture.

Among the aspects of social self-concept, perceived peer acceptance or popularity was quite positive before

beginning school, but no significant test-retest intercorrelation was found in the entire group in two subsequent years. It did not turn out to be as negative as Aho (1987) found it to change during the first school years. The perceived constructiveness of social behaviour was high and 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). Differences were, however, found in the subgroups with different social skills.

Altogether, if the stability of social behaviour is found, the inner factors, consolidation and social learning, and social networks supporting the stability should be looked into. In preschool and at school there may exist routines and rituals which support stable roles and interaction patterns. Passive adaptation into a school setting and its time tables and hidden curriculums may become generalized also elsewhere (Broady, 1986). According to the results of Leiwo et al. (1989), the communication patterns at school are often rigid and consist mainly of long speeches and questions by the teachers and answers by the pupils.

#### 7.1.2. Socio-cognitive factors and social skills in childhood

The stability of social behaviour may stem from the self-perception which may be connected with the feedback of the social network or be more individually produced. This study suggests that the social self-concept is connected with the type of social interaction of the person. 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 con-

sistent 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). 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 children and aggressive children differ in the nature of their self-concept (Block & Gjerde, 1986).

Especially the active, impulsive children showed a high level and high stability in their perceived constructiveness of social behaviour. This is consistent with the finding (Damon & Hart, 1986) that the socially oriented males have a high stability of behaviour 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 children's self-perceptions (Hymel & Franke, 1985). In peer interaction children must negotiate their roles and self-interpretations with other children (Burns, 1982). The present study suggested that an originally negative self-concept started to change into the direction of high and defensive self-concept after interpersonal difficulties.

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 the 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 in the children's self-concept scale by Wheeler and Ladd (1983). It deals with self-evaluations of persuasion strategies in conflict and non-conflict situations in middle childhood.

### 7.1.3. Familial socialization of social skills and self-concept

The socio-ecological approach emphasizes the entanglement of child development with the daily contexts and way of life of the families. Thus many influences between adults and children take place unnoticed and via elementary learning mechanisms and family interaction. Originally the way of life of children and families was studied in detail, also the time budget method was used (Alanen et al., 1978; Takala, 1984b), but the connections between the activity structures and social development were not very close.

Parental consciousness of parenthood was supposed to be a mediating link between societal and cultural structures and processes, and the family's way of life. The goals set for the children's development and the guidance given to children were suggested to influence the contents and evaluation of the self, and the acquisition of social and other competences. Types of parental consciousness of parenthood did not prove to be very successful because they overvaluated conscious educational goals and rules (III) (compare with the analysis by Hirsjärvi, 1981).

The intercorrelations between parental consciousness of parenthood and social skills and self-concept were rather low. The results suggested the same kind of

features in family communication, control and guidance which Baumrind (1978) found central in the acquisition of competence and which Coopersmith (1967) held critical in the development of high 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. On the other hand, the extreme group with plenty of problems with peers after the first term had socialization background which did not support their positive development; this finding has also been made by Pulkkinen (1982). The origins of cyclical aversive interactions could be seen both in the families of active impulsive children and aggressive children (Maccoby, 1984).

The parents' role in the development of social skills with peers should be inquired into. The attachment to parents has been shown to be important in the development of social-emotional bonds with age-mates (Waters & Stroufe, 1983). The impact of home may be critical in the adoption of basic trust and self-esteem (e.g. if one is a person worth paying attention to), but already in early childhood the evaluation of one's social competence is dependent on the experiences with peers (II).

## 7.2. Evaluation of the theoretical approach and methodology

The socio-ecological approach of the project "Way of life of the family, parental consciousness of parenthood, and children's social development" emphasized the entanglement of children's social development with the daily settings and contexts and, through the adults, also with the values and goals of the institutions and macro systems.

