CHAPTER 7. RESULTS: SOCIAL COMPETENCE CONSTRUCT

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This chapter examines the results of the study of the concept of social competence. Research Themes 2, 3 and 4 results are presented and analysed.

7.1 Research Theme 2: Knowledge, Skills, Behaviours and Personality Traits which Contribute to Social Competence

In this research theme, the teachers' perceptions of the group, using information from the HESCI checklist; the researcher's observations; and the children's perception of their social world (interview and sociometric status) are examined. Profiles of children in each status group were developed, using information from all sources.

7.11 Sociometric Status Profiles

Children from each status group were compared to discover patterns for groups.

7.111 High Sociometric Status

Only four children [Adelaide (IG3), Sophie (IG3), Georgina (IG3), and Thomas (NIG2)] had high sociometric status over the three tests. All were selected and examined in more detail. Table 7.1 summarises the type of responses given at the interviews, observations and lists the HESCI scores.

Children with high sociometric status were perceived by their teachers as having good attention skills, effective communication skills, effectual emotional understanding, strong self attributes and appropriate social interaction attributes associated with social competence. In other words, they received high scores on the HESCI checklist. All four children scored in the range of 79 to 92 - a perfect score being 92.

Consistently high status children eg Adelaide (IG3), Sophie (IG3), Georgina (IG3), and Thomas (NIG2), during observations appeared to be bright and confident; had effective nonverbal and verbal communicative skills; were pleasant to others; welcomed others in play or gave a reason for not including others; were skilful in joining others; and asserted themselves during conflict. They appeared to know the peer group rules and conformed.

High status children had friends of mixed or same sex; described friends as "people you like"; were conscious about how to show you are listening; were aware of asking when joining play (after the pre test especially); mentioned being good at school activities and sport; would feel sad after accidents; and sad or upset or both due to a transgression. It should be noted that the responses given were stable on the whole over the three test times.

Table 7.1 Knowledge and Behaviours of Children with High Sociometric Status

Knowledge	Adelaide (IG3)	Sophie (IG3)	Georgina (IG3)	Thomas (NIG2)
Gender of friends	Mixed	Same (mixed delayed post test)	Mixed (p) Same (ps & dp)	Same Mixed (dp)
Description of friend	Play with & like the person	Person you like & play with	Someone you like or love	Play with you
Listening	Stay & quiet	Quiet, talk after they talk	Talk back & sit still	Sit still & quiet, watch the book
Knowledge of sadness	Know by face & have no friend	Know when they cry or frown	Cry or have tears	They want something, are hurt or scream
What is said to a sad person	Invite to play	Cheer up & invite them to play	Ask what's up	Comfort them
Joining play	Ask	Join in (pre), ask	Just play (pre) Ask (ps, dp)	Join in & play
Self attributes	School activities, sport	School activities, sport	sport, play (nothing - post)	School activities, sport,
Feelings-accident	Cross & upset	Angry (p) Sad post & delayed post test	Sad	OK, sad, sad
Feeling - intentional act	Sad - cross upset- upset & angry	Angry (p) Sad (ps & dp)	Very sad or sad	sad, angry, sad
HESCI score	79 -92	88-92	84-92	89-90
Observations	Confident, quiet, prosocial to others, happy	Confident, placid, pleasant to others, happy	Quiet, confident, prosocial to others, happy	Outgoing, happy disposition, prosocial to others

p - pre test ps - post test dp - delayed post test

7.112 Average Sociometric Status

Children with average status, over three test times were Gabby (IG1), William (IG1), Ashley (IG3), Grant (NIG1), Sally (NIG1), Stefanie (NIG2), Nathan (NIG3), Cameron (NIG4), and Kimberley (NIG4). Four were selected and examined in more detail: two who were quiet and introverted (William, Kimberley) and two who were perceived by their teachers to be delayed in academic areas and were from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Gabby, Nathan). Two in each group were from different preschools.

Table 7.2 presents a comparison of responses given by the four selected children at the interview; observations made by the researcher; and the children's HESCI scores. The responses given by the four children varied at each test time, which differs from children with high status. It appears that these children were still unsure of their social relationships and peer group functioning. Uncertainty was expressed when asked about joining play because these children predicted that they might not be allowed to join play.

Children with average status were perceived by their teachers as being in either of two categories. Children in category one were inattentive; had poor communication skills and lacked some social interaction skills, or were delayed in academic areas. Children in category two were non assertive; were often unable to interpret or express emotions appropriately; and lacked some social interaction skills, or were introverted and reluctant to mix. HESCI scores for children with average status were much lower and inconsistent than for high status children.

Gabby and Nathan had difficulty with the interview questions and chattered incessantly as if to compensate for their lack of understanding. At times Kimberley had difficulty with the questions and chose not to answer and so the question needed to be rephrased. William had no difficulty answering the questions.

For shy children (William and Kimberley), this may be due to their having less experience in their social environment because of a reluctance to join in. Children perceived as being delayed in academic areas (Gabby and Nathan), had difficulty with the questions because their communication skills may be less advanced, which makes it difficult to appropriately respond to peers.

Table 7.2 Knowledge and Behaviours of Children with Average Sociometric Status

Knowledge	William (IG1)	Kimberley (NIG4)	Gabby (IG1)	Nathan (NIG3)
Gender of friends	Same	Mixed	Mixed	Opposite (p & dp), mixed (ps)
Description of friend	Play with, like, allows you to play with them	R. Nice, play, Play (dp)	They come to your house(p), you talk to them (ps), a happy person (dp)	No friends, my mum, R. happy & smile
Listening	Look at them quiet, talk back	R. watch (p), quiet (ps), sit(dp)	R. sit still (p), quiet (ps), quiet	Close my mouth, R. correct response,
Knowledge of sadness	When hurt, cry	Face or cry	Go away, won't be your friend,	Talked about something else, my mum got sad, pulled a sad face.
What is said to a sad person	Hello; Hello with a smile; cheer up	Cuddle; go to mum,	Don't matter , don't cry , need a bandaid?	Talked about other things, no answer, wipe your eyes,
Joining play	Start playing, ask, won't let me play	R. play,	Tell if they don't let you, they tell me to go away, they won't ley me	No answer
Self attributes	sport, school activities	helping, making, playing, nothing	playing, do what I'm told	Playing, being happy
Feelings-accident	Sad	sad (p) good (ps) happy (dp)	mad (p, ps) don't matter (dp)	Inappropriate response, difficulty with question, slam them
Feeling - intentional act	sad	sad (p) good (ps) happy (dp)	sad, angry, very sad	Disconnected response, R. happy, alright
HESCI score	75-54-62	57-92-84	32-88-72	58-56-74
Absent behaviours/ skill (HESCI)	Blames others for accidents, does not share thoughts or feelings, rushes into group	Does not share or express emotions & thoughts, not confident, lacks humour, non assertive, shy, no consideration for others, poor negotiation & resolution skills	Poor attention, memory & use of soc. information, joining in skills poor, poor emotion knowledge, lacks self control, poor social interaction skills (sharing cooperating, turn taking etc)	Poor attention, memory & use of soc. information, poor communication , non assertive, defiant, poor negotiation & compromising
Observations	Very quiet & shy, introverted, serious	Very quiet & shy, reluctant to join others, a twin & stays with her brother	Difficulty with questions, nice to others, happy, outgoing, babbled	Difficulty with questions, nice to others, happy, outgoing, babbled

p - pre test ps - post test dp - delayed post test

7.113 Low Sociometric Status

Only four children [Benjamin (G2), Samuel (NIG3), Natalie (NIG3) and Nicholas (NIG2)] had low status over the three test times. The four were examined to determine a profile for low status. Table 7.3 provides a comparison of each of the children over the three test times.

Children with low status were perceived by their teachers as being defiant, having poor skills for resolving conflict, having poor skills when joining a group (they rushed in without observing the context of play) and disrupted the group; and had little consideration for others. A large number of skills are lacking in children with low status. The interview confirms poor entry to play skills such that all children (except Benjamin and Nicholas at delayed post test) were not aware of being expected to ask before joining play.

HESCI scores range from 40-82 indicating that the teacher's perception of the child may be very different to that of the peer group. For example, Natalie and Nicholas were quite well behaved and caused few problems for the teacher, but were not readily accepted by their peers. Both of these children lacked emotion knowledge and did not discriminate the intentions of others.

Interview responses show that low status children appear to know as much as children with average status and like them, each answer changes over time. This indicates a little uncertainty Benjamin, however, appeared to be more sure of his answers but did not behave appropriately. His personal traits such as stubbornness, keenness to get his own way; tended to impede his social relationships.

Having examined the knowledge, skills, and behaviour required for social competence for each status group, it was possible to examine which constructs were most important.

Table 7.3 Knowledge and Behaviours of Children with Low Sociometric Status

Knowledge	Benjamin	Samuel	Natalie	Nicholas
Gender of friends	Same sex	Mixed, same, same	Mixed, same, same	Mixed, opposite (dp)
Description of friend	Play with & talk to, like a lot	Named friends, I'd don't know (R. dig in the sand), I don't know (R. play)	Play	Good (to you) & bossy: R. play; you know them & they like you
Listening	Stand still & listen	Just listen, R. quiet, sit still	Cross your legs & sit up straight, quiet, with your ears	Sit there; R, sit still & quiet; don't talk
Knowledge of sadness	Mouth goes down	They go to bed, they cry	Have sand in eye & cry; kick & cry	Cry; cry & hurt themself; cry
What is said to a sad person	Please don't cry, sorry	I look after them, sorry, nothing,	Don't put sand in your eyes, they are hurt; come & play	Nothing, go away, tell adult
Joining play	Ask or join in	Play	Play, join them; R. watch,	Play, just play, ask
Self attributes	School activities, making things,	Looking after puppies, I don't know, not drawing pigs	Playing, talking	School activities, sport, everything
Feelings-accident	Just build it, a bit angry, not angry just build it again	I'd go away; angry, not happy	Good, happy, good	Good, good, sad
Feeling - intentional act	Angry, really angry	I'd go to bed & throw things, angry, a bit cross	Good, sad, they'd be sorry	No good, no good, sad
HESCI score	71-68-65	46-40-44	77-82-64	61-68-80
Absent behaviours/ skill (HESCI)	Disrupts group, won't negotiate, try to resolve or compromise, defiant	Blames others for accidents, poor emotion skills, defiant, rushes in & disrupts peers, poor negotiation, compromise, sharing, turn taking skills, lacks consideration for others	Blames others for accidents, not shy, does not share thoughts & emotions, rushes in, poor negotiation, compromise & sharing skills, insensitive to peers	Draws attention to self, disrupts group, rushes in, not confident in new task, lacks behav. control, no compromise, blames others for accidents
Observations	Stubborn & wants his own way, appears to have knowledge but does not use it in behaviour	Very difficult child, wants his own way, stubborn, poor behavioural & emotional control	Does not listen, talks a lot, disrupts others, determined, giggles a lot	Confident, happy, likes his own way

p - pre test ps - post test dp - delayed post test

7.2 Research Theme 3: **Most Important Constructs Related to Social Competence**

This research theme examined social competence constructs from the perspective of the child (sociometric ratings) and the perspective of the teacher (HESCI). Information was analysed using Factor Analysis to find relationships between variables and percentages of responses of HESCI categories for high and low sociometric status to distinguish important categories.

