‘Friendship is a very powerful thing’: The Importance of Communication, Humour, Kindness, Inclusion, and Shared Experiences – How Children Describe Their Experiences of Friendship in an International School Setting

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Friendship   Peer Cultures   International Schools   Communication   Inclusion

Children’s friendships have been researched in various contexts with many studies performed in school settings. This study seeks to contribute to the field of childhood studies by examining children’s descriptions of their experiences of friendship within the unique context of the international school. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how 8-9 year old children in an international school setting, who move frequently, describe their experiences of friendship. Questions regarding how children describe their experiences of making friends, the qualities or traits they perceive make a good friend, and the strategies they use to make friends are all considered and analyzed. Research and analysis is conducted from the standpoint of viewing children as competent social actors with the intention of honouring their voices and authentically describing their experiences.

A mixed methods approach was utilized to collect data through child-friendly interview questions combined with a friendship map drawing task. Scaffolding was a key component of the interview process to ensure children involved understood and were comfortable answering questions as they progressively became more complex. Twelve children were interviewed and their thoughts, ideas and, descriptions were analyzed through the use of a thematic analysis involving coding themes from transcribed data and the creation of different thematic maps. The results of this analysis demonstrated the importance of communication, humour and kindness, inclusion, and shared experiences. These were significant in the children’s descriptions of their experiences of friendship. Children within this international school context described experiences of laughter, inclusion, and open communication as central upon entering new school environments. Educators and childcare professionals should support and encourage these behaviours in students across school settings to help ease with transitions and facilitate inclusion and acceptance in learning environments worldwide.
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INTRODUCTION

Children around the world interact with their environments and with other children and in doing so experience making friends and the process of friendship. Friendships are significant as they are: “voluntary, intimate, dynamic relationships founded on cooperation and trust… a primary feature of both adults’ and children’s lives” (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003: 248). Many children around the world spend a great amount of time within the institution of schools and it is here that they often experience and develop friendships. Schools are important settings for developing friendships, as they are institutions in which children experience the process of education but are also viewed as a space for children (James and James, 2012: 107).

This study is done from the standpoint of viewing children as competent and capable social actors who have interesting thoughts to contribute and who are worthy of study in their own right (James and Prout, 1997: 4). With this perspective, this study seeks to extend insights and understandings into how children describe their experiences of friendships; the qualities they perceive make a good friend, and the strategies they use to make friends within an international school setting. The research problem is to explore how 8-9 year old children in an international school setting, who move frequently, describe their experiences of friendship.

This study took place in an international school in a major city in Sweden. The students from this school represent over 65 different countries coming from professional, highly educated and affluent families. The parents of many of these students are skilled professionals or work for different embassies, which results in their frequent movement to different countries and schools based on two-year contracts. Although students are often moving schools they frequently remain within an international school environment, which approaches education in a similar fashion through the use of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum to promote inquiry, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

Schooling involves the process of educating children and their experiences of that process with schools as the institution, or space, in which children are educated (James & James, 2012: 107). A great deal of research has been done on children’s friendships
within school settings and its connections and importance to their social and academic functioning (Gifford-Smith and Bronwell, 2003: 237). There has been great interest in children’s friendships in school settings but little work has been done within the setting of the international school. International schools provide a unique setting for children to experience the process of schooling. International schools can be defined as schools that utilize the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, located in many major cities in many countries, and schools that came into being as a result of an increasingly mobilized world. These schools have worked to become more responsive to the: “broadening array of cultures, languages and experiences of their student populations” (Young, 2017: 21).

By examining the descriptions of friendships found within an international school context, one can gain a deeper understanding of the strategies and behaviours these children exhibit including an openness to new children frequently joining their different classroom communities. Corsaro argued that: “Children and their childhoods are affected by the societies and cultures of which they are members” (2012: 489). In examining the strategies and behaviours found within these children’s descriptions of their experiences of friendships, one can gain more knowledge about this unique context and apply these lessons, insights, and strategies to other schools in many different contexts as the world becomes increasingly connected and globalized.

The issue of friendship seems to become of less importance once children reach older grade levels as researchers and teachers tend to focus more on academic skills and progress (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016: 398). Christensen and James argue for the importance of examining and giving attention to the power relations and organizational structures that shape children’s lives (2000: 7). Schools are institutions of central importance to the lives of many children and are places where children experience making friends. By analyzing children’s understandings of social conditions that impact their lives one can begin to develop policies that: “are appropriate to enable children to lead satisfying lives” (Mayall, 2000: 134). Listening to and honouring children’s voices can help researchers gain a deeper understanding of issues that impact and are of great importance to them (James and Christensen, 2000: 7), such as their processes of making friends within school institutions. This study was done with the intention of filling a gap in previous research relating to children’s friendship experiences by focusing on the
unique circumstances and characteristics found within the international school setting and the children who attend these schools.

In the following pages the research problem and aim are more thoroughly addressed and previous research on children’s friendships is reviewed. This is then followed by a detailed description of the method for collecting and analyzing data to find key themes that describe these children’s experiences of friendship. The thematic analysis of these themes results in a concluding discussion about the importance of communication, openness, and shared experiences found within the international school setting and the implications this can have on supporting children making friends and throughout their transitions worldwide.
RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

Schools and schooling involve the social institutions children can attend and their experiences of this process. Schools have developed into spaces for children in which they are segregated from the adult world (James and James, 2012: 107). International schools are schools that differ with unique characteristics such as the diversity in nationalities, cultures, and the experiences reflected within their student populations. These schools can be found in many countries around the world and often utilize the same curriculum as these students and their families move frequently. This common curriculum helps bring connection and consistency to their learning.

This study is seeking to understand the following: how do 8-9 year old children in an international school setting, who move frequently, describe their experiences of friendship? The aim of this project is to investigate how these children describe their experiences of friendship and to determine what, or if, they have shared experiences and descriptions.

This research is important because learning how children develop and understand friendships can help teachers and childcare professionals better support their transitions into new countries, classrooms, and learning environments. Children’s peer groups and cultures are shaped by their understandings of friendship. Corsaro describes children as members of peer groups, which form peer cultures and friendships as developing based on intimacy and shared understanding (2009: 1, 8). This is seen in international schools where children come from different cultures with both unique and shared experiences. Tisdall and Punch suggest childhood studies should focus on relationships to help us understand connections and differences among children in a globalized world (2012: 260). This study aims to look at the connections and relationships found within children who attend international schools with regards to their experiences and descriptions of making friends.