The loyalty to the ecological approach in the form presented by Barker (1978) was not great in the present study. Many cognitively loaded mechanisms were studied instead of the descriptions of the behavior settings. The significance of automatic associations in childhood cannot, however, be overvalued. When integrating and completing the basic results, heavy selection had to be done. In emphasizing the social competence, both the outside appearance and the self-perception and evaluation of social behaviour were studied. The variety of specific methods to analyze socialization, social skills as well as self-concept in different phases of the study was exceptionally great. This is both the strength and the weakness of the study. Because of different methods at different phases of the project and a small number of children in certain analyses, some of the comparisons became complicated. A longer and more intensive follow-up of social skills would have been needed for stronger conclusions.

The ecological validity was emphasized in this study. Different criteria were used in the selection of social skills for research. Social skills were studied in natural preschool and school settings using parents, teachers, children themselves and researchers as informants and judges. Thus the social skills studied before beginning school and 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.

It must also be remembered that the analysis of elementary social skills tends to be relativistic although there are commonly accepted basic values, norms and concepts of the necessary prerequisites for interaction to get started and sustained. In the more complicated social situations, e.g. in interpersonal conflict, one judge may find conciliatory behaviour more competent than assertive

behaviour.

Forming social interaction types which would contain central information and dimensions of social skills was not unproblematic. The approach was qualitative and emphasized the profiles of the component skills (see Appendix 7 in IV). The ecological validity was assured by using naturalistic observations by researchers and teachers. The dimensions of activeness-passiveness, constructiveness-unconstructiveness and independence-dependence can be recognized in the types of social skills.

One can ask whether the children called active constructive represent the most flexible and developed social competence of that age period. It is also possible that the most creative, critical, and socially promising children were left outside these crystallized types (called unclassified or too inconsistent). These might also be found among the impulsive children, who had problems with peers both in preschool and school settings.

Normal, passive, nice children remain easily unnoticed, although they may have a rather shy or rigid way of participating in new group activities and adopting new skills. One can suppose that a socially competent child is able to process social information adequately, has a great variety of social strategies and can tune them to the social tasks and contexts. He also has at least an average concept of her or his social competence, and is evaluated by the others as competent in social situations. There may exist, however, native inward orientation which cannot and need not be changed (Kagan, 1982).

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 (II) 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 although their reliabilities were not high.

Because children's self-concept scales seldom take the script-nature, situation-bound way of thinking and development of reciprocity of preschool-aged children into consideration, Verbal Description of One's Social Behaviour was used in this analysis as a situational social self-concept test.

Homogeneity of the sample in the last phases of the study was aimed to guarantee that the familial mediation of social skills could be studied carefully. The sample consisted of families with two parents who had no higher education. This does not represent well the present situation in the Nordic Countries.

The data of this research were already collected in the seventies. A number of changes in societal conditions, families and other socializing agents, and children's daily lives have taken place in the eighties. In the Nordic Countries new trends can be found for example in the number of siblings, changed cohabitation forms and family constellation, public engagement in child care, and divorce (Dencik et al., 1989). The influence of the mass media has possibly increased after the coverage of satellite channels had broadened also into remote areas.

7.3. What kind of school beginners may be at risk for later social and personal problems and how they could be helped?

The model concerning the basic elements and levels of social competence presents basic inner and outer prerequisites for social development and its problems. Also socio-cognitive problems, e.g. problems of role-taking and social information processing, may intertwine with the social contexts.



In the selection of candidates for social skill training at least the degree of discomfort or developmental risk posed by the problem and the etiology of the problem should be noticed. Several social skill training studies have been aimed at children who are considered socially withdrawn or isolated from peers. The seriousness of this problem, when viewed in terms of the possible developmental risk, remains unclear. The other two groups of children targeted for social skill training are those with low levels of peer acceptance or popularity and the children who may be generally well accepted but have no close friends; these are often aggressive.

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 alienated individuals. From 28 % to 70 % of the 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: low acceptance and aggressiveness were more consistent predictors of later negative outcomes in the follow-up sense. A sizable number of maladjusted individuals went through a period of shyness/withdrawal but, however, this has not yet been demonstrated as being predictive of later maladjustment.