7.21 Factor Analysis

This research theme was investigated using the Principal Component form of Factor Analysis. Each child's score on the five main variables of the HESCI (pre-requisites of learning, communication, emotion, self attributes, and social interaction attributes) together with his/her sociometric status as indicated by Rasch modelling and cluster analysis were taken into the principal components analysis. This process was undertaken in the pre, post, and delayed post data so as to determine whether the resulting factor structure was stable.

Full details of the analysis are given in Appendix 18. The input data matrices for each time period were factorable as indicated by Matrix Sampling Adequacy Indices of 0.734 (pre test), 0.755 (post test), and 0.681 (delayed post test) and by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($c^2(20)=171.036$ $p=0.0001$ - pretest; $c^2(20)=145.558$ $p=0.0001$- post test; and $c^2(20)=138.064$ $p=0.0001$- delayed post test) (Hair et al, 1995).

The factor loading matrix for each time period is given in Table 7.4 below.

Inspection of Table 7.4 reveals that the six variables can be represented by just three factors, and that this factor structure is stable over time. The three factors were:

Factor 1. communication, emotion, self attributes and social interaction attributes.
Factor 2. the pre-requisites to learning, and
Factor 3. item estimates (sociometric status)

Over the three test times there were high correlations between:

- communication and emotion; and
- self and social interaction.

Table 7.4 Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Pre Test			
Pre-requisites of Learning	0.67	**0.963**	0.017
Communication	**0.849**	-0.033	0.045
Emotion	**0.802**	0.393	0.061
Self Attributes	**0.678**	-0.148	0.26
Social Interaction Attributes	**0.771**	0.244	0.234
Social Status	0.194	0.029	**0.965**
Post Test			
Pre-requisites of Learning	0.075	**0.908**	-0.018
Communication	**0.686**	-0.477	-0.06
Emotion	**0.818**	-0.086	0.016
Self Attributes	**0.786**	0.346	0.09
Social Interaction Attributes	**0.789**	0.092	0.317
Social Status	0.115	-0.01	**0.977**
DelayedPost Test			
Pre-requisites of Learning	0.166	0.155	**0.936**
Communication	**0.681**	-0.198	0.236
Emotion	**0.618**	-0.192	0.574
Self Attributes	**0.804**	0.089	0.133
Social Interaction Attributes	**0.84**	0.22	0.109
Social Status	0.044	**0.961**	0.078

NOTES: *(1) Factor loadings are derived from the Primary Pattern Matrix for an oblique solution.*

(2) In all cases interfactor correlations were satisfactory (Hair et al, 1995) - see Appendix 17.

(3) The three factors accounted for 78% of the variance (pre test), 77% (post test), and 77% (delayed post test).

At pre test to post test times, there were correlations between the pre-requisites for learning and emotion: and emotion and social interaction.

At the post test and the delayed post test, there was a relationship between emotions and self.

At the pre test and the delayed post test time there was a relationship between the pre-requisites for learning and communication.

7.22 Constructs Related to Social Competence (HESCI)

Each of the five areas concerning social competence such as pre-requisites of learning, communication, emotion, self attributes, and social interaction

attributes, were examined as a comparison between the high and low status groups. Evidence was obtained from two sources, that is, the children (sociometric rating) and the teachers (HESCI).

7.221 Pre-Requisites of Learning

A higher percentage of children with low sociometric status displayed poor attention and other social processing skills as compared to children with high sociometric status in the pre test only (see Table 7.5). However, at the time of subsequent tests, teachers perceived that most children had improved these skills probably as a result of being in the preschool environment when there is an expectation for attending and listening. Hence, it may be concluded that such skills are not related to sociometric status.

Table 7.5 Pre-Requisites of Learning and Sociometric Status

Pre-Requisites of Learning	Low			High		
	Pre n=32	Post n=24	Del Post n=25	Pre n=19	Post n=19	Del Post n=24
Poor attention	6/32 **19%**	4/24 **17%**	0/25 0%	1/19 5%	1/19 5%	1/24 0%
Poor at determining useful information	6/32 **19%**	1/24 4%	0/25 0%	0/19 0%	1/19v	0/24 0%
Poor memory	6/32 **19%**	0/24 0%	0/25 0%	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Poor at adapting useful information	5/32 **16%**	2/24 8%	0/25 0%	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%

7.222 Communication

A slightly higher percentage of low status children were perceived by their teachers as lacking some communication skills especially in the pre test and, to a lesser extent, in the post test Skills which were perceived by teachers as not being present included not initiating communication (19%-21%-8%); poor articulation (13%-4%); not directly addressing peers (19%-21%); and not commenting on ongoing play or work (25% pre test only) than children with high status.

A higher percentage of low status children, draw attention to themselves (31% 38%-32%); do not provide a reason for preventing another child from entering a group (25%-46%-24%) and not producing an alternative suggestion for play when refusing entry into a group (31%- 56%) as compared to children with high status which were much lower percentages (see Table 7.6).

Table 7.6 Communication and Sociometric Status

Communication	Low			High		
	Pre n=32	Post n=24	Del Post n=25	Pre n=19	Post n=19	Del Post n=24
Does not initiate oral communication	6/32 **19%**	5/24 **21%**	2/25 8%	2/19 11%	1/19 5%	3/24 13%
Articulates poorly	4/32 **13%**	1/24 **4%**	0/25 0%	0/19 0%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Meaning unclear	1/32 3%	0/24 0%	0/25 0%	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Responds disconnectedly	2/32 6%	1/24 4%	0/25 0%	0/19 0%	1/19 5%	0/24 0%
Does not directly address peers	6/32 **19%**	5/24 **21%**	0/25 0%	1/19 5%	1/19 5%	1/24 4%
Does not direct talk to group	11/32 34%	13/24 54%	2/25 8%	8/19 42%	4/19 21%	0/24 0%
No comments on ongoing play/work	8/32 **25%**	1/24 4%	2/25 8%	2/19 11%	2/19 11%	1/24 4%
Draws attention to self	10/32 **31%**	9/24 **38%**	9/25 **32%**	1/19 5%	4/19 21%	3/24 13%
Does not use nonverbal communication	1/32 3%	0/24 0%	2/25 8%	0/19 0%	2/19 11%	1/24 4%
Entry refusal: no reason	8/32 **25%**	11/24 **46%**	6/25 **24%**	2/19 11%	4/19 21%	3/24 13%
Entry refusal: offers alt idea	10/32 **31%**	12/24 **50%**	14/25 **56%**	3/19 16%	5/19 26%	6/24 25%
No private speech	16/32 50%	13/24 54%	12/25 48%	10/19 53%	11/19 58%	16/24 67%

7.223 Emotions

Children with low sociometric status were perceived by their teachers as having slightly poorer emotiona expression, emotional interpretation skills and emotional sharing especially in the pre test. Perhaps teachers envisaged an improvement because these skills are usually discussed. Table 7.7 displays the percentages of teacher perceptions.

Table 7.7 Emotions and Sociometric Status

Emotions	Low			High		
	Pre n=32	Post n=24	Del Post n=25	Pre n=19	Post n=19	Del Post n=24
Does not express opinions, emotions	8/32 **25%**	2/24 **8%**	2/25 **8%**	2/19 11%	0/19 0%	1/24 4%
Does not show emotions	1/32 3%	1/24 4%	1/25 4%	0/19 0%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Unable to interpret emotions	5/32 **16%**	1/24 **4%**	1/25 4%	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	1/24 4%
Non sharing of emotions	12/32 **38%**	2/24 **8%**	4/25 **16%**	3/19 16%	0/19 0%	1/24 4%

The researcher's perception of the importance of emotional knowledge is greater than that of the teachers. She was able to see a larger deficit of

emotion knowledge (from interviews and observations) in children with low sociometric status than in children with high status. See results section: Theme 1, Research Questions 21, 25, 30, 45 and 50.

7.224 Self Attributes

Self attributes were not as distinguishing as other categories. Teachers perceived that a slightly larger percentage of children with low status were defiant than those with high status, especially in the pre test and post test. Percentages are listed in Table 7 8.

Table 7.8 Self Attributes and Sociometric Status

Self Attributes	Low			High		
	Pre n=32	Post n=24	Del Post n=25	Pre n=19	Post n=19	Del Post n=24
Rarely happy	1/32 3%	1/24 4%	2/25 8%	0/19 0%	0/19 5%	0/24 0%
Often sad/lonely	7/32 22%	3/24 13%	5/25 20%	4/19 21%	0/19 0%	4/24 17%
Not confident	9/32 28%	3/24 13%	2/25 8%	4/19 21%	0/19 0%	3/24 13%
Lacks humour	4/32 13%	1/24 4%	1/25 4%	2/19 11%	1/19 5%	0/24 0%
Not independent	0/32 0%	1/24 4%	0/25 0%	2/19 11%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Insecure at preschool	0/32 0%	0/24 0%	1/25 4%	0/19 0%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Not compliant	3/32 9%	1/24 4%	1/25 4%	0/19 0%	1/19 5%	0/24 0%
Lacks self control	1/32 3%	3/24 13%	1/25 4%	1/19 5%	4/19 21%	2/24 8%
Non assertive	9/32 28%	4/24 17%	1/25 4%	3/19 16%	1/19 5%	2/24 8%
Shy	10/32 31%	5/24 21%	4/25 16%	7/19 37%	2/19 11%	4/24 17%
Blames others for problems	12/32 38%	5/24 21%	9/25 36%	5/19 26%	4/19 21%	7/24 29%
Defiant	7/32 **22%**	4/24 **17%**	3/25 12%	2/19 5%	1/19 0%	2/24 8%

7.225 Social Interaction Attributes

On the whole, teachers perceived that children with low sociometric status lacked many social interaction attributes. Teachers seemed to be more familiar with children's socia interaction attributes and were more discriminating in this section. This may be because preschool teachers emphasise these attributes in the r teaching.