Allison James and Adrian James argue for the importance of developing and supporting a child-focused perspective in research as it respects the individuality, perspectives and standpoints of children (2012: 12). This study is placed in a research field which views children as competent social actors who negotiate, share, and create
culture among each other and with adults (Corsaro, 2012: 488). It aims to further contribute to this field which honours children as people who are worthy of study in their own right as active participants in different societies (James, 2009: 34). Adults often distort or misinterpret children’s views to fit into an adult perspective (Corsaro, 2003: 6). By listening to children describe their experiences of friendship this study hopes to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and strategies with friendships to contribute to this knowledge base within the field of childhood studies.

This study focuses on the data collected from 11 interviews with 8-9 year old children and seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do children describe their experiences of making friends?
- What qualities or traits do children perceive make a good friend?
- What strategies do they use to make friends? Do these strategies differ or share similarities?
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Perspectives on Children

Research on children’s friendships and social interactions have been of focus in two major areas, which include developmental psychology and sociology. Psychology studies tend to focus on quantitative methods in which children nominate or rate their friends. In contrast to this, many sociological studies have utilized qualitative methods through observations and interviewing to represent and more deeply understand children’s authentic voices.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychology aims to examine children’s cognitive and moral development in relation to their age (James and James, 2012: 39). Early research in psychology aimed to discover the origins of friendship with a focus on children’s processes of friendship selection (Rubin et al, 2011: 22). Monroe (1898) asked children aged 7 to 16 about what types of friends they liked best and analyzed these results to include attributes such as age, sex, size, habits and mental and moral traits. He discovered that children sought friends who were kind, agreeable, and of the same age, sex, and size (in Rubin et al., 2011: 22-23). Bosner (1902) expanded on this thinking and asked adolescents aged 12 to 22 years to write about different types of intimate friendships with a focus on the age the friendships began, the time spent together, and their similarities and differences (in Rubin et al, 2011: 22). Bosner discovered that friendships began as early as infancy and older children formed friendships based on closer connections and shared confidence (in Rubin et al, 2011: 22). Essay techniques were also used where children were to write about their ideas about friendship or were interviewed about friendship. Schneider argues that these early techniques were not as effective as they left out certain elements of children’s relationships arguing for more use of observations (2000: 138).

During the 1930s developmental psychologists used sociometric techniques to research children’s friendships and social interactions in which children rate their friends and look for patterns in their relationships with peers (James and James, 2012: 55). Peer nominations are one sociometric technique where children nominate who they most like
or dislike which then ranks children into categories of popular, rejected, neglected, controversial and average, with negative rankings being linked to negative developmental and academic outcomes (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003: 239, 247). These nominations did not always produce accurate results as children would sometimes name peers they wanted to be friends with along with their actual friends (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003: 251). Additionally, children may nominate each other based on superficial friendship levels and a child with no nominations may have friends outside of the classroom or interview setting (Schneider, 2000: 138-139). Without interviewing or listening to children’s thoughts and ideas, these developmental psychology research techniques may have missed out on more complete understandings of friendships. More recently, Gottman (1983) used the approach of observation to determine which behaviours were essential parts of children’s friendship making (In Schneider, 2000: 138). However, observation is not so common in psychological research, as a contrast to research developing in sociological traditions.

**Childhood Sociology**

Another strategy in researching and exploring the significance of children’s friendships can be found within the sociology of childhood. This field aims to work with children and involves adults trying to enter their worlds to gain deeper understandings of topics and issues important to children (Mayall, 2000: 121). Childhood sociology aims to view children and childhood as a social construction, a variable of social analysis, worthy of study in their own right, and active in constructing their lives (James and Prout, 1997: 8). Children were to be viewed as social actors who:

- must be seen as active in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes (James and Prout, 1997: 8).

Views on children and childhood were now to be based on social definition and not physical maturity (Montgomery, 2013: 183). Much sociological research has been done involving children through the use of observations and interviews to gain a deeper
understanding of their perspectives and concerns regarding the complex issue of friendship.

**Children and Friendship**

*Defining Friendship*

Children’s friendships are difficult to define, as they are often illusive to adults as they are: “private phenomena that often occur at times and in places where adults are not present” (Schneider, 2000: 138). Friendship is a concept that can involve many different interpretations and definitions, which have altered throughout decades of research and analysis. Psychologists such as Bukowski et al (1996) defined friendship as focusing on the idea of ‘liking’ in which people like one another and like spending time together (in Carter and Nutbrown, 2016: 396). Developmental psychologists defined friendship through the use of sociometric testing in which children nominate other children that they like and do not like to determine different categories of peer acceptances (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016: 396-397). Psychology research has also been done on how friendships can vary depending on a child’s age and their social development with toddlers focusing on having shared interests and mutual affection and shifting towards the importance of loyalty, trust, and intimacy as children age (Dunn, 2004: 13).

Sociologists moved away from this perspective to focus on how children construct their own peer cultures in how they interact with others in groups to interpret and understand the world around them (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016: 397). Sociologists James and James define friendship as: “children’s affective social relations with their peers and others” (2012: 55).

Humour and shared laughter are important elements in making friends and in defining friendship. Previous research has discussed the role of laughter as an interactional recourse, which can help to facilitate conversations and interactions. Gareth Walker’s study on the use of laughter by young children examines how they use laughter as a means to develop their interactional competencies (2017: 20). Laughter works as an invitation to other participants in conversations which results in shared laughter and collaborations in conversations (Holt, 2010: 1513, 1524). Laughter plays an important role in the interplay between both adults and children.
Studying kindness in children is an area that has not received much research attention, even though it is widely valued, as much research has focused on the human behaviours behind bullying (Binfet and Gaertner, 2015: 28). Research on kindness has illustrated that it has varying and complex definitions and that it can be related to terms such as compassion, caring, helping, and altruism. It has also been found that children’s understandings of kindness develop with age and maturity to focus increasingly on intentions behind action even though there have been fewer studies done that address the issue of kindness from the child’s perspective (Binfet and Gaertner, 2015: 29). This study aims to look more closely at traits and qualities that children use to describe what makes a good friend with kindness as a central theme.

Many sociological studies have focused on children’s friendships and interactions. William Corsaro’s work contributes to the complexities involved in the socialization and friendship development of children.

*Peer Cultures and Access to Play*

Research on children’s peer groups and socialization has been of great focus for many years. Corsaro’s work highlights the important role that children play in their own socialization as a process where they interact with others to create their own peer cultures in order to: “reproduce, to extend and to join the adult world” (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000: 197-198). Socialization is not focused on children adopting adult knowledge and skills as in these interactions children are demonstrating themselves as competent, social actors who actively interpret the world around them and create their own unique peer cultures. Peer cultures are defined as: “a stable set of routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share with each other” (Corsaro, 2012: 489). This concept is closely linked with children’s friendship, as it is within these peer cultures that children share, connect, and develop friendships.