Although the follow-up time was short, important processes were revealed and questions concerning intervention were raised. The group with plenty of problems with peers and a possibly defensive social self-concept at the end of the first school year was not great but needs special attention. It consisted of boys like the groups of active impulsive and aggressive offensive children found in the middle of the first term. There are socialization experiences which have provided some children with an in-

adequate basis for new relationships with adults and other children. These children may have internal conflicts and problems in their early attachment histories.

Short superficial interventions may not help problem children and the groups they are involved with. The remedial programs use peers, teachers or psychotherapists as successful agents for change. Different kinds of the informational, emotional, and guiding support systems of the school should still be developed.

One cannot rate as excellent social skills mere adaptation into existing social circumstances which was natural and easy for the majority of children after the first term at school. Context-specific social skills in pre-school and at school may also cumulate in unsuccessful ways and produce too rigid ways of coping with new situations and stress. The educators' emphasis on the nice other respecting behaviour and their controlling of all the expressions of assertiveness and hostile feelings may assist in producing false selves.

The group-centred approach has proved promising both in the acquisition of knowledge and of cooperative relations between pupils (Riihelä, 1986; Bossert, 1987). This also applies to children of different ethnic origins. Also respect and tolerance of different temperaments and types of social skills are needed, especially when boys are concerned. The adoption of more flexible timetables for learning and free time might also prevent social problems or at least make school world easier to tolerate for many who begin their school careers.

## TIIVISTELMÄ: KOULUTULOKKAIDEN MINÄKÄSITYS JA SOSIAALISET TAIDOT

Tutkimuksen päätavoitteena oli 1) tutkia sosiaalisten taitojen ja minäkäsityksen, erityisesti sosiaalisen minäkäsityksen pysyvyyttä ja muutoksia siirtymävaiheessa kodista ja esikoulusta kouluun ja ensimmäisen kouluvuoden aikana, 2) tarkastella kognitiivisten tekijöiden, minäkäsityksen ja sosiaalisten taitojen väliisiä yhteyksiä ja 3) selvittää sosiaalisten taitojen ja minäkäsityksen omaksumista, erityisesti perheen vuorovaikutusmallien ja vanhempien kasvatustietoisuuden osuutta tässä prosessissa.

Tutkimus on raportoitu viitenä erillisenä julkaisuna. Käsillä oleva yhteenveto sisältää osien yhteisen teoriaosuuden esittelyn, metodien kuvauksen, tulosten tiivistelmän sekä yleisen arvioinnin ja johtopäätökset.

Tutkimuksen teoreettisena lähtökohtana sosialisointiin oli sosio-ekologinen viitekehys. Kehitetyssä mallissa korostuu yksilön sosiaalisen kehityksen kietoutuminen arkipäivän toimintoihin ja vuorovaikutukseen, yhteisön tavoitteisiin, ohjaukseen ja säätelyyn sekä yksilön sisäisiin tekijöihin. Sosiaalisten taitojen välitysmekanismeina tutkittiin erityisesti perheen vuorovaikutusmalleja ja vanhempien kasvatustietoisuuden sisältöä (mm. lapsen kohdistuvia kasvatustavoitteita sekä ohjaus- ja säätelytapaa). Minäkäsityksen oletettiin toimivan suodattimena sosiaa-

listen tilanteiden tulkinnassa ja toiminnassa.

Lasten sosiaalisen kompetenssin määrittelyyn liittyy ongelmia erityisesti sen monimuotoisuuden ja arvosidonnaisuuden vuoksi. Keskeisenä sosiaalisen kompetenssin luonnehdinnassa voidaan pitää sitä, että toimijalla on tilanteen hahmottamiskykyä, runsaasti erilaisia sosiaalisia taitoja ja valmius toimia tilanteen vaatimusten ja omien tavoitteidensa mukaisesti. Täten on tärkeää, kenen kriteereitä käytetään kompetenssin arvioinnissa ja miten sosiaalisen toiminnan ongelmat tulkitaan. Koulualoille keskeisinä sosiaalisina taitoina pidettiin tutkimuksessa erityisesti sellaisia valmiuksia, jotka auttavat lasta osallistumaan vapaaseen vuorovaikutukseen ja asiakeskeiseen yhteistoimintaan ryhmätilanteissa ja vaikuttamaan omien ja yhteisten tavoitteiden muotoiluun ja saavuttamiseen.