Attributes which discriminated low status children from high status children were: not waiting when joining a group (22%-21%-8%); disrupting when

joining a group (19%-17%-28%); not initiating negotiation during conflict (56%-63%-26%); not trying to resolve issues (59%-67%-48%); not initiating a compromise (59%-63%-48%); not accepting a compromise (22%- 13%-16%); not sharing (16%-8%-8%); not engaging in interactive play (22%-17%-12%); insensitive to peers (9%-13%-20%); not empathetic (13%-13%-16%); and disrespectful to others (9%-13%-16%). See Table 7.9 for percentages for high status children.

Children with low status tended to receive very low scores for the HESCI as compared to high status children. Teachers perceived children with low status as having multiple deficits.

Table 7.9 Social Interaction Attributes and Sociometric Status

Social Interaction Attributes	Low			High		
	Pre n=32	Post n=24	Del Post n=25	Pre n=19	Post n=19	Del Post n=24
Join in: does not wait	7/32 **22%**	5/24 **21%**	2/25 **8%**	1/19 5%	1/19 5%	1/24 4%
Join in: disrupts	6/32 **19%**	3/24 **17%**	7/25 **28%**	2/19 11%	0/19 0%	6/24 25%
Does not initiate negotiation	18/32 **56%**	15/24 **63%**	13/25 **52%**	6/19 32%	5/19 26%	5/24 26%
Does not try to resolve	19/32 **59%**	16/24 **67%**	12/25 **48%**	5/19 21%	6/19 32%	5/24 26%
Does not initiate compromise	19/32 **59%**	15/24 **63%**	12/25 **48%**	5/19 21%	5/19 26%	7/24 37%
Does not accept compromise	7/32 **22%**	3/24 **13%**	4/25 **16%**	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Does not cooperate	2/32 6%	1/24 4%	2/25 8%	0/19 0%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Does not share	5/32 **16%**	2/24 **8%**	2/25 **8%**	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Does not turn take	3/32 9%	2/24 8%	3/25 12%	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Does not interact in play	7/32 **22%**	4/24 **17%**	3/25 **12%**	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	1/24 4%
Insensitive to peers	3/32 **9%**	3/24 **13%**	5/25 **20%**	0/19 0%	0/19 0%	0/24 0%
Unfair	2/32 6%	3/24 13%	1/25 4%	1/19 5%	1/19 5%	0/24 0%
Not empathetic	4/32 **13%**	3/24 **13%**	4/25 **16%**	0/19 0%	1/19 5%	0/24 0%
Disrespectful to others	3/32 **9%**	3/24 **13%**	4/25 **16%**	1/19 5%	0/19 0%	1/24 4%

The social context is important to the acquisition of social competence knowledge, that is, the context can provide support from those in that environment. Being part of a supportive environment will affect motivation for participation within that environment. Hence, the context provided by intervention or no intervention was investigated in Research Theme 4.

7.3 Research Theme 4: **Social Competence Intervention Program**

The program which was taught to the Intervention Group was evaluated by the teachers to determine its relevance and success from the teachers' perspective. Case studies of the groups and individuals enabled the researcher to understand what was happening in the preschool context and how the program could change the context and affect the children's behaviours.

7.31 Teachers' Evaluation of Program

Only two teachers and one aide submitted the evaluation sheets because one teacher had taken a year off work and gone overseas. The completed evaluation forms are included as Appendix 12.

The two teachers stated they felt competent in and committed to teaching the program. The aide stated that she used it incidentally during discussion in one-to-one or small groups.

Teachers and aides indicated that the program was relevant to preschoolers. Both teachers stated that they would prefer to use the program selectively with children who have difficulties or in small groups rather than the whole group. However, during the taped discussion, the teachers indicated that they thought that the first five foci weeks should be taught to small groups. They indicated that the first focus week was "absolutely crucial" because it enabled the children "to reflect on social relationships" and showed them that "friends are really important". They stated that the other foci weeks "were appropriate to developmental stages of three, four and five year olds".

The teachers particularly liked using role play as a teaching technique for modelling sharing, turn taking and transgressions. They felt that it enabled a child to see another's perspective. They also indicated that using stories was an effective way to allow children to view events from another perspective because they can be used "to ask what you would do if it were you?"

Teachers thought it important to share their moods with children. For example one teacher who had a series of family problems was feeling grumpy and upset one particular day and so she mentioned this to the children and used it for further discussion about emotions. Teachers also indicated that they liked targeting incidents or natural situations rather than hypothetical events. The teachers thought that the foci week that dealt with compromising was very

important because they perceived that children who cannot compromise are not liked by others. Danielle was mentioned as being someone who could not compromise and insisted on having her own way with her peers. Danielle, when with adults, compromised and, hence, it was a surprise to the teachers when Danielle was perceived by her peers at the pre test and the post test as having only average sociometric status. One of the teachers observed her for a period and determined that this was her problem. Another child, Ashley, was also mentioned and is discussed as an individual case study.

Foci week 9 (Peacemaking strategies) was thought to be the least successful because it was most appropriate to five year olds. One teacher stated that it was better to deal with incidents as they occurred.

All teachers indicated that they would use the program again but not with all children in a large group but rather in a small group, with a child who was perceived to be having social problems or who was isolated socially. Another indicated that the program should be used spontaneously in natural situations. Another felt that more reflection on "real" incidents could be done as a follow-up and more games could be used in music time to promote social interaction. For example when going to morning tea, a new friend who was wearing red, or who was taller than another, could be selected with whom time could be spent at morning tea.

The teachers also stated that the latter part of the program should be used again in the first year of school as follow up.

7.32 Group Case Studies

Not only did the Intervention Group (IG) differ from the Non-Intervention Group (NIG) but class groups differed from one another within the same preschool. The differences resulted from class size, age groups, and personalities of children and teachers (see Chapter 6). These differences provide a different context for each group. Context is important as it links people who participate in that context to learning of knowledge, behaviour and motivation (see section on Situated Learning - Chapter 2, pp. 15-17). Each group was examined as a case study.

7.321 IG1

The 14 children (seven males, seven females) in this group attended preschool at least twice per week - nine of them came on Monday and

Wednesday, while five attended Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It is interesting to note that most of the children who attended three sessions together, played together. Some attended an all day session at least once per week. Other children attended as well - some for one day only. Because the children present differed each day, each child could have had a different set of friends on Monday as compared to Wednesday. Most of the children however, played with those who attended Monday and Wednesday. The composition of the group hence was different on a Monday to a Wednesday because the parents were able to choose the day(s) their child attended preschool. Thus, the children in each group were exposed to many different children, such that, the groups were changing on a daily basis.

Each morning session consisting of 40 children, was supervised by three teachers and an aide. The children who stayed on for a full day were part of a smaller session of twenty children in the afternoon and were supervised by two teachers. Different teachers were rostered on for afternoon sessions but were present on set days. Hence, the afternoon group comprised a different set of children to the morning group.

Children were not grouped according to age, that is, 3-5 year olds attended sessions together. Children formed social groups according to ability and interests rather than chronological age. Children were free to choose from a wide range of activities from either inside or outside. Regular activities consisted of painting, cooking, games, road building, block building, carpentry, crafts, play dough, puzzles, doll houses, dolly corner, obstacle tracks, water play, and access to a large range of books. An adult was available to read to the children. If a child excluded him/herself from activities, a discussion occurred between the teacher and child to find out if the child had a problem. Again a child was never forced to participate if they did not want to. Children were not expected to take home craftwork or a painting. It was their choice if they participated in such an activity.

There was plenty of space both inside and outside, so few conflicts arose because of crowding at various activities. Choice of and accessibility to activities was continuous.

The sociometric status of most of the children over the test times was average or high. See Chapter 6, Tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 pp. 155-156. Many of these children dropped in sociometric status over the test times (See Appendix 14 for sociometric status). The reasons are numerous and include:

- excluding others as a result of forming a special friendship, for example Elisabeth and Hanna (see individual case study on excluding others);
- family problems such as marriage splits, deaths of relatives, moving house, being upset because mum has returned to work, the child has a new caregiver;
- lacking experience with peers, that is the child rarely gets to visit or play with other children due to living in an isolated area, or the family rarely socialise (see individual case studies).

All of these children participated in the social competence program and some were selected to receive extra help by one teacher in particular. Anyone who was selected belonged to that particular teacher's story group. The teachers kept a close eye on the selected children both inside and outside in the playground. The selected children were encouraged to participate in social interaction; helped with problem solving by encouraging the children to "talk about it"; helped by other children in play; and generally supported. One example of such a child is found in the case study - Rebecca. The type of intervention received is discussed in Appendix 8- The Social Competence Program.

7.322 IG2

The children in IG2 consisted of 18 children who attended preschool at least twice per week, all on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Some attended an all day session on one of those days, once per week. Other children attended for one day only. The composition of the group again varied from Tuesday to Thursday. Again, each morning session consisted of 40 children, who were supervised by three teachers, and an aide. A smaller session of twenty children, ran in the afternoon - Thursdays only and was supervised by two teachers.

Children were not graded according to age and formed groups according to ability and interests rather than chronological age. Children were free to choose from a wide range of activities from either inside or outside.

All of these children participated in the social competence program and some were selected to receive extra help (Katherine, Benjamin, Hugh and Jay). All of this group improved their status except Benjamin and Joseph. Joseph's

parents had parted and he found it more difficult as time went by even with support because he had spent a lot of time with his father.