Interpretive reproduction is a term developed by Corsaro that describes how children create and participate in their own peer cultures as they actively contribute to change within their different cultures and societies (2012: 488-489). It helps to demonstrate the active role children play in constructing and understanding the world around them. Friendships are a key factor in this process as they create peer cultures with
their friends through the use of different request strategies to access play within those peer cultures. Children use different access strategies to join in during play by demonstrating they will not disrupt the play and understand how it works (Corsaro, 2009: 8). Young children put great value in their fragile play spaces and may exclude other children from playing for fear that they will disrupt the play they have created (Corsaro, 2003: 43).

Corsaro’s work serves as an important inspiration for this thesis but in contrast to his work based on ethnographic research and observations, this study is based on interviewing children. The use of interviewing aims to capture children’s unique and authentic voices further our understanding of children’s friendships in the field of childhood studies within an international school setting.

 Friendship and Diversity

Friendships made in primary school are important as it is during this time that children start to develop understandings of social, ethnic, and individual differences (Iqbal et al, 2017: 129). Countless sociological studies have been done which focus on children’s friendship development in school settings (Corsaro, 2003; Corsaro and Eder, 1990; Iqbal et al, 2017; Li and Zizzi, 2018; Scholtz and Gilligan, 2017; Vincent et al, 2017). Additionally, there have been studies done on children within educational settings who have special learning needs, such as autism and augmentative communication disorders, and the processes and strategies they use in making friends which demonstrate the obstacles and loneliness they face that often leads to unilateral friendships (Sumiya et al, 2018; Ostrík et al, 2018). This study is seeking to contribute to the field of sociology by interviewing children within the unique setting of the international school.

A variety of sociological research has been done on children’s friendships in diverse contexts. In recent years much research has been done on diversity and immigration and their impacts on children’s friendships (Connolly et al., 2009; Scholtz and Gilligan, 2017; Iqbal, Neal and Vincent, 2017). These studies have highlighted positive and negative impacts diversity can have on school learning environments and children’s processes of making friends. Some studies have focused on how children use their agency to transform cultural meanings to shift boundaries and create environments
of acceptance (Christou and Spyrou, 2012; Kromidas, 2012). Other studies have demonstrated how children in these diverse situations can exclude or discriminate against other children through the use of racist name-calling and stereotyping (Devine et al., 2008), which can occur between majority and migrant children and additionally between migrant children themselves (Theodorou, 2012).

Research has also been done on international students who move to new countries and do not attend international schools. Li and Zizzi’s (2018) study used observations and interviewing to examine how multicultural friendships were strengthened through physical activities or sports as they provided a social venue for children to interact and build friendships. Other researchers have found that these types of international students frequently felt alienated, lonely and marginalized (Klomegah, 2006; Brown, 2009). These sociological studies examined the experiences of international children entering a new learning environment that differs from this study of children in an international school setting that is made up of a variety of cultures where children may feel less marginalized or different.

Lastly, Iqbal et al’s study involved interviews and social mapping with children aged 8-9 years old from diverse background across three schools in London, England (2017: 128). This study focused on the issue of diversity and its impacts on friendship making concluding that friendships form: “across class, ethnic and religious difference, but that their practices of friendship-making also reflect the influence of dimensions of social division” (Iqbal et al, 2017: 140). This research paper seeks to contribute to this knowledge by examining another diverse setting of the international school.

To sum up, all of the research studies mentioned above focus on issues of diversity, friendships, observations, and interviews with children. This study will add to this research by interviewing children within the unique context of the international school. This study seeks to contribute additional knowledge about children’s friendships in international schools by interviewing them, listening to their descriptions of friendship making, and asking about the processes and strategies they use in making friends when entering different school environments.
METHOD

A central component of childhood studies aims to try and capture the authentic voices of children as:

Only through listening and hearing what children say and paying attention to the ways in which they communicate will progress be made towards conducting research with, rather than simply on, children (James and Christensen, 2000: 7).

With this epistemological standpoint data was collected and analyzed with the aim of listening and focusing on children’s authentic voices and ideas. This standpoint has evolved as a criticism to previous research which focused on children as in the process of becoming adults, who only had value as future adults, and ignored the concept of children as beings in their own right (Gallacher and Kehily, 2013: 225). This shift in childhood studies and research on children aims to view children as competent social actors who are experts in their own experiences and argues they should be taken seriously in their own right (James and Prout, 1997: 3-4). This qualitative study views children in this light as capable social actors who have interesting insights worthy of focus, discussion, and analysis.

Data Collected & Materials

Setting

This study took place in an international school in a major city in Sweden. This international school includes children from 65 different countries and utilizes a common curriculum that focuses on inquiry-based learning, which is found across many international schools around the world. Interviews were conducted in a quiet area of the elementary school library where students could focus on the interview questions but remain in an open area close to other classrooms.

Participant Recruitment

This study is based on interviews with children in order to capture their authentic voices and descriptions of their experiences of friendship. Before beginning the data collection process informed consent was obtained from classroom teachers asking if their students could be involved. With this consent and support, informed consent was then
sought from the parents of the children in the two third grade classes who could chose to be involved in the thesis project. Participants were recruited following ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent from these parents via an email outlining the project and then with a written response confirming their child’s participation (see Appendix 2).

The first 5-10 respondents to the email were to be the children who would be interviewed so as to avoid bias in the data collection process. There were many quick responses of interest and consent to the email so 11 children were initially included. An email was then sent out to the parents of the other children in the classes that there were enough participants after which another parent emailed with great interest. It was decided that it could cause harm to the child to exclude them from the study, as they were excited to be involved, so this child was included for a total of 12 interviews. The 12 children included in the study were selected based on parent email responses, which included boys and girls representing different cultural backgrounds and nationalities including Sweden, India, Estonia, Germany, France, United States of America, Mongolia, Chile, Italy, Panama, and England.

Informed consent was then sought from the children participating, which involved explaining the project to them, that it would involve asking questions about friendship and making friends, and that they did not need to participate and could refuse to answer questions without explanation at any time (Alderson, 2005: 27). Presenting this information in a child-friendly manner and checking for their understanding enabled the children involved to make informed decisions about their participation (Bryman, 2016: 129).