Tutkimuksen kohdehenkilöinä oli 213 syksyllä 1970 syntyttä lasta Lahdesta, Laukaasta, Outokummusta ja Keski-Suomen syrjäseuduilta. Heidät poimittiin terveydenhoitajien kortistoista. Perheet olivat suhteellisen homogeenisia vanhempien koulutuksen suhteen ja mukana oli vain kahden huoltajan perheitä. Jotta sosiaalisten taitojen ja minäkäsityksen sosiaalipsykologiset välitysmekanismit saataisiin analyysin kohteiksi, jätettiin tutkimuksen loppuvaiheen analyysistä pois kaikki perheet, joiden jommalla kummalla vanhemmalla oli ylioppilastutkinto tai sitä enemmän koulutusta; tällöin tutkittujen määräksi jäi 193.

Sosiaalisten taitojen tutkimusmenetelminä 4-5 kuukautta ennen koulunkäynnin alkua käytettiin vanhempien arviointeja ja päiväkodissa olleiden lasten (N=59) tarkkailua luonnollisissa tilanteissa sekä lastentarhanopettajien arviointeja. Vanhemmat ja opettajat kuvasivat erityisesti lasten kontaktikykyä, kommunikointia, yhteistoimintaa, prososiaalista toimintaa kuten auttamista ja ristiriitojen ratkaisukeinoja. Luonnollisia tilanteita havainnoitiin yhteensä 10 kertaa oppimiskeskeisissä ja vapaissa tilanteissa ja havainnot liittyivät samoihin sosiaali-

sen kehityksen aspekteihin kuin arvioinnit.

Ensimmäisten luokkien opettajat tarkkailivat oppilaiden sopeutumista kouluun ja sosiaalisia taitoja 2 1/2 ensimmäisen kuukauden aikana. Yksityiskohtaisista sosiaalisten taitojen kuvauksista valittiin jatkokäsittelyyn seuraavat muuttujat: vuorovaikutus opettajan kanssa, osallistuminen työskentelyyn oppitunneilla, yhteistoiminta tovereiden kanssa vapaa-aikoina, toisten puolesta toimiminen ja ristiriitojen ratkaisukeinot. Syyslukukauden alussa järjestetyssä pienryhmätutkimuksesta (N=147), jossa käytettiin sekä yksityiskohtaista tarkkailua että kokonaisvaltaisempia sosiaalisten taitojen arviointeja, otettiin jatkokäsittelyyn muuttujat yhteistyötä edistävä kielellinen vuorovaikutus ja konstrukttiivinen, tavoitteinen toiminta asiakeskeisissä yhteistoimintatilanteissa.

Edellä mainittujen sosiaalisten taitojen komponenttien perusteella muodostettiin seuraavat kuusi sosiaalisten taitojen tyyppiä, joihin kuului 160 oppilasta: 1. aktiivinen, konstrukttiivinen, erinomaiset taidot toverisuhteissa (15 % kaikista), 2. passiivinen, konstrukttiivinen, hyvät taidot toverisuhteissa (26 %), 3. aikuisesta riippuvainen, ongelmia toverisuhteissa (9 %), 4. aktiivinen, impulsiivinen, ristiriitoja tovereiden kanssa (13 %), 5. yksinäinen, arka, ongelmia toverisuhteissa (6 %) ja 6. aggressiivinen, hyökkäävä, ongelmia aikuis- ja toverisuhteissa (7 %).

Syyslukukauden lopussa opettajat arvioivat oppilaiden osallistumista koulutyöhön ja heidän mahdollisia ongelmiaan tovereiden kanssa (N=100). Ensimmäisen lukuvuoden loppupuolella tehdyssä kyselyssä vanhemmat kertoivat, millaiseksi lapsen arjen toimintamallit, ihmissuhteet ja sosiaaliset taidot olivat muovautuneet.