Most of the females (11/12) at the delayed post test had high status. The exception was Katherine who is discussed as an individual case study. The females seemed to absorb many aspects of the program, such as using the strategies and the language of the program, and presented as good models for others. The personalities were very different from one another, some quiet, others outgoing but all improved. It may be that a program is more effective in a largely female group. Females may be more receptive to assistance.

7.323 IG3

This group of thirteen children comprised eight females and five males. They attended preschool at least twice per week, on Wednesday and Friday. Two of these children attended on Thursday as well. Seven attended two whole day sessions. Children involved in all day sessions tended to play together. The composition of the group again varied from Wednesday to Friday because various other children attended for only one of these days. The group consisted of mixed age. Again, each morning session consisted of 40 children, who were supervised by three teachers, and an aide and a smaller afternoon session of twenty children, was conducted each afternoon. Afternoon sessions were supervised by two teachers.

This group had a full range of sociometric status. Again the female status tended to be high (3/8 at pre test and 5/8 at delayed post test) compared to males (0/5 at pre test and 0/5 at delayed post test). Most of the males had low or average status (pre test: 2/5 average, 3/5 low; delayed post: 2/5 average, 3/5 low). Some of these boys were selected and improved their status and others who were not selected lost status within the group in this study. Males may need extra support since they are slower to respond.

7.324 NIG1

This group of twelve children (seven males; five females), were in their second year of preschool and were referred to as the "oldest group". They were aged between four and five years of age. They attended preschool for a two and a half hour session, three set times per week (Monday afternoon, Wednesday morning and Friday afternoon). The same children were always in attendance with one another.

The teacher (referred to Teacher A in Chapter 6) was preparing these children for school the following year. They had a set routine. It consisted of coming inside the preschool first thing to do school type activities such as a set craft activity organised by the parent on duty, painting, playdough, etc. Children had access to books, blocks, dress up corner, lego, and puzzles. After about one hour, the children moved outside for morning tea where they sat with the teacher and could not leave until they were finished eating and drinking. After morning tea, the children spent approximately 45 minutes in freeplay outside. Activities consisted of bike riding, waterplay, cubby house play, swings, obstacle courses, and climbing frames. At the conclusion of freeplay, the children moved inside for story and music time. Children in this group were expected to be independent and some help was given when conflicts arose. However, conflicts were infrequent perhaps due to the abundance of space and small number of children.

Only three of this group had high to average sociometric status, the remainder had low to average status. Of the nine with low to average status, one had experienced his mother returning to work and he had a variety of caregivers. Hence he showed signs of insecurity. Another was from another culture (see case study - Amit).

Over time, five children actually improved their sociometric status (Grant, Anna, Sally, Joshua, Kimberley). Most of these children were very quiet or lacked social experience. Hence as these children became known by their classmates or learnt new skills, they improved their status.

7.325 NIG2

This group of thirteen was an older group of preschoolers (aged between four and five years), comprising five males and eight females. They were taught by Teacher A. Most of these children had attended this preschool the previous year with Teacher B. The same children attended together for a two and a half hour session, three set times per week (Monday morning, Wednesday afternoon and Friday morning).

Again because this group would be attending school the following year, preparations were being made for school. These children experienced a set routine similar to that of NIG1.

The group had a mixture of sociometric status. Over the three test times, three children had consistent status: Thomas had high status, Stephanie had

average status, and Nicholas had low status. Five children had low to average status; two of which are included in the case studies for excluding others, and another had problems due to the parent's marital separation. Four children had from low to average to high status: two (Kiera and Dominic) had attended preschool irregularly and took a while longer to become part of the group. Both of these children gained status as the year progressed, as others came to know them and they came to know others. Nikita, whose parents had separated, frequently had angry, crying outbursts which disturbed the others in the group. Despite the problems many of the children in this group appeared to get on quite well.

Over time, five children actually improved their sociometric status (Joe, Kiera, Jessie, Dominic, and Adam). Adam had poor articulation and Jessie and Joe were very quiet.

7.326 NIG3

This group consisted of twelve children (seven males and five females) who are the younger children aged between three years and four years. They were taught by Teacher B. Most of these children had not attended a preschool previously. The same children attended together for a two and a half hour session, two set times per week (Tuesday morning and Thursday afternoon).

These children experienced a set routine similar to that of NIG 1. Activities were similar to the other Non-Intervention Groups and were age appropriate. The teacher saw her role as settling the children into preschool and was caring and supportive. She helped to solve their social problems.

Three children in this group had an average to high sociometric status; six had a low to average status; two had low only status and one had average only status over the three test times. Samuel, who had consistently low status over time, frequently had screaming outbursts of rage when disciplined or was asked to conform. These outbursts disturbed the others in the group and they became silent and appeared to be afraid during this time. Samuel is discussed as one of the case studies.

Over time, only three children improved their sociometric status (Peter, Laura and Toby). Peter had articulation problems and the other two were quiet and in time became known by the others. Many of the children in this group appeared to play separately, perhaps because of their young age.

7.327 NIG4

This group consisted of twelve children (eight males and four females) who are the younger children aged between three years and four years and were taught by Teacher B. The majority of these children had not attended a preschool previously. The same children attended together two set times per week, for a two and a half hour session (Tuesday afternoon and Thursday morning).

These children experienced a set routine similar to that of NIG3. Activities were age appropriate and there was a set routine. Again the teacher saw her role as settling the children into preschool and provided support. She helped to solve their social problems, for example, when a conflict arose.

Two children had average to high sociometric status; eight had low to average status; one had low to high status; and one had consistently average status. Of the eight children with low to average status two excluded others; one (Caitlin discussed as a case study) had poor motor skills; one did not listen but constantly talked; and one was defiant and stubborn and the other three children did not have visible problems.

Six children improved their status in this group (Bernard, Luke, Kimberley, Tim, Callan and Cameron). Kimberley was very shy and the others seemed to lack experience socially. One child who began with low status (Luke) and finished with high status had poor articulation but improved status perhaps as a result of children becoming used to his articulation.

7.33 Individual Case Studies

Children may have low status for various reasons. Some examples of children who were selected in the Intervention Group were examined as case studies to gain a better understanding of the problems which lead to low sociometric status and to attempt to understand how intervention may help. Case study children from the Intervention Group were matched with children with similar profiles from the Non-Intervention Group. It was difficult for children struggling in their social group to improve their status without help from teachers in a supportive environment. This struggle may result from:

1. reputation established initially;

2. lag in skills from children with deficits who have to "catch up" and develop at the rate of peers;

3. "Matthew effect" (Stanovich, 1986) in which those with effective skills gain more and so too gain more positive reinforcement, whereas those with poor skills receive more negative reinforcement; and

4. lack of support from peers if no whole class and intervention program is present.

Case studies examined various children for different reasons, such as lacking social experience with peers; investing all their time with a special friend and excluding others; having problems controlling emotions and behaviours; and having physical problems which decrease motivation necessary for interacting socially.

7.331 Children who Lack Experience with Peers

Children who have little opportunity to play with peers often are deprived of a context to test the limits of permissible behaviour and hence learn the social rules of the peer group. The children in the following case studies, Rebecca and Amit, are two such children who lacked frequent opportunity to play with peers.

7.3311 Rebecca (IG1)

Rebecca came from a family who did not encourage socialisation with other children or other families. She had a sister who had a severe behavioural disorder. Social occasions often resulted in embarrassment and discomfort for the family and so were avoided. The mother enrolled Rebecca at preschool in order to provide effective role models and positive social experiences for her daughter. Hence, Rebecca was selected for intervention.

Rebecca was very shy and quiet. She had a happy disposition and behaved prosocially toward others. She stated during the interview that if someone was sad she would say: *"I'll make something for you".* She rarely interacted socially with other children and tended to play by herself initially. She stated in the pre test interview that when joining in she would: *"Just play with them and say nothing".* Children tended to ignore her. She was however a little more comfortable with adults. At the time of the pre test, she had average sociometric status (third from the bottom - see Chart 6n in Appendix 13).

During intervention, the teachers encouraged her to participate in play and activities with others. Although at the post test time her status was low, she had learnt some of the peer group rules and became more confident. It seems that after the post test, the children seemed to be more effective in discriminating children who did not comply with peer rules, hence the low ranking.

By the time of delayed post test, Rebecca had made a friend - Andrew, another quiet child. She was also receiving invitations to play from other children in the group. Her sociometric status had improved to average and she was ranked third in the group. See Chart 6p in Appendix 6.

7.3312 Amit (NIG1).

Amit is Sri Lankan and had been in Australia for two years. Although parents were University students and were expected to mix with others, Amit had little experience with children especially from the Australian culture. During the pre test interview he said his sisters Amita and Smita were his friends. He also stated: "*[I have] no friends at preschool; they don't like me*". He was a happy, outgoing boy and seemed quite sensitive. He attended preschool regularly. At the pre test, his sociometric status was low (ranked fourth last).

At the time of the post test, he appeared to be joining in more although he was still a bit hesitant. He received no encouragement from his teacher to join in so any improvement was due to his increase in experience. He played with a few girls. He knew that when you join in play that "*you play what they are playing*". His sociometric status improved very slightly to average (sixth last ranking). He appeared to be learning some peer rules. As time went by he seemed to be joining in more, especially with the girls.

By the time of the delayed post test, his sociometric status had dropped to low again (ranked third last). This may be because he played with the girls. Perhaps he felt more comfrotable with girls because he had two sisters and no brothers. At this time during his interview he made a comment about his friendship which indicated that it was not going so well. He said (about joining in play): *"If I join her she will be angry".* It is hard to determine if low sociometric status children play with members of the opposite sex only because they have few choices in friends or whether playing with the opposite sex contributes to low sociometric status. It is not known if playing with the

opposite sex contributes to low status or is a consequence of low status. Further study is needed.

7.332 Children who Exclude Others

When some children form "special" friendships they often explore these friendships in such a way that they exclude other children from playing with them. Not playing with others in the peer group limits opportunities for keeping up to date with and learning the peer group social rules. It often involves rejecting others which then leads to being rejected from play by others. Two pairs of children were examined: one from the Intervention Group, and one from the non Intervention Group.