Scaffolding and Interviewing

Data was collected through the use of a mixed methods approach combining semi-structured interview questions with a drawing task of creating a friendship map. Scaffolding is an important aspect of working with children as it is a teaching strategy that allows for tasks to get increasingly difficult in an attentive and supportive environment. Interviews were scaffolded with questions framed in a child-friendly manner in order to meet different learning needs and comprehension levels (Dell Clark, 2011: 87). I began scaffolding by drawing my own friendship map during the first
interview but then proceeded to keep it to the side so as to encourage the children to
design their own maps with the only guideline of putting themselves in the center of the
page. Additionally, children were interviewed one at a time to enable more focus and
attention to their responses to check their understanding and accommodate to their
different communication styles (Dell Clark, 2011: 69-71).

Interviews were recorded with the use of the iPhone voice memo application to
ensure all detailed responses were captured and to enable the transcription upon
completion. Dell Clark recommends starting and ending with an easy task when
interviewing children (2011: 86). With this in mind, interviews began with the following
prompt:

“Today we are going to talk about friendships. I am studying and am interested in
learning about how children your age, who go to international schools, make friends. Can
you draw me a map of your friends? I would like you to draw yourself in the middle or
center of the paper and include your friends and important people, animals or things in
your life around you. While you are drawing I am going to ask you some questions about
your drawing, is that ok with you?” (See Appendix 1 for complete Interview Guide).

Additionally, children were asked for their input as they were experts in the field of
children’s friendships and it was highlighted that without their expertise the study would
not be possible or complete. This was an interview strategy recommended by Dell Clark
in which she highlights that children are experts in different areas that adults know little
about and stresses the importance of how the children can teach the researcher about a
topic (2011: 14). This strategy worked well to engage the interest of the children
interviewed as they expressed excitement and pride in knowing that they could help an
adult understand the topic of friendships on a deeper level.

The children could then begin the interview by starting their friendship map
drawings accompanied with easy, open-ended questions, which became more in-depth as
the interview progressed. The use of the drawing task was chosen to provide an outlet
that is sensitive to children’s voices as it can increase authenticity and helps one to listen
respectfully to their perspectives (Elden, 2012: 67, Carter and Nutbrown, 2016: 399).
Additionally, drawings can work as a technique to relax children in interview settings and help them to reflect on the topics being discussed (Elden, 2012: 71). The friendship maps were used in this way to encourage discussion and reflection but were not part of the analysis. It was also a great starting and ending point for friendship discussions, which the children could refer back to and helped facilitate the interview process and encourage deeper reflections (see Table 1 for friendship map examples with names omitted).

*Table 1: Friendship Maps*

- Interview 11
- Interview 7
Interview 8

Interview 10

Interview 12
Analytical Procedure

A thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the collected interview data in an attempt to report on the meanings and experiences of the children within this qualitative study (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81). Braun and Clarke describe a thematic analysis as searching for repeated patterns of meaning across data (2006: 86). There are six phases in a thematic analysis including transcribing collected data, generating initial codes, looking for themes within codes, reviewing themes to create a thematic map, defining and naming themes, and report writing (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). The first phase involved familiarizing oneself with the data through transcribing and reading through each interview several times. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and were conducted in a quiet space within the school library. Conducting and transcribing the collected data was a lengthy process as many children and their parents gave consent and were engaged throughout the interviews resulting in some interviews lasting longer than 15 minutes (see Table 1). This meant the transcription process took longer as did the search for initial codes and analysis of themes.

Table 2: Matrix of Interview Length
The second phase of the analysis involved rereading the transcribed interviews and recording initial code ideas. The third phase consisted of writing out all of the initial code ideas into a long list while searching for repeating and significant themes. Braun and Clarke define a theme as an important part of the data representing a patterned response within the collected data (2006: 82). Some of these themes included the importance of shared interests, a shared sense of humour, making introductions, inclusion, secrets, living in close proximity or the same class, planning play dates and sleepovers, communicating, and bonding over shared international experiences and common languages, among many others. Identifying themes began as a straightforward process but then became more complex upon searching for ways to justify their connections, implications, and significance (Bryman, 2016: 587-588). This process involved colour coding and counting the above themes to note their significance and reoccurrence throughout the collected data. The most significant four themes were:

1. The importance of communication in making friends.
2. Humour and kindness as important friendship qualities.
3. Inclusion.
4. Shared experiences and interests.

With these four central themes I was able to move on to the fourth phase of the analysis, which consisted of reviewing the selected themes to begin creating a thematic map. A thematic analysis is not a linear process as it involves going back and rereading data to code and refine themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 86). This was very clear throughout the fifth phase of the analysis during which many thematic maps were created and altered to finally define and name four central themes of this analysis; communication, humour and kindness, inclusion, and shared experiences, in order to finalize the thematic map results. Upon finalizing and naming these themes the report writing of this analysis could begin.
Ethical Considerations

Working with children involves inherent and important ethical considerations. Bryman discusses four areas in which ethical dilemmas can occur including harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception (2016: 125). To avoid these concerns detailed information was given to all teachers, parents, and the children involved describing the purpose of the study, guaranteeing confidentiality in names and data collected, and ensuring the collected data was solely used for research. This information was presented to children in a child-friendly manner to allow them to make informed decisions about participation (Bryman, 2016: 129). Informed consent was sought and obtained from all participants before the interview process began as an essential aspect of the data collection process.

I work as a teacher within this international school context where the interviews took place and lead lessons one hour per week with the children involved in the study. The children involved were familiar and comfortable speaking with me but I do not have daily contact with them. Although they were comfortable speaking with me, one must acknowledge that they were aware they were speaking to an adult, which may serve as a barrier in their responses (Corsaro, 2003: 5). Using the school as the setting for the interviews provided another ethical consideration, as children can feel obliged to agree, conform or be obedient within this setting (James and James, 2012: 12). With this in mind, children were reminded that consent is not a one time agreement so they more clearly understood that their participation was voluntary and that they did not need to participate, could stop the interview at any time, and that they did not need to give me a reason (Alderson, 2005: 27).
ANALYSIS

Four central themes became clear throughout the thematic data analysis, which included communication, humour and kindness, inclusion and shared experiences (see Table 2 for more descriptions of central themes). Communication is an important aspect involved in the strategies the children described in making friends. Humour and kindness were the most significant and repeated themes in the data when analyzing friendship qualities, traits, and reflections on what makes a good friend. Inclusion is a theme that is central to these children’s definitions and descriptions of their experiences of friendship. By including others in their games, clubs, and activities and by being included these children described feeling respected, listened to, and cared for. Lastly, shared experiences became evident as an underlying theme throughout the thematic analysis as children described their experiences of moving, making new friends, and connecting over shared languages, emotions, and international experiences.