Minäkäsityksen tutkimusmenetelminä olivat vapaa kuvaus sekä kolme muuta minäkäsitystestiä (kuvaminäkäsitystesti, kielellinen minäkäsitysasteikko sekä oman toiminnan kuvaus sosiaalisissa ongelmatilanteissa). Viimeisissä analyyseissä käytettiin kolmea edellisiin testeihin pohjautuvaa so-

siaalisen minäkäsityksen asteikkoa, jotka luonnehtivat lasten omaa havaintoa sosiaalisesta kyvykkyydestään.

Tulokset osoittivat, että vanhempien ja lastentarhanopettajien arvioinneissa sosiaalisista taidoista oli yksittäisten lasten kohdalla eroja. Lastentarhanopettajien arvioinnit olivat merkitsevämmin yhteydessä koulunkäynnin alkuvaiheessa havaittuihin sosiaalisiin taitoihin kuin vanhempien arvioinnit. Siirtymävaiheessa havaittiin impulsiivisuutta ja aikuisista riippuvuutta myös lapsilla, joita lastentarhanopettajat pitivät sosiaalisesti hyvin kehittyneinä.

Luonnollisten tilanteiden tarkkailu päiväkodeissa osoitti, että esikouluiässä esiintyy myönteisten tunteiden, prososiaalisen toiminnan ja yhteistoiminnan rinnalla toisten dominoimista ja aggressioita myös sosiaalisesti taitaviksi arvioiduilla lapsilla. Näin ollen asertiivisuutta, toisiin vaikuttamista ja aggressiivisuutta on tarkasteltava useasta näkökulmasta.

Syyslukukauden puolivälissä havaitut keskeiset sosiaalisten taitojen erot säilyivät ensimmäisen lukukauden ajan. Noin 10 prosentilla ensiluokkalaisista oli vielä runsaasti ongelmia ja 24 prosentilla jonkin verran ongelmia tovereiden kanssa syyslukukauden lopussa. Kenelläkään syyslukukauden puolivälissä konstruktivisiksi arvioiduista ei ollut vaikeuksia tovereiden kanssa, ja kaikki yhtä lukuun ottamatta osallistuivat aktiivisesti koulutyöhön. Sen sijaan hyökkääviksi arvioiduista lapsista 78 prosentilla oli edelleen ongelmia tovereiden kanssa ja 63 prosentilla koulutyöhön osallistumisessa. Aktiivisiksi ja impulsiivisiksi arvioiduista 54 prosentilla ja 71 prosentilla yksinäisistä lapsista oli edelleen vaikeuksia toverisuhteissa.

Koulussa havaitut sosiaaliset toimintamallit olivat nähtävissä myös lasten vapaa-aikana. Yksinäiset ja aggressiiviset lapset eivät osallistuneet juuri lainkaan järjestettyyn ryhmätoimintaan kuten kerhotoimintaan kodin ulkopuolella, kun taas 53 % aktiivisen konstruktivisista ja

70 % aikuisista riippuvista lapsista osallistui siihen viikoittain.

Koulunkäynnin alussa lasten käsitykset omasta sosiaalisesta kyvykkyydestään olivat merkitsevästi yhteydessä koulussa havaittuihin sosiaalisten taitojen tyyppeihin. Aktiivisen konstruktiiiviset lapset näkivät itsensä tovereiden hyväksymiksi ja suosituiksi ennen koulunkäynnin alkua, ja näillä havainnoilla oli jatkuvuutta. Toveriongelmia omaavilla lapsiryhmillä (aikuisista riippuvat, impulsiiviset, yksinäiset ja aggressiiviset) oli merkitsevästi alhaisempi käsitys omasta sosiaalisesta kyvykkyydestään aktiivisen konstruktiiivisiin lapsiin verrattuna. Sosiaalisilta taidoiltaan erilaisten lasten minäkäsitys myös kehittyi eri tavoin ensimmäisen kouluvuoden aikana. Erittäin yksinäisten ja vetäytyvien lasten sosiaalinen minäkäsitys muuttui myönteisemmäksi ensimmäisen kouluvuoden loppupuolella.