7.3321 Rhys (IG2).

Hugh and Rhys were inseparable friends. Their mothers were friends and the children played together a lot outside of preschool hours. Rhys was outgoing, assertive and did most of the talking for Hugh. Frequently when peers attempted to gain entry to their play Rhys rejected them. Hugh and Rhys wanted to play only with each other. At the beginning of the preschool year, Rhys made little attempt to get to know other children. His sociometric status was low at the pre test (Rhys was ranked last). At post test (after the intervention program was taught) Rhys made an attempt to include Mitchell and Joseph in his play. His sociometric status improved to average (he was ranked fifth last). The teachers felt that he was making good progress. However, by the time of the delayed post test, his status dropped to low again (he was ranked third last). This seems to indicate that the program needs to be maintained for children like this.

7.3322 Laura (NIG 2).

Laura and Linden were special friends. They visited each other's house and spent all their time together at preschool. They spent a lot of time inside drawing and making things. Occasionally they ventured outside to the play house. Laura and Linden could get quite nasty if another child was attempting to join their play. They excluded others. Laura could be quite bossy. She remarked that if she wanted to join someone else that *"she would ask if she could play and then start playing".* Laura also had trouble with distinguishing intentions of others. In both the pre and the post test, she said she would be angry if someone accidentally knocked over her tower. Lack of knowledge

about intentions is associated with low status (see discussion of Research Question 45).

At the time of the pre test Laura's sociometric status was low (ranked ninth from the bottom). At post test, she had average status but was fifth from the bottom). By the time of the delayed post test, she had low status and was ranked third from the bottom. This indicates that the longer unchecked exclusion of others continues, the more disassociated children can become from the group. Thus, status continues to fall.

7.333 Poor Control of Behaviour

Young children who have difficulty in controlling their emotions, especially those who display frequent and intense outbursts of temper, appear to frighten other children and they therefore tend to avoid them. Children who have extreme difficulty with control often have low sociometric status.

7.3331 Samuel (NIG3).

Samuel lived on a sheep farm. He spent a lot of time wandering around the paddocks and in the shearing shed with the men. As long as he kept out of trouble, his dad was happy with him. Samuel, at preschool, was a very determined child intent on getting his own way. He appeared to dislike structure or defined boundaries. Each time he did not get his own way he started yelling, stamping his foot and screaming. His tantrums would last approximately five minutes and it would take half an hour for him to pacify. His teacher became very anxious about his behaviour and would try to calm him. Invariably she would give him "time out". These tantrums became more intense and frequent as time went by. The teacher spoke with his parents and they were not concerned initially as he did not appear to have these tantrums at home. At the pre test he had a low sociometric status (he was ranked last).

By the time of the post test, he had the same low sociometric status and his mother was beginning to have problems with him at home, especially with his swearing. His father was not concerned. At the time of the delayed post test his status was still low (ranked last) but his mother had decided to take him to a psychologist in Brisbane. The psychologist stated that he was a bright child and there appeared that nothing was wrong. The mother and the teacher felt that he needed stronger discipline and boundaries to be set. Both were worried about his next year at preschool.

Each time Samuel had a tantrum the children quickly moved outside or if it was story time they watched with worried faces. Peter was in Samuel's class, and when asked during the interview, "how do you know someone is sad" he stated: *They're noisy like Sam* (who was crying at the time).

When asked in the pre test interview how he (Sam) would feel if someone knocked down his tower intentionally he stated: *I'd go to bed and throw everything. [I'd be] cranky.* At the time of the post test regarding an accident he said: *I wouldn't play with them again. [I'd be] angry.* These answers were inappropriate because accidents are not intentional and although children feel sad when a tower is broken, they realise that it was a mishap. At the time of the delayed post test, Samuel's answers were appropriate (accident: not happy; on purpose: a bit cross). In other words, he knew the difference between an accident and an intentional act. Thus, although he was maturing, it was not evident in his behaviour.

7.3332 Ashley (IG3).

Ashley was an outgoing, happy child with good social relationship skills. However, he was intent on getting his own way rather than compromising. When frustrated or angry he would yell and cry. His tantrums were not as intense or frequent as Samuel's, but the children looked worried whenever he had a tantrum. For example, the day another child knocked over his block tower, the day someone spilt paint on his picture, he shouted abusively at the child and started to cry with rage. His mother showed concern for him and asked if the preschool teachers could help. She felt that he had a bad temper and had not learnt to control it. He was to start school the following year and the mother felt this may be a problem. At the pre test he had average sociometric status (he was ranked 7th). When asked how he would feel if someone knocked his tower down accidentally he stated that he would go away but he would feel sad. It appeared that by going away he was able to cope with the situation. When asked how he would feel if the act was intentional he replied that he would feel angry but he would not hit. Thus, he knew it was wrong to hit, but felt frustrated in this situation. At the time of the post test, he was aware of different feelings experienced if the other's intentions were accidental as compared to when the action was intentional. Hence, he could identify his feelings but he had to learn control. During the intervention period, he was able to talk about his feelings each time he was angry and frustrated, and he was able to deal with these emotions. He began to gain control of his emotions. It is interesting that although his control

improved by the post test time his status dropped in ranking to 9th. This may be that children were more discriminating after the program was taught and that reputational bias occurred.

7.334 Physical Problems

7.3341 Katherine (IG2).

Katherine had low energy and was often unwell even in attendance at preschool. She often had allergic rashes on her face, appeared blue around her mouth, and had frequent colds. By lunchtime at each session she had watering and swollen eyes. She spent a lot of time sitting. She preferred to do puzzles, paint, and read books. Those children who frequently sit around miss opportunities for initiating social interaction. Preschoolers on the whole tend to move around quite a lot, going from activity to activity. This movement creates opportunities for social interaction and experience in entering groups. It also increases the chances of getting to know others' likes and dislikes. Hence, if children do not appear to be outgoing or interact, it affects their sociometric status.

At the time of the pre test, Katherine had low sociometric status (ranked 5th last - see Charts 6q, Appendix 6). She did not have any friends with whom she frequently played. She appeared to be dependent on teachers to solve her problems, that is, she lacked independence and assertiveness (*If sad you'd go to a teacher).*

At the post test, she had made friends with two other children who were not confident at preschool, and like her tended to sit around quite a bit. She stated in the interview that: *"I have two friends now".* Her status remained low (ranked last - see Chart 6r, Appendix 6). Perhaps she had too little time to learn enough new knowledge and use it in her behaviour to improve her status. Low sociometric status may have remained due to other children being more discriminating in their rating of friends; reputational bias; or other children developing their skills at a faster rate. Hence a time lag in social skill development may occur after new skills are acquired and used in a child's behavioural repertoire.

At the time of the delayed post test, Katherine's sociometric status was still low but she appeared to be more outgoing and happier. She also appeared more confident and assertive. When asked how she would feel if someone pushed

over her tower intentionally, she stated: *Sad and I'd say don't push my tower over.* She also seemed less dependent on teachers to solve her problems.

7.3342 Caitlin (NIG4).

Caitlin was a very bright child who appeared friendly and prosocial toward her peers. In fact when asked how she would feel if someone knocked over her tower accidentally or on purpose she said that she "*would smile and build it back up again".* Although at the pre test her sociometric status was average, she was ranked fourth last. Her teacher was surprised because she thought her status would be high because her skills were perceived by the teacher to be good. Caitlin was thus observed by the teacher and the researcher for a few weeks. It became clear that she too sat around and when invited to go outside, she refused. Because she refused invitations, children stopped inviting her to participate.

The teacher later observed her outside and realised that her gross motor skills were poor. She found it especially difficult to run and climb. Keeping up with her peers was very difficult and so she found it easier to remain inside. This limited her social interaction opportunities. Her sociometric status was low at the post test (ranked 3rd last). She was aware that she was not liked because when she was asked how she knew when someone is sad she stated: *"because they don't like me".* The teacher contacted her parents and asked them to observe her gross motor skills. Her mother then asked for an assessment from the occupational therapist who confirmed that her gross motor skills were poor. An exercise program was created and she was encouraged to participate in physical activities at preschool. In a sense, she had intervention but for physical problems not to encourage her social participation.

At the time of the delayed post test, although her gross motor skills were improving and she spent more time outside, she was however, no longer receiving many invitations. She tried several strategies for improving her acceptance, for example, by attempting to make people laugh *(I'd make a funny face to make them happy again. I'd go ha ha.)* She did not seem to have a special friend. Hence, she had established a reputation for rejecting invitations. A whole class intervention program was needed and would have provided support for her.

The results indicated the knowledge, skills, and behaviours important for social competence. Context was also important and evidence from case studies showed how the context can be changed to support the acquisition of such knowledge, skills and behaviours.

7.4 Summary of Findings

7.41 Research Theme 2

Results indicate that there is a stability regarding social relationships within preschoolers. However, a repertoire of particular skills is needed for social competence. Children with low, average and high sociometric status are perceived to have or to lack particular skills and exhibit various personality traits. Profiles for each status group in the study are listed below.

7.411 High Sociometric Status.

Children with high sociometric status were perceived by their teachers as having good attention skills, effective communication skills, effectual emotional understanding, strong self attributes and appropriate social interaction attributes associated with social competence. In other words they received high scores on the HESCI checklist.

7.412 Average Sociometric Status.

Children with average status were perceived by their teachers as being inattentive or introverted. Inattentive children had poor communication skills; lacked some social interaction skills; and were perceived to be delayed in academic areas. Introverted children were non assertive; had poor emotion skills; and lacked some social interaction skills. HESCI scores for children with average status, were much lower and more inconsistent than for high status children. The researcher observed that these children could not distinguish the intentions of others or were not sure of their feelings.

7.413 Low Sociometric Status.

Children with low status were perceived by their teachers as being defiant, having poor skills for resolving conflict, having poor skills when joining a group (they rushed in without observing the context of play) and disrupted the group; and had little consideration for others. HESCI scores were often quite low. Personal traits observed by these children were stubbornness and a desire to get their own way.

7.42 Research Theme 3

A summary of research findings are presented.

7.421 Pre-Requisites of Learning

A higher percentage of children with low sociometric status displayed poor attention and other social processing skills as compared to children with high sociometric status.

7.422 Communication

A higher percentage of low status children as compared to children with high status, drew attention to themselves; did not provide a reason for preventing another child from entering a group; and did not produce an alternative suggestion for play when refusing entry into a group.