Communication, humour and kindness, and inclusion are all themes, which focus on action. These actions can be explained through their descriptions of shared experiences, which work together to help these children make friends within this international school setting.

Table 3: Central Themes and Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Children’s Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Presenting or introducing one’s self, talking to others, asking questions to learn more about someone, and saying hi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour and Kindness</td>
<td>Being a kind person, making someone laugh, telling jokes, laughing at the same time, shared sense of humour, being funny as a way to make new friends, kindness by including others in games, cheering friends up when they feel sad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Inviting someone to play at break or play dates, including someone in a game, family inclusion, sharing secrets, best friends, being included in class projects, feeling shy on the first day but then making friends, supporting each other ‘they have my back.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Experiences</td>
<td>Experience of moving countries, starting at new schools, missing friends and family members who live abroad, shared hobbies and interests (football, tag games, video games, gymnastics, reading/writing), making new friends, losing friends who move away.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMUNICATION

“Asking people to play with you or presenting yourself to them.” (Interview 5)

Research Question: What strategies do they use to make friends? Do these strategies differ or share similarities?

Communication is a central strategy described in making and maintaining friendships, which in this context involves talking to others, introducing oneself to new people, discussing shared hobbies and interests, and including others in conversations. Throughout the interviews children frequently described the importance of communicating in making new friends involving introducing or presenting themselves to others, being introduced by a new class buddy (someone meant to show them around a new school environment), asking questions to determine shared interests and getting to know new people, and sharing jokes and secrets. The following excerpt describes one child’s strategy for making new friends through the use of communication:

“You have to first get to know them and say ‘hi, what’s your name?’ and ask questions about them first and then when you got to know them you can ask them to come play with you and that’s how you can make a friend!” (Interview 8)

This child describes a strategy in making friends by talking to new children in her class, learning more about them, and then asking them to play. Throughout the interviews children demonstrated and described their efficient use of communication as a strategy to make friends.

Corsaro describes children as social beings who want to be involved and participate within groups (2002: 36). His studies with preschool children can be applied to this study with regards to the different access strategies that children use in play as a means to gain entry into an ongoing interaction (Corsaro, 2003: 42). Including others can alter or change the play they have developed so children utilize these access strategies by demonstrating they have knowledge about the play and can join without disrupting it (Corsaro, 2009: 8). Younger children rarely use direct strategies of introducing
themselves and asking to be included in play as they are often scared another child will disrupt the fragile play space or game that they have created (Corsaro, 2003: 43). This is not the case with the 8-9 year old children in this study who describe a willingness to ask other children if they could play with them or to invite them on play dates outside of school. The children in this international school setting describe experiences of being confident in their communication abilities and being able to request access to play as can be seen in the following responses:

Interviewer: “If you could give someone a tip about how to make new friends what would you say?”

“You can always just ask um to be a friend so you have more friends and if one day you’re lonely you’ll have friends.” (Interview 6)

“I just ask them what they like to do... when you come into the class you can introduce yourself.” (Interview 11)

“I would ask them if you could play and just talk and like tell them what you like and what you usually do and stuff like that.” (Interview 12)

These responses to the same question demonstrate the importance of communication as a means to access play and experience friendship within this international school setting. In response to a broad question about making new friends, many interviewed children responded that they asked others to play and found ways to connect to them through communication. These descriptions of their willingness and abilities to ask others to be included or to learn about a new person demonstrates their skilful use of communication as a strategy in the process of making friends.

The children described their use of communication through skilfully and independently introducing themselves, asking others to play, or asking new people questions to learn more about them. These characteristics and behaviours that the children described demonstrate that they have clear and confident communication skills
supporting this study’s standpoint of them as competent actors. They are capable and knowledgeable about ways to introduce themselves and access different play scenarios on their own. They share similar strategies of communicating with others and describe different instances where they were quick to ask permission to play or be included during a break time activity. These descriptions highlight the confidence and capabilities these children have found within the different strategies they use in making friends.

Other strategies that interviewed children talked about in making new friends revolving around communication included having a class buddy introduce them, asking others to play, planning a play date or a sleepover outside of school, asking someone questions to learn about them, and finally saying something funny or making a friend laugh. In all school settings children learn how to gain access to different games and friendship groups as: “Adults can be helpful, but children often collectively teach each other how to get along” (Corsaro, 2003: 41). These descriptions of friendship within this international school setting demonstrate that children are supporting and encouraging one another to communicate, request access to play, and to begin developing friendships.

Communication enables these children to discover shared interests and experiences which is an essential aspect to making a friend. According to this analysis, the theme of communication focuses on the child as an actor who describes the process of making friends by asking others to be included to play with them and by asking a new person questions in order to get to know them better. The interviewed children are using the act of communicating in facilitating and enabling their experiences of making friends.

Laughter was another aspect that was of key importance to all the children interviewed as it served as a great way to make friends, introduce oneself, and to maintain friendships based on a shared sense of humour.
HUMOUR AND KINDNESS

“She is so funny she can almost always make me laugh like even when I’m really upset she can always make me laugh.” (Interview 11)

**Research Questions:** What qualities or traits do children perceive make a good friend? What strategies do they use to make friends? Do these strategies differ or share similarities?

Laughter is an important interactional recourse among adults and children. Interactional recourse refers to the strategies people use to help communicate, connect and influence each other. Gareth Walker’s study on young children’s use of laughter highlights how these children use laughter while developing their interactional competencies (2017: 20). Children and adults find ways to use laughter in reflexive and accountable ways (Walker, 2017: 20-21).

Being funny, including having a shared sense of humour, and being kind were two essential qualities that the children repeatedly described when discussing what makes a good friend. Every child interviewed discussed the importance of being funny, making jokes, and laughing as important traits in a good friend. When asked to describe a friend one child described how being funny and kind were important qualities of a friend and were also traits within herself that made her a good friend:

“Well I can always trust her with everything and she’s also really funny and she makes me laugh a lot and I can also make her laugh. Like normally I always cheer her up... She has a lot of imagination and she’s really kind and caring.” (Interview 11)

This excerpt describes an interplay between these two children and how their shared traits of humour and kindness help in the action of making friends. This further indicates that humour and kindness were not only important qualities found within a good friend, but also were important qualities this child saw within herself as a friend. Humour and
kindness are seen here as qualities within friends and as part of the action or strategy in making new friends.