Eri vuorovaikutustyyppisiin kuuluneiden lasten perheissä oli erilaisia kasvatustavoitteita. Aktiivisen konstruktiiivisten lasten perheissä korostettiin yksilön kasvuun liittyviä humanistisia tavoitteita, kun taas yksinäisten sekä aktiivisten lasten perheissä suosittiin ihmissuhteisiin liittyviä humanistisia kasvatustavoitteita. Hyökkääviksi arvioitujen lasten vanhemmat mainitsivat erityisesti käytännöllisiä tavoitteita.

Yksinäisten, vetäytyvien lasten perheissä oli eniten sääntöjä, ja vähiten niitä oli impulsiivisten ja aggressiivisten lasten perheissä, joissa myös annettiin vähemmän velvollisuuksia lapsille muihin perheisiin verrattuna. Aikuisesta riippuvien ja aggressiivisten lasten perheissä käytettiin eniten kovia kontrollointikeinoja kuten ruumiillista rangaistusta ja uhkailua.

Sosialisaatiotekijöiden ja sosiaalisen minäkäsityksen kesken havaittiin suhteellisen vähän suoraa riippuvuutta. Erittäin myönteinen sosiaalinen minäkuva lapsilla oli kuitenkin yhteydessä perhekommunikaatioon, erityisesti monipuolisiin yhteisiin keskusteluihin.

Pienen, toveri- ja aikuissuhteiltaan ongelmaisen ääri-ryhmän muodostivat syyslukukauden lopussa aikaisemmin aggressiivisiksi ja impulsiivisiksi arvioidut lapset. Heidän kodeissaan käytettiin ankaria rangaistuskeinoja ja kasvatustavoitteet olivat käytännöllisiä. Näillä lapsilla oli kuitenkin lukuvuoden lopussa suhteellisen myönteinen kuva omasta sosiaalisesta asemastaan tovereiden keskuudessa.

Tutkimus vahvisti ja täydensi aikaisemmissa tutkimuksissa saatua kuvaa poikien runsaammista sosiaalisen käyttäytymisen ongelmista: he muodostivat koulunkäynnin alussa melkein 90 % aggressiivisiksi ja 2/3 impulsiivisiksi arvioiduista lapsista. Myös ongelmallisin ääriryhmä syyslukukauden jälkeen koostui pojista. Useimmilla ongelmallisilla pojilla oli vaikeuksia sekä aikuis- että toverisuhteissa lastentarhanopettajien, mutta ei aina vanhempien, käsityksen mukaan jo ennen kouluikää. Lapsia, joiden tausta ei tue luottavaa suhtautumista aikuisiin ja toisiin lapsiin sekä niitä, joilla on mahdollisesti erityisiä tarkkaavuushäiriöitä tai tunne-elämän vaikeuksia olisi autettava mahdollisimman varhain yhteisöllisten ja yksilöllisten tukisysteemien avulla.

Tutkimuksessa korostui, että tulevaisuudessa myönteistä ennustearvoa omaavina sosiaalisina taitoina ei voi pitää vain nopeaa koulumaailmaan sopeutumista, mikä enemmistölle lapsista oli helppoa ensimmäisten kuukausien jälkeen. Liiallinen mukautuminen koulun rutiineihin voi olla esteenä aktiiviselle, kriittiselle ja tavoitteiselle osallistumiselle ryhmätoimintoihin ja siten myös oppimiselle. Ryhmäkeskeiset opetusmuodot ovat tärkeitä sekä sosiaalisten taitojen että oppisisältöjen omaksumisen kannalta. Myös yksilöllisten sosiaalisten tyyppien ja tyylien arvostusta olisi lisättävä. Lisäksi olisi tutkittava työille ja pojille ominaisten ryhmien ja verkostojen vaikutusta heidän sosiaaliseen kyvykkyyteensä.

Johtopäätösten tekemistä rajoittavat mm. tutkimusmenetelmien heterogeenisyys eri tutkimusvaiheissa, pienet osaryhmät eräissä analyyyseissä ja sosiaalisten taitojen seuranta-ajan lyhyys.



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