A slightly higher percentage of low status children were perceived by their teachers as lacking some communication skills, especially in the pre test and to a lesser extent in the post test. Skills which were perceived by teachers as not being present in low status children included not initiating communication; poor articulation; not directly addressing peers; and not commenting on ongoing play or work (pre test only).

7.423 Emotions

Children with low sociometric status were perceived by their teachers as having slightly poorer emotional expression, emotional interpretation skills and emotional sharing, especially in the pre test.

7.424 Self Attributes

Self attributes were not as distinguishing as other categories. Teachers perceived that a slightly larger percentage of children with low status were defiant than those with high status especially in the pre test and post test.

7.425 Social Interaction Attributes

On the whole, teachers perceived that children with low sociometric status lacked a number of social interaction attributes. Attributes which discriminated low status children from high status children were: not waiting when joining a group; disrupting when joining a group; not initiating negotiation during conflict ; not trying to resolve issues; not initiating a compromise; not accepting

a compromise; not sharing ; not engaging in interactive play ; insensitive to peers; not empathetic; and disrespectful to others.

7.43 Research Theme 4

Teachers perceived that children benefited from the intervention program. They expressed that it was extremely important to discuss friendship to enable children to reflect on social relationships and realise the importance of friends. They also indicated the importance of discussing both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. Although teachers indicated that their personal preference was to teach children who lack social competence knowledge in small groups, the researcher acknowledges the importance of having a whole class program.

A whole class program reinforces effective behaviours for all children; provides models for those who are slower to respond to the program; creates an awareness of acceptable behaviours in low and average status children; enables reflection on inappropriate behaviours; and provides strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour.

Individual Case Studies provided evidence for use of intervention with children with particular problems, such as not sharing a special friend, lacking social experience, having physical problems and having poor control of behaviour. Children who received intervention improved their sociometric status. Those who did not receive intervention did not improve.

The next chapter will discuss the significant findings of the research, particularly related to children's knowledge acquisition and intervention.

CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the research findings will be discussed and their importance to current theories. Not all findings are discussed, only those which are of major importance. Context, gender, friends, joining in, emotions, self, HESCI, sociometric ratings, and intervention are discussed.

8.1 Context

The Situated Learning framework provided a framework for children learning in a particular context. It indicated the relationships among the learner, people, and the social world. Context is extremely important to learning social competence. Dunn (1991) has reported that young children in the context of home understand at an early age about a great deal of social relationship issues; for example, empathy with mothers when they are upset. Knowledge about social situations in the *home* will be dependent upon parenting style, discipline, siblings, and experience with visiting peers. Young children are aware that different behaviours are appropriate for different places. Initially, "home" knowledge is brought to preschool.

In the *preschool*, children initially rely on what they have brought from home until they learn what is appropriate for the new context. Those children who bring limited or inappropriate knowledge, skills and behaviours need help and a supportive environment to assist in discovering the relevant knowledge, skills, and behaviours for the new context.

Young children need to observe what others are doing and participate in social interactions and "test" their existing knowledge to discover what is appropriate in the new context. After a time in the preschool context, they use the knowledge they brought from home to see if it "works" or not and adapt it to the new situation. The fact that young children change their behaviours to suit the preschool context implies that they are aware of appropriate behaviours for the new context.

The support given to social relationship development, by teachers and peers, affects children's learning. This study has provided evidence, as was documented in the case studies, for creating a context which models the positive aspects of friendship formation and the skills necessary to form satisfying relationships.

Once children become aware of what the social rules are, they, especially girls, conform to the rules. The author believes that young children may react to a new situation impulsively (using genetic predispositions) but at the point of having control, of emotions or behaviour, they have consciously thought about what is appropriate for the peer group (see Chapter 3, section 3.3211 Genetic difference). For example, the author predicted that shyness may influence social interaction and social competence, but this study showed that it made no difference.

At the point of becoming aware of what is appropriate, and making a decision to act in a conforming manner, conscious thought has occurred (metacognition). Awareness and use of a strategy is involved in such situations.

8.2 Gender

In this study, gender differences were perhaps the most interesting of the findings. It was evident from the results that females as young as three had behaved differently from and had a different social knowledge base from that of males. Saani (1986) explained this gender difference, especially in regard to emotional display, as motivated by social pressure; that is, that girls must be seen as nice, friendly and do the "right thing" (See Chapter 4, p. 88). The "theory of mind" framework stresses that young children individually make sense of their world by building theories about situations. Gender is not specifically emphasised but age is. Many authors such as Wellman (1990), Dunn (1991) and Perner (1993) question when young children have mental representations (see Chapter 2, pp. 19-23). Perhaps the gender differences could be investigated further.

Many females appear to mature or conform earlier than males and become more aware of what is happening in their social world. They are more knowledgeable of appropriate and acceptable behaviour and are more sensitive to others. Boyatzis, Chazan, and Ting (1993) proposed that girls were significantly better at identifying emotions than boys; in fact girls aged 3.5 years were as accurate as 5 year old boys. Casey (1993) proposed that females were more aware of facial expressions; were conscious of displaying socially acceptable feelings; and regulated their emotions to exhibit socially acceptable emotions. This supports the view that females are more mature and more sensitive to their social environment.

This study indicated that three to five year old girls were more mature than boys even of the same age. Many more girls had higher sociometric status than boys, which provided evidence for girls being more sensitive to the rules of the peer group. This increased sensitivity to the social environment most likely improves the process of learning in general and may explain why females responded more favourably to the teaching program.

Gender was especially linked to emotion issues in this study. Females and males had different rules for expressing feelings and perhaps different levels of understanding.

8.3 Emotions

Emotions were discussed in reference to what children reported they would do if another person was sad, how they would feel about an accident, and how they would feel due to a transgression. Emotions are very important to most aspects of social interactions especially in self and other understanding. The "theory of mind" framework views emotions as a mental state which can undergo representation. It is perceived as being important in the evaluation of events and the categorisation of the meaning of events. It is important in the guiding of subsequent behaviour. This study indicated that children's knowledge of emotions and how emotions were displayed was associated with how children were functioning in their social world.

8.31 Context of Sadness

In this study, comforting was related to gender and high sociometric status. More females reported that they would comfort others who were sad. Strayer (1989) proposed that females reported more empathy, especially with sadness and fear, than males. This was the case in this study.
High status children comforted others verbally. It appeared that comforting by physical actions (a cuddle) was not acceptable to the preschooler's peer group. Appropriate comforting phrases or emotional scripts were: *"Cheer up and you can play with me."* Lewis (1989) proposed that affective responsiveness to others is organised within a knowledge structure through well articulated emotional scripts which include information about appropriate emotion for self and other in particular situations. This study supported his work.

More females expressed sadness in terms of not being liked. It is interesting to note that all children with high sociometric status who connected sadness

with not being liked, gave an empathetic perspective. Farver and Branstetter (1994) reported that variations in the manner that children responded to another's distress were related to temperament, friendship status, and positive interactive style with peers rather than age, gender, social competence, and childcare experience. This study did not investigate the responses in terms of temperament, friendships status, or social interaction style of peers.
Most children with high status mentioned that sadness was associated with not being liked. This may have indicated that children become conscious of being liked over time, and were aware of the consequences of not being liked in the preschool context.

Many males described the context of sadness in terms of being hurt or of being the recipient of aggression. Often the two concepts were difficult to separate. All children who described the context of sadness in terms of aggression were males with low status. Talk of being hurt and aggression seems to indicate that there is an expectation that males will be hurt in the preschool environment, which suggests that there may be more preschool aggression than is noticed. Perhaps new male preschoolers are in a vulnerable position because speaking about aggression decreased over the test times.

Males did not mention telling a teacher or adult if aggression occurred. The reason may be that males empathised with the aggressor, that is, they recognised that often when you are frustrated or angry you become aggressive. Strayer (1989) stated that males report more empathy with anger.

8.32 Response to an Accident

A larger proportion of children with high sociometric status identified feelings of sadness in response to their tower being knocked down accidentally. Most of the females with high status were from the Intervention Group. It would appear that in this group, appropriate feelings were identified due to the supportive environment. Females appeared to benefit more from intervention.
A slightly larger proportion of low status children identified feelings of anger in response to their tower being knocked down accidentally. The reason may have been that these children were not aware of the intention of the other. Intentions, in the "theory of mind" framework, are essential in terms of explaining and predicting behaviour of others (Astington, Harris & Olson, 1988). The young child has a concept of mental life which can theorise about related, unobservable entities. Children, especially females, who expressed

sadness regarding the knocking over of a tower, appeared to be aware of others' intentions. Thus, they could predict other people's reactions by their imaginative capacity.

8.33 Response to a Transgression

The majority of children indicated that they would feel sad. A large number of children with low sociometric status stated that they would feel happy, whereas more high status children reported that they would feel angry. It was surmised that feeling of being happy was inappropriate and expressing sadness or anger was acceptable. Feeling happy indicated that low status children did not yet understand the intention of others. Feeling angry indicated that there was an awareness of the intention of the transgressor. Average status children were not able to distinguish the intentions of others or they were not sure of their feelings. The same emotion was anticipated for an accident as for a transgression. This differed from children with high status.

8.4 Friends

Results indicated that there is a stability regarding sociometric ratings or social relationships within preschoolers as indicated by the charts (see Chapter 6, section 6.1 pp. 154-156). This may oppose Damon (1983), who stated that children's friendships became more stable as they grew older, which suggests instability in relationships in young children. As was reported in the literature by Rubin (1980), young children perceived friends as being those peers that they played with. However, children did not appear to choose friends due to their accessibility in the preschool context. They chose those they liked or wanted to play with and showed consistency in their choice of friends over the eight months.

Many young children in this study had cross sex friends but nearly as many had same sex friends. The literature review indicated that as children get older, they choose same sex partners to play with, although cross sex friends are not uncommon (Maccoby, 1990). Maccoby hypothesised about the reason for girls not liking boys (the play style differed and that girls made no impact on boys during play). This same sex preference began before age three years (Howes, 1988b). In this study, a large proportion of children had cross sex friends. This preference may have occurred as a result of previous experience with siblings or friends from the home context. Girls may have learnt strategies to cope with the rough and tumble play, the competitiveness

and how to gain influence over males. High status children were participants in both groups, that is, those with same sex or mixed sex friends.