Shared laughter was a theme of central importance to all children interviewed and was used to describe important qualities of friends and it further connected with the question of what strategies these children used in making friends. Humour was described as not only an essential quality in being a good friend but also as a strategy in making friends. This is clear in the following interview excerpts:

Interviewer: “How do you make a new friend?”

“I like to do funny things so they start to laugh. That’s like my friend [name omitted] does... If you want to be a good friend you have to be nice and act a little funny so the other person starts to laugh and then they get to be a friend.” (Interview 7)

“Well we think the same things are funny like if there’s some kind of word that we think is funny we both laugh at exactly the same time.”(Interview 8)

“Sometimes I make them laugh, sometimes I just walk up to them and say that’s good if they are doing or trying something.” (Interview 10)

“I just introduce myself like I say a joke and sometimes if they’re not a really funny person I ask them what they like to do.” (Interview 11)

These excerpts describe the strategies and traits that children are using in making friends. The children interviewed describe making jokes, saying funny things, and making others laugh as strategies in the process of making friends. Laughter by one person can serve as an invitation for another person to laugh which leads to shared laughter (Holt, 2010: 1513). Whether or not a person laughs can be tied into the interactional environment and the continuation of the shared talk or communication that is taking place (Holt, 2010: 1513).
Shared laughter is significant because it is not only linked to a shared sense of humour but can be viewed as a way to collaborate within a topic that can result in changing the topic or having more to add (Holt, 2010: 1524). These children’s descriptions illustrated the importance of shared laughter as a strategy and quality in making friends as a means of communication and connection. This theme of humour connects with the theme of communication as these children are describing their skilful abilities as actors to use shared laughter as an essential strategy in making friends.

Another significant quality that was described and repeated throughout the interview data was the theme of kindness. Many of the interviewed children described a good friend as someone who was nice and kind. Kindness can be defined as: “an emotion-based motivation that promotes prosocial behaviour without the expectation of reciprocal benefit… fostering social relationships and social networks” (Campos and Algoe, 2009: 551). By definition it is clear that kindness can be closely linked to friendships, as it is important in fostering and maintaining relationships. Kindness is more than acting in a positive way, as there are many ways and definitions of what it means to be kind. Young children can view kindness as emotional or physical support that helps to build or maintain relationships and friendships (Binfet and Gaertner, 2015: 36-37). Kindness was addressed in many interviewed children’s descriptions of how their friends treated them illustrating it as both an important quality and a strategy in making friends. This is indicated in the following excerpt:

“To be friends you can talk with them a lot and try to be kind to that person so they will know you are a kind person instead of a bad person. I don’t care if it’s a boy or a girl.” (Interview 1)

The above excerpt describes the importance of kindness as a trait of a good friend and begins to demonstrate the significance of the theme of inclusion. Many children used words and behaviours to demonstrate the importance of kindness, which resulted in identifying it as an important theme, found within the collected data. This can be seen in the following quote where kindness is seen as important quality in a friend by the actions and behaviours that this friend exhibits:
“Cause [name omitted] when I am lonely she is always like ‘do you wanna play with me?’ and she is like always here for me and stuff.” (Interview 6)

This child describes the importance of kindness as a quality she looks for in a friend as someone who notices when she is feeling lonely, includes her in activities, and supports her. Kindness is described as an action that her friend takes to include her and make her feel welcome in the school environment.

Children’s understandings of kindness become increasingly differentiated with age as they become more aware of intentions behind different actions (Binfet and Gaertner, 2015: 29). These 8-9 year old children demonstrated a deep understanding of the importance of kindness as a quality they look for in a friend and as a strategy they can use to make and maintain their friendships. They described kindness as including others, saying something nice to a new person, smiling, or simply by just being kind or caring. This is further illustrated in the following exchanges:

Interviewer: “If you were to give someone a tip about how to make new friends at a new school what would you say?”

“I can be friends with new people if they’re kind to me. Like [name omitted] was like my friend right away in kindergarten ... if they play with me a lot and like make me smile cause I really like to smile all the time!” (Interview 1)

“When you come into the class you can introduce yourself and then you can say something funny or something nice. Lots of my good friends did that!” (Interview 11)

These children described instances of a skilful use of humour and kindness as a strategy in order to make new friends. These were not only important qualities that they used as strategies to make friends but they were also traits that they looked for within their own friends. These children described the use of laughter and kindness as ways to form
connections with others as both a strategy for making friends and as traits used to describe what makes a good friend. Shared laughter and kind behaviours allowed these children to form connections with other children in their classes and schools and helped to form and maintain lasting friendships.

**INCLUSION**

“He listens to me, we play together at recess of course, and then also we share many of the same interests.” (Interview 9)

*Research Question: How do children describe their experiences of making friends?*

A critical theme that occurred throughout this analysis was the theme of inclusion as central to the children’s descriptions of their experiences of making friends. This theme was not immediately evident during the transcription stage and the first phases of the thematic analysis but became increasingly evident in searching for repeated meanings across the collected and coded interview data. Descriptions of inclusive activities were found within all of the themes previously discussed as children described being included in games while making new friends, described a good friend as someone who talks to them and invites them on play dates, and described being together and included as essential to having a friend. This is further described below:

“They would ask me to play with them. They would also say they want to tell you something like secrets. They would say nice things and not tease.” (Interview 3)

This excerpt illustrates a child’s description of a good friend as someone who includes her in activities, games, and secrets. Feeling included and including others is repeatedly described as an important part of making friends by the children interviewed.

A central theme found within friendships and peer cultures is that children try to gain control of their lives in order to be able to share it with others (Corsaro, 2009: 3). In trying to control their surroundings, children can include or exclude their peers by
allowing or resisting entry to their play (Corsaro, 2009: 8). Unlike Corsaro’s descriptions of children requesting access to play and often being excluded, it was seen in this international school setting that other children were inclusive and even invited others to play with them:

Interviewer: “How do you make a new friend when you go to a new school?”

“Usually it’s them who comes to me and is like ‘can I play with you?’ and then I say, ‘sure!’ and then I play with that person almost everyday and we help each other.” (Interview 6)

This interaction highlights the inclusive nature found within this international school setting. This is not to claim that processes of exclusion do not occur in this setting but rather to highlight the significance of this level of inclusion during play times. Corsaro’s work was with children younger than those in this study but he consistently noticed children attempting to control their surroundings by allowing or resisting entry of their peers in their play (2009: 8). Experiences of exclusion were not described as important in these children’s friendship experiences.