Females, in this study, tended to have more same sex friends than males. Males lagged behind females and increased the proportion of same sex friends by the delayed post test This indicated that there may have been social pressure to be with same sex friends from the peer group. This appears to be an Australian cultural behaviour, even into adulthood, whereby males cluster together with males, and females with females at social outings.

8.5 Joining In

A higher percentage of female and high status children asked before joining in play. This indicated that females, especially those with high status, were more aware of the social rules. The percentage of children asking before joining in play increased over time and so led to the conclusion that this is the accepted behaviour by the peer group. Most of the high status children were girls and so this again supports the hypothesis that girls are more aware of what is happening in their social environment.

This study indicated that peer group entry was important and implicit rules were essential. Initially, the newcomer engaged in passive but alert *observation* of the group for a period of time to determine a frame of reference (Phillips, Shenker, & Revitz, 1951). Next, the newcomer attempted to become involved through *vocalisation*; or *cooperative activity.* Sharing a group's frame of reference is critical for acceptance by a group (Putallaz & Wasserman, 1990).

8.6 Self

Children with low sociometric status perceived that they were good at school type activities, making things or being good at everything. The reason may be connected with empowerment in their environment. Because the preschool environment caters for a broad range of interests and activities for children, a child has a better chance of demonstrating skills and, hence, self concept is improved. The preschool environment also provides choices which support a child's independence and develops a sense of personal control. This, too, leads to improved self esteem and competence. (See discussion of the development of self concept in Chapter 4, pp. 89-94) In the preschool environment the children with low status may feel a false sense of elation. The teacher usually provides support and communicates an expectation that

the child can perform tasks and joins in the activities provided. This is supported by the literature. Bredekamp (1987) states that a number of aspects of the physical environment such as accessibility of developmentally appropriate materials, and provision of a broad number of activities, will enhance feelings of confidence in approaching new materials and so, a child has a better chance of demonstrating skills and therefore self concept is improved. Providing choice supports a child's developing independence and develops a sense of personal control and so too leads to improved self esteem and competence also. Peer interaction influences self esteem and social perceptions of competence (Marshall, 1987).

8.7 HESCI

The HESCI proved to be a useful instrument for relating perceived skills to social status. Factor analysis indicated that communication and emotion were highly correlated. The reason for this high correlation was because the expression and interpretation of emotions requires effective communication skills.

Self and social interaction were highly correlated. Social interaction attributes comprised many behaviours for understanding others. The relationship probably existed because effective social interaction skills lead to a good self concept, that is, if you display these skills people are friendlier and reinforce your use of them. On the contrary, those children with poor social interaction skills are avoided or rejected. This would impinge on feelings of self and confidence about self worth.

The relationship between emotions and social interaction may be explained in a similar manner. Those children with effective emotion skills most likely had parents who discuss feelings frequently and from an early age. They are also most likely to discuss and teach their children social interaction skills.

At pre test and post test times, there were moderately significant correlations between the pre-requisites for learning and emotion, and emotion and social interaction. Concerning the relationship between the pre-requisites for learning and emotion, the result may be explained as follows. Understanding emotions is a cognitive process which requires sophisticated concentration and processing skills. Caregivers play an important role in developing emotion knowledge/skills. As was discussed in the literature in Chapter 3, caregivers who discuss emotions from an early age, produce socially

competent children. It may be assumed that their children are also proficient at listening and attending to social information.

At the post test and the delayed post test, there was a relationship between emotions and self. One would think that those children who had difficulty with understanding and interpreting emotions, which appears to be crucial to social competence, would have a poor concept of self which would contribute to lack of confidence, assertiveness, and feeling unhappy. On the other hand, those who had effective emotion skills would have a positive self concept. This relationship may have developed later in the year because of the awareness of, and the need to increase, situation-specific knowledge from the preschool context, which is crucial for belonging to the group. Social rules for the preschool group are learnt after the child has been part of the group for a time.

At the pre test and the delayed post test time, there was a relationship between the pre-requisites for learning and communication. Attending and processing information are vital skills for communication.

8.8 Intervention

A whole class program helped all children by providing support from teachers and peers. It allowed the context for the class group to be supportive and nurturing of social competence. A whole class program may have reinforced effective behaviours for all children; may have provided models for those who were slower to respond to the program; may have created an awareness of acceptable behaviours in low and average status children; may have enabled children to reflect on inappropriate behaviours; and may have provided strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Children in the Intervention Preschool may have improved due to maturity or the difference in the peer context. It is difficult to be sure because the factors which influence social competence are so complex and difficult to measure. Children with low status may have come from families who did not frequently discuss emotions and social experiences and hence may have benefited from the class discussions and reinforcement of prosocial behaviours. Apparent improvements in the Intervention Group as compared to Non-Intervention Group were previously noted in Research Theme 1 (see summary) and provided possible evidence for the benefits of a social competence program.

The case studies indicated added improvements, also. Individual intervention provided support for children lacking specific skills and catered for individual differences. Case studies added another dimension to the understanding of the preschool context and how the peers functioned socially within that context.

Using sociometric status as a measure for improvement of skills and behaviours is not always reliable. The reasons are firstly, there may be a time lag in social skill development between the acquisition of new knowledge and those skills being displayed as part of the child's behavioural repertoire. Secondly, a time lapse may occur between attainment of skills and others noticing a change. Hence, children's status may be perceived by their peers as remaining the same. Thirdly, when children become aware of appropriate social behaviour they become more discriminating of others' behaviours. Thus, they may reject "rule breakers". Fourthly, children who have established a reputation as being "rule breakers" may hold that reputation after inappropriate behaviours have gone. So in relation to this study, children's social competence may have improved but their status may have not registered that change.

The most important research findings in this study were related to context, gender, friends, joining in, emotions, self, HESCI, sociometric ratings, and intervention. In the next chapter, the conclusions of this study and recommendations for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter examines the study as a whole and discusses links between the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, literature review and the research findings.

The focus of the study was to contribute to the understanding of social competence and its acquisition in young children. Social competence is important because it affects how children view school which alters their motivation to learn in a classroom environment. Social competence is also a life long skill which can contribute to outcomes such as satisfying social relationships. Social incompetence can lead to depression, delinquency, drug taking, suicide and overall unhappiness.

A vast number of studies reviewed in the literature had examined social competence and the majority focused on peer rejection as opposed to peer acceptance. However, the researcher believed that these studies had not been organised to create a holistic account of the concept. Hence, the literature reviewed was largely compiled on peer acceptance or high sociometric status. It was organised into two main sections:

1. factors influencing social competence, and
2. the constructs of social competence.

The first section consisted of those factors that influence the development of social competence, such as, parental style; child characteristics; teachers; peers; siblings; and intervention. These influences were important and enabled the researcher to understand the different knowledge bases a child may bring to a preschool context, and how that knowledge was adapted or changed to suit the new context. For example, a child who has parents who are authoritarian will bring a different set of social knowledge, skills and behaviours to a new context than a child who has authoritative parents (see Chapter 3, pp. 52-53). Understanding the influences of peers and teachers is important for changing inappropriate knowledge and behaviours in the preschool context.

The second section included the subcategories of social competence such as pre-requisites for learning, communication, emotion knowledge, self attributes and social interaction attributes. Understanding the constructs of social competence assisted in developing a teaching program and a checklist of the

skills needed for social competence (see Appendices 6 and 8 for the program and checklist).

9.1 The Research

The research was approached from a predominantly qualitative standpoint but certain quantitative techniques were used to assist decision making during qualitative data analyses. Quantitative techniques were used for determination of sociometric status and deciding the most frequent answers for interview responses. The qualitative aspect was approached from several perspectives of the social world of young children (triangulation). Information collected was from the perspective of several people connected to the child in the preschool. Investigating different perspectives gave a richer understanding. Methods used were:

- an interview to discover what young children "know" about their social relationships in the context of preschool (the child's perception of his/her social world);
- sociometric ratings to determine the sociometric status of each child in the study and the child's perception of those who are successful in relationships;
- a checklist to gain the teachers' perception of how a child functions in his/her social world; and
- observations to gain the researcher's perception of how a child functions in his/her social world.

Sociometric status was important to the study. Sociometric status was determined by a different method (Rasch and Cluster Analysis) than is usually used and enabled the researcher to identify knowledge, skills, and behaviours which were present or absent in high or low status children. High sociometric status children were identified and investigated to determine which knowledge, skills, and behaviours they exhibited to gain acceptance within the preschool peer group. Low status children were identified and investigated to determine what was not acceptable to their peer group.

The research was divided into two main sections:

1. *social competence knowledge*: what young children know about social competence; and

2. the *social competence construct*: those skills and behaviours needed for social competence and how the context for learning them could be changed.

9.11 Social Competence Knowledge

Children's knowledge about social competence was collected from the children themselves using the "theory of mind" view of knowledge acquisition. The "theory of mind" view perceives the young child as an active seeker of knowledge, who thinks, and does so in a social world composed of cultural forces and communicating people. To understand the peer social world children were required to interpret others' intentions, emotions, mental states, and make sense of another person's behaviour. For example, if one child was crying because she did not want her mother to leave, her friend may have interpreted that the crying child wanted to be left alone because the crying child did not respond to comforting. Interpreting the crying child's desires was essential to responding appropriately.

"Theory of mind" is based on an awareness of self and others' mental states. To function effectively in the peer group, children must be able to anticipate how others are feeling, be able to interpret what others are communicating, have an awareness and confidence of self, and know the rules for social interaction. Hence, in the preschool environment, social interactions continually occurred and appropriate actions were important for social competence. Each child was required to use effective strategies and hence, possibly metacognised.

Only the child "knows" about the child's peer group. Adults are outsiders to the child's social world and can only hope to gain understanding of the child's perception of their world and discover what they know by talking with the child. By discovering what children know and how they view the social world, researchers can attempt to understand how that world is represented and, also, if and how the child metacognises about the social world. The research in this thesis used the view of regarding cognitive development in terms of theory formation and theory change. Whether the "theory of mind" requires an 'implicit only' or an 'implicit and reflective' view of the changing nature of the mind, is debateable. However, it is the researcher's belief that those who are successful in the peer world (high status children) use an implicit and reflective view or metacognise.