Communication is closely linked to the concept of inclusion as children describe their experiences of making friends. Children describe experiences of openness upon entering a new international school environment as can be seen in the exchange below:

Interviewer: “And how did it feel when you started at a new school?”
Interview 11: “Um well like the first second I was in the classroom then I made three friends.”
Interviewer: “How did you make friends with them?”
Interview 11: [Name omitted] just said ‘what’s your name?’ and I said “I’m [name omitted]’ so we introduced ourselves and said a few jokes.
In this description the child is describing her initial experiences arriving at a new international school and how quickly she was included and made friends. Inclusion and connection happened quickly within this environment and were facilitated and supported by the use of humour and shared laughter.

Children in this study described feelings of inclusion as essential in their experiences of making friends in describing games they played together, being invited to play on break times and for play dates after school, and being asked to work together on school projects. One activity described that worked to create, support and reinforce positive feelings of inclusion was the secret friend initiative described below:

“We had a secret friend this week where we had to do nice things for them and not tell them and mine was [name omitted] so I wrote one note to her like good afternoon... and I thought my person was [name omitted] and it turned out to be [name omitted]!” (Interview 3)

In this excerpt the child describes how she left nice notes wishing her secret friend a good afternoon to make her feel included. She also detailed how she thought she knew her secret friend was but was surprised to find out it was someone else. Although the teacher organized this classroom activity it was run completely by the children within the grade level. They had to perform kind acts towards another classmate without them knowing. This activity included everyone in the class and through the children’s descriptions it illustrated a deep and lasting impact on the classroom culture as one of inclusion, encouragement, and kindness towards others. Having a secret friend is a simple way for students to take initiative to make everyone in their class feel welcome and this is definitely a strategy that could be applied to other school settings to improve and increase feelings of inclusion.

Communication, humour and kindness, and inclusion are all themes that involve actions that demonstrate the children in this international school context as active, independent, and capable in their experiences of making friends. It is their shared experiences that help to facilitate this action and aid them in the process of making friends.
SHARED EXPERIENCES

“It’s like she knows me because we like the same things, it’s like we’re connecting somehow.” (Interview 8)

Research Question: How do children describe their experiences of making friends?

Children in schools often have shared experiences as they are in the same classrooms, learning environments, are exposed to the same subjects and curriculum, and often live within communities that are a close proximity of the school. This can also stem into shared interests and hobbies that help support and maintain friendships. The children in this study described connections they made with friends over shared interests such as video games, tag games, gymnastics, football, drawing, and Pokémon, but more significantly connected over shared experiences of moving, joining new schools, and making friends in different countries.

The children in this study described their experiences of moving frequently including the emotions they felt and the strategies they used in making new friends. Throughout the interviews the children were describing these shared experiences. In this way, shared experiences is an underlying theme found within this analysis and connects to the unique experiences found within the context of the international school setting and how these shared experiences helped to facilitate their friendship making. These shared experiences are described through their descriptions of shared emotions, feelings, and their experiences upon entering new school environments.

Many children described being shy when coming to a new school but being able to make friends quickly. This is an interesting finding as most children interviewed, despite their varying cultural backgrounds and different personality traits, all described the experience of making friends quickly within the international school setting. This shared experience may make the transition into a new school environment easier with other children experiencing the same process and facilitated the process of making friends. This is illustrated in the question and its responses below:

Interviewer: How do you feel when you start at a new school?
“I was little and shy but I got used to it really fast. I got some friends and I wasn’t that shy anymore.” (Interview 1)

“I was shy on the first day. I was like where should I go? All new persons. And [name omitted] was new with me and [name omitted] was new with me too. And then I got some more friends” (Interview 4).

“Well when I first came I was really, really, really, really, really shy and I didn’t know what day I was gonna make friends but I realized that the complete next day I had a friend and it was [name omitted].” (Interview 8)

The above excerpts illustrate repeated patterns of shyness and nervousness after moving to a new school. How do these children make friends so quickly, despite repeated descriptions of feelings of shyness and nervousness? They connect through their shared experience of being the new student in a different learning environment. Even though most children interviewed described themselves as shy and nervous upon entering a new school they described that they were able to talk with others, introduce themselves, and ask to join in games during break times, which led them to making friends soon after joining a new school environment. These children described the same shared experience of shyness entering a new school, which enabled and positioned them to make friends as these children have the same kinds of experiences within this unique international school context.

All of these children have experienced moving, starting at a new school, and meeting new people, which may provide some insight as to why they describe being so comfortable and making friends quickly very shortly after arriving in a new country and new school environment. These children might have empathy for new students joining their classes as they have all shared this experience and understand what it feels like to be in a new school or country and the nervousness that comes with making new friends.

Additionally, all of the children interviewed also expressed different international experiences that are distinct, or more commonly seen, in children found within
international schools. Some of these shared experiences included moving to new countries, having friends in many different countries, and being exposed to a variety of languages and cultures. The following excerpts help to illustrate this further:

**Interviewer:** Do you like joining a new school or class?

“In India I was small and I only went to school in Delhi and then I came to Japan where I made so many friends that my whole class was my friend and there was like no one left to be my friend.” (Interview 3)

“Ya because I get more friends so if I’m lonely I can get more friends. Now I have friends in Singapore, in France, in Switzerland and in Sweden!” (Interview 6)

“Ya it was very much nicer because this is really an international school because a lot of people speak Swedish, a lot of people speak Hindi, and a lot of people speak English.” (Interview 8)

These excerpts highlight the distinct international experiences these children have described with friends in many different countries and exposure to a variety of languages. This underlying theme of shared experiences is further illustrated above as these children described their shared experiences in this international school context, which positioned them to make friends and enjoy joining a new school. The children described positive experiences in joining a new international school, as they were able to make new friends and be with other children who speak other languages and may understand this shared experience.

Children develop friendships through: “a good deal of shared understanding and intimacy” (Corsaro 2009, p. 8). For the children in this international school a shared understanding comes from experiences of moving, changing schools, and being exposed to a variety of different cultures. The descriptions of these experiences detailed above help to demonstrate the importance of shared experiences as an underlying theme in all of
the interviews. These shared experiences may serve as a way for these children to form fast bonds and connections within new countries, classrooms, and learning environments.