As children in the preschool environment observed and experienced incidents in the preschool context, their views and behaviours changed during this study (see Chapter 8, pp. 233-234). Examples of children changing their view over time occurred when children became aware of asking before joining play; learning that friends were those with whom they played and liked not just those they played with; and with respect to "peer group appropriate" emotions, for example, when their tower was knocked over (happiness to sadness). Understanding of situations often resulted in changed views and behaviours.

The interviews and sociometric ratings in this study revealed that:

- high status children had mixed sex friends, whereas low status children had more same or opposite sex friends;
- females and high status children asked before joining in play;
- females comforted others who were sad;
- males said nothing to a sad peer or they avoided them;
- males were aware of a need to be good at playing ; and
- high status children understood intentions and expressed the appropriate emotions, for example, sadness for accident; anger or sadness for a transgression.

Knowing, however, does not necessarily lead to social competence or high sociometric status. Children need to use their knowledge to develop appropriate behaviours. Display of knowledge, skills, and behaviours lead to social competence as is discussed in the next section.

9.12 Construct of Social Competence

The process of thinking about the social environment is a cognitive process and may result in forming strategies to deal with future events. These strategies are used for behaviours and lead to an individual gaining sociometric status. The context in which such strategies are learnt is important.

Behaviours exhibited and observed by the teachers and the researcher in this study were used to compile profiles according to sociometric status as indicated by the children.

9.121 Profiles

Teachers indicated the presence or absence of behaviours in children from the HESCI checklist. These were examined in combination with sociometric status as indicated by children. Profiles of status groups (low, average and high) were formed.

Data from the HESCI (the teachers' perspective) indicated that :

- all pre-requisites of learning were important for high status;
- communications skills which appeared to be most important for social competence included not drawing attention to themselves; providing a reason for preventing another child from entering a group; and producing an alternative suggestion for play when refusing entry into a group;
- having adequate emotion knowledge and behaviours was important;
- self attributes were not as important, except being defiant was related to low status ; and
- many social interaction attributes were important, especially, waiting before joining a group; not being disruptive when joining a group; initiating negotiation during conflict; trying to resolve issues; initiating and accepting a compromise; sharing; engaging in interactive play; being sensitive to peers; being empathetic and respectful to others.

The researcher observed and noted that:

- some personal traits, especially being strong willed, affected social relationships formation;

- lacking of control of behaviour, such as having temper tantrums or being angry and frustrated because of family problems, affected relationship formation; and

- having articulation problems affected sociometric status only until other children became familiar with the child's speech.

In summary, children with *high* sociometric status received high scores on the HESCI checklist (79-92). They were perceived by their teachers as having good attention skills, effective communication skills, effectual emotional understanding, strong self attributes and appropriate social interaction attributes associated with social competence. Most of the children with high status were females and this may indicate early maturity.

Children with *average* status were perceived by their teachers as being either:

1. *inattentive* (had poor communication skills and lacked some social interaction skills, or had poor academic ability); or

2. *non assertive*; had poor emotion skills; and lacked some social interaction skills, and were introverted and reluctant to mix. HESCI scores for these children were much lower and more inconsistent than for high status children.

Children with *low* status were perceived by their teachers to lack a large number of social competence skills. These children were viewed as being defiant, having poor skills for resolving conflict, having poor skills when joining a group (they rushed in without observing the context of play and disrupted the group); and had little consideration for others.

Information from the case studies lead the researcher to believe that particular circumstances can impede or temporarily affect the development of social competence. Some of these circumstances were: children who were affected by a parent's marriage split; a mother returning to work; a child having a different knowledge base to others in the preschool such as being from another culture or lacking social interaction experience; or having a special friend and not wanting to share that friend with others.

Some of the important behaviours within the subcategories of social competence constructs, as discussed in the profiles, appeared to be more important to social competence and are discussed below.

9.122 Subcategories of the Social Competence Construct

9.1221 Pre requisites of learning.

Children with social competence have effective information processing skills, that is they pay attention to social world; they are able to attend to relevant information; they can determine which is useful information; they recall a range of strategies for particular situations, and they can choose a relevant strategy from the list and adapt the strategy appropriately. Many children with low and average status had difficulty with attending to social information.

Although having these skills for learning was important, they appeared to affect social competence indirectly rather than directly (see Chapter 7 p. 210).

However, communication, emotion, self attributes and social interaction attributes were directly linked to one another.

9.1222 Communication.

Children with high sociometric status were perceived by their teachers to initiate oral communication; articulate clearly; give clear meaning; respond to others in a connected manner; and address peers directly during conversations. These children also appeared to comment on ongoing play or activities; did not draw attention to themselves; used nods, smiles, etc (nonverbal communication); and provided reasons or made an alternative suggestion for play when not allowing another child to join in an activity.

9.1223 Emotion.

High status children were perceived by their teachers as expressing appropriate opinions and emotions; being able to interpret others' emotions; and sharing their own emotions. The researcher however, observed that a larger proportion of children who lacked emotion knowledge had low sociometric status.

9.1224 Self (personal traits)

Teachers were not as discriminating when examining personal traits of these children. They perceived that a slightly larger percentage of high status children were happy, compliant and did not blame others for accidents. However, there was a large difference in perception between low and high status children especially regarding defiance (more low status children were viewed as being defiant).

9.1225 Social Interaction Attributes

Social interaction attributes tended to discriminate low status children from high status children. High status children appeared to: wait when joining a group; not disrupt when joining a group; initiate negotiation during conflict; try to resolve issues; initiate a compromise; accept a compromise; share; engage in interactive play; be sensitive to peers; empathise; and respect others.

9.2 Educational Implications

The research revealed that when teaching young children, considerations with respect to gender, age, sociometric status and intervention should be given.

9.21 Gender

Research findings support the view that most females mature earlier than males, and so achieve higher sociometric status because they have a greater understanding of their social world (see Chapter 8, pp. 234-235 for discussion). This maturity affected their acquisition of social knowledge and social competence. In this study, young females also tended to benefit more from intervention than males.

9.22 Age

Age was not as important a finding as gender or sociometric status in this study. However, some trends occurred. For example, younger children (three to five year olds) had friends mostly of mixed gender, whereas children over five years of age had same sex friends This supports the literature reviewed (see Chapter 4, p. 103). More younger children talked of rejection as compared to children over five years, which indicates that they may feel vulnerable due to a lack of socia knowledge and maturity. Hence, younger children may need extra support regarding social relationship formation.

The researcher believes that this finding supports the view that experience in the social world is more relevant than age. However, it is acknowledged that some children learn faster than others due to a combination of factors in their home environment and cognitive potential.

9.23 Sociometric Status

Social status was linked to gender, that is, most females obtained higher status than males. This appeared to be linked to maturity and greater capacity for social cognition (see Chapter 8, pp. 234-235 for discussion).

Another important research finding was the method used to determine social status. The Rasch model and cluster analysis were used instead of the accepted method of counting the number of votes determined by sociometric ratings (see Chapter 5, pp. 147-50)

9.24 Importance of Intervention

The intervention used in this study altered the context of learning. It changed the context by providing more support for the learning of social relationship knowledge; by encouraging prosocial behaviour and assisting in developing social problem solving strategies. Altering the context, that is, by providing an environment supportive to social competence, affected children's motivation to behave appropriately so as to become part of the group. The Situated Learning Theory discussed in Chapter 2 pp. 15-17 related learning to context, and proved useful when investigating the impact of intervention. This theory stresses that knowledge acquisition was specific to a particular context through participation in activities. Hence, children with a different knowledge base were able to adjust and benefit from the preschool context. Case studies of each group were used to gain understanding of the preschool context, and case studies of individuals indicated the gains made from intervention.

The intervention program proved successful. Success occurred because a supportive environment was provided by teachers and peers. Peers also provided modelling for prosocial and positive social relationship behaviours. Females appeared to benefit more from intervention than males.

Intervention also benefited children who lacked experience or had developed a different set of behaviours. It provided a framework for the skills which needed to be developed and it provided structure for learning social competence. Young children appeared to benefit from this structure. As a result of intervention of this nature, the transference of these skills to other contexts may have occurred. This was not measured.

The teaching of social competence may help young special needs children as well. Such a program would give encouragement and provide a supportive environment to those who lack social competence skills.

9.3 Limitations of the Study

This study was limited, especially by time and could have been of more value if:

- it were extended in time to include the first year of formal school, that is, children were interviewed to document their knowledge in the school context and the context was examined to discover similarities and differences between preschool and formal school;

- the teaching program was taught over a full year rather than a term;
- the teaching program had been taught by the researcher so as to exercise more control over the intervention; and
- the checklist was slightly modified. The researcher observed that personal characteristics that were not included in HESCI could be added to this section. For example, personal characteristics that could be added to the checklist were *unsettled* because of problems at home, *lacking behavioural control; strong-willed;* and *reluctant to share a special friend.*

9.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research, in the area of social competence will need to enquire further into gender differences. In this study, females responded better to the program than males. Males may need extra support especially if they are less mature and slower to respond to learning. This indicates that many males may need to have special programs and be targeted for intervention. Intervention, especially in the subcategory of emotions, appears to be most important. The researcher believes that socially constructed expectations for males allow them to express anger but not other emotions. Hence males, when in highly emotive situations other than situations which allow the expression of anger ignore their feelings in order to cope. Intervention programs need to provide strategies for them to assist them to recognise their feelings and provide strategies for dealing with their emotions. Perhaps male children may respond more favourably to male teachers.

If males are less mature and slower to respond to learning then perhaps differences in learning styles from an earlier age need further investigation to find more effective teaching methods. This appears to be of great importance because adolescent males are said to be floundering in the Australian schools system as compared to females. Newspaper reports of late have reported lower Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) scores in NSW for males than females . McCulla (1996, p. 12) reports that "there have been calls for strategies to assist boys to achieve better HSC outcomes and for the government to act on a report on gender equity prepared by the previous government". A report on the inquiry boys' education (1994) by the NSW Government Advisory Committee on Education Training and Tourism echoes these views. They have reported that a larger proportion of boys: are in

Special Schools and Support Classes; are early school leavers; underperform in literacy tests at both Year 3 and Year 6 in Government schools; and receive lower TER score. It may be that some of these problems arise from a young age due to the socially constructed values, for example, "it is not cool to be viewed as working hard at school ". Lower achievement needs further investigation.