The children in this study used and described the actions of communication, humour and kindness, and inclusion in the process of making friends. These themes describe the interviewed children as independent, confident, and skilful actors in the process of making friends. The theme of shared experiences connects to the other themes as it helps to explain their actions, strategies, and abilities in making friends so quickly and independently as they have all experienced moving and making new friends in a new learning environment. These shared experiences are unique to children in this international school context and they help to position these children to make friends through the actions of communication, humour and kindness, and inclusion.
CONCLUSIONS

James and James argue that childhood studies can contribute to our growing knowledge of children’s experiences of schooling with a more child-focused perspective (2012: 109). This study aimed to capture a child-focused perspective on the concept of friendship and its impact, prevalence, and importance in an international school setting. With a closer examination of children’s descriptions of their experiences educators and childcare professionals can gain a deeper understanding of children’s experiences in making friends and assist them in this process in different transitions throughout their lives.

This study set out to investigate the research problem of how 8-9 year old children in an international school setting, who move frequently, describe their experiences of friendship by interviewing children from diverse backgrounds who have all attended a variety of different international schools. Interviewing was the chosen method of analysis with the aim to honour and capture children’s voices and express their authentic experiences of friendship making within different international school settings.

In using a thematic analysis it became increasingly clear, through coding and multiple readings of transcribed interview data, that the themes of communication, humour and kindness, inclusion, and shared experiences were significant, repeating, and overlapping themes that held central importance in the children’s descriptions of their experiences in making friends. These themes were not isolated as they were overlapping and intertwined with the same topics occurring throughout the different themes.

The children in this study described their experiences of friendship with great detail and reflection focusing on many positive experiences in making friends by outlining how they often felt shy and nervous moving to a new school but felt welcomed and were able to make friends quickly. They described their shared experiences of moving to new schools, being exposed to different cultures and countries, and making friends in different learning environments. These shared experiences helped them to form quick and close connections, as they were included in games and conversations within their new school community.

The qualities and traits that children described in a good friend included being nice, funny, kind, caring, and inclusive with a great emphasis on the importance of a
shared sense of humour and treating each other with kindness. These children were able to recognize the qualities they seek out in friends and described how they valued the importance of open communication and shared laughter in forming and maintaining their friendships. Additionally, it was significant that these children sought out these qualities in what they described was a good friend but also described these as qualities found within themselves as friends.

Many of the strategies these children used to make friends revolved around the four themes that were identified and analyzed. Communication was a strategy involving introducing or presenting oneself to others, talking and including others in conversations, asking to join in during games, and sharing stories and secrets. When asked to describe how to make a new friend all of the children interviewed highlighted the importance of communication and described asking others to play. The children in this international school context demonstrated a skilful use of the strategy of communication in order to make new friends.

Humour and kindness were important traits that the children used to describe their friends but were also used as strategies to form friendships. Every child interviewed discussed the importance of shared laughter between friends and with many descriptions of their use of humour and telling jokes in order to make friends in a new school environment. Telling a joke and making someone laugh was repeatedly described as a way to meet new people and make a new friend.

Adults need to value and appreciate how significant friendships are to children (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016: 409). This study was done from the standpoint of viewing children as competent and confident social actors who have much to contribute to the adult understandings and knowledge base of their experiences of friendship. This study highlights important areas of connection among international school students involving communication skills, qualities of kindness and humour, including others, and bonding over their shared experiences living in different countries and attending international schools. This study has shown that there is a clear connection between the themes of communication, humour and kindness, and inclusion as these themes highlight the action and strategies the children in this international school context take and utilize in making friends. These children are skilled, confident, capable, and independent actors in the
process of making friends, which is unique to this international school context. I see their skilful use of these strategies in making friends as a result of the shared experiences these children have, which is unique to the international school context.

Although this study was performed within one international school context the results could be transferable to other school settings including those that have been impacted by immigration and have increasingly diverse student populations. It would be beneficial for more research to be done with other international schools to compare results to see if children experience and understand friendships in a similar manner. The lessons learned from examining the strategies and behaviours of international students can also be applied in multicultural school settings elsewhere (Young, 2017: 25). These findings could be also applied to children experiencing different transitions in which they will meet new people and make new friends such as moving to a new school or country, joining a new club or after school program, or transitioning between grade levels at school (such as from elementary to middle school).

With our world growing closer through globalization it is of increasing importance that educators listen, reflect, and support children in international schools to develop these strategies and behaviours that promote kindness, laughter, communication, and a true openness towards the inclusion of others.
References


Appendix #1: Interview Guide

Introduction Message: Today we are going to talk about friendships. I am studying and am interested in learning about how children your age who go to international schools make friends. Can you draw me a map of your friends? I would like you to draw yourself in the middle or center of the paper and include your friends and important people, animals or things in your life around you. While you are drawing I am going to ask you some questions about your drawing, is that ok with you?

1. Can you tell me about your day at school so far?
   a. How are you feeling today?
   b. What else did you do?

2. Who do you like to play with on break times?
   a. What kinds of games do you play?
   b. How does that make you feel?

3. Do any of your other friends play too?

4. Where do these friends live? Do some of them live in different places?
   a. Where are they?
   b. How do you feel when you think about them?

5. Who is that person in your drawing?
   a. Can you describe them to me? What are they like?
   b. What are they like as a friend?

6. What makes a good friend for you?
   a. How do they act?
   b. How does that make you feel?
7. Does that person know anyone else in your drawing?
   a. How do they know each other?

8. What do you and X do in your spare time?
   a. Do you play together?
   b. What games do you play?

9. Can you describe X? What is she/he like?

10. How do you feel when you are with X?

11. Can you describe what it was like to start in a new class?
    a. What happened? What happened on break times?
    b. How did you make new friends?

12. Do you enjoy joining a new class/school?
    a. Why or why not?
    b. Is it interesting?

13. If you could give someone a tip about how to make new friends what would you say?

14. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your drawing?
    a. What did you do there?
    b. Why?
    c. How does it make you feel?
Appendix #2: Consent Form

Dear grade 3 parents and carers,

My name is Sarah Kerwin and I am the Library Media Specialist for Preschool to Grade 7 at [school name omitted]. I am currently completing a Masters in Social Science with a focus on the field of Child Studies from Linköping University. I am interested in learning more about how children, in an international school setting, define and construct friendships. A central focus of Child Studies is to look at the child’s perspective on issues that impact their lives. With this in mind, I would like to conduct interviews with students aged 8-9 years old. If you would like your child to be involved please email me back at s.kerwin@intsch.se confirming their participation. I will be working closely with the third grade classroom teachers to ensure their lessons are not interrupted and will also be introducing this idea to the students to ensure their consent in participating too. If you have any questions or concerns regarding my research proposal please feel free to email me or stop by the library to discuss this further.

Kind regards,

Sarah Kerwin

Library Media Specialist

[School name omitted]

s.kerwin@intsch.se