MULTIMEDIA AND FRIENDSHIP- FROM REALITY OR FICTION

Krystyna Nowak -Fabrykowski
Central Michigan University (UNITED STATES)

Abstract

The focus of this research project is to investigate if 3 and 4-year old children consider fictional characters from movies, video games, toys as friends or is a ‘friend’ specific to real people? Are fictional characters important figures in children’s live? This study used a qualitative, ethnographic research method based on interviewing 64 children 3- and 4-years old attending Child Development and Learning Laboratory -located at the university. They were asked to draw friends and answer questions about who their friends were and why. The results of the study demonstrated that almost all children pointed to real people such as peers and family as friends, but none of them named characters from video games or movies as their friends or friends in general. Children did not identify fictional character as illustrations or models of friendships.

Keywords: Multimedia, Friendship, Young Children.

1 INTRODUCTION

Children under 5 years old spend almost 4 hours per day interacting with mobile devices, and this time increases to over 7 hours per day between the age 5 and 10. (Ralph and Petrina 2019 p.1) The time spent using digital devises has tripled from an average of 5 minutes per day in 2011 to 15 minutes a day in 2013 (Brito,2019). Preschool games are easily found on the web like ‘education.com’ where there are advertisements stressing that they are teaching from basic matching and identification skills to reading, writing, typing, and math skills of all kinds. The pitch addressed to the parents is” Your young learner will have a blast mining gems as they practice their typing skills, going treasure hunting for complete sentences, exploring outer space as they hunt capital letters, and embarking on many more educational adventures. (education.com)

Even Curious George, and Arthur and Winnie the Pooh have their own sites bringing very young children to the screen. Children under 2- years old already know how to search for them on U-Tube. (Brito,2019)

Multimedia companies advertise many interactive and educational games for preschoolers. For example, on HEACH Early Learning
iStartSmart is designed to grow with your classrooms. Start children playing Shell Squad Adventures as early as 28 months old and allow them to continue to play all the way through our entry level kindergarten games”.

There are dangers for children overusing digital media. The risks pointed to by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016) are:

1. Not enough sleep that is needed to grow caused by overstimulation by screens;
2. Problems with attention, thinking, language, and social skills.
3. Health problem such as obesity caused by lack of physical play
4. Behavioral problems either because they are scared and confused by what they see, or they try to mimic on-screen characters.

During early childhood, children learn the best by action, manipulations with real objects, exploration and interactions with other children and adults – but multimedia companies create games for very young children even for toddlers.
The proponents point to touchscreen design as enabling young children to learn how to manipulate and interact with mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones. The programs for very young children for iPad are: • Doodle Buddy app: Coloring Zoo: Finger painting using a picture of a Cat, • Fingerpaint Magic. In the study of Flewitt, Kucirkova, and Messer (2014) with hepatic children the authors stressed that iPads can enable many students to achieve independent, accomplished and pleasurable (if occasionally frustrating) completion of classroom-based literacy activities through the sensory mode of touch. (p. 96)

Children learn how to use technology like Play Station Portable from their family members, older colleagues. (Brita, 2019)

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2018) suggests that for children that are 2-5 years old to use interactive, non-violent, educational and prosocial media. They also suggest to parents playing with children and find activities that are healthy.

Prosocial skills, such as friendship, is a close dyadic relationship between two individuals (Lindsey, 2002). The effect of friendship has both a positive and negative influence on child development (Laad et al., 1996) since the dynamic features of friendships create various psychological benefits and costs. Studies done by Yu et al. (2011) demonstrated that the friendship and play opportunities for children with developmental delays were similar in many ways to those of children considered typically developing. During early childhood, the main ingredients in forming friendships are opportunity and similarity (Cook & Cook, 2009), initiative and complementary interactions (Goldman & Buysee, 2007). The focus of this research project is to investigate if the 3 and 4 year old children associate friends with the fictional characters from movies, videogames, toys or rather real people?

2 METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, ethnographic research method described by Cohen, Marion and Morison, (2007) as the role of an ethnographer as to balance a commitment to catch the diversity, variability, creativity, individuality, uniqueness and spontaneity of social interactions. (p.169) This research goal is to investigate if young children interactions with social media and watching different characters evoke in them desire of befriending them and if they identify fictional character as illustrations or models of friendships. This research has been IRB approved.

2.1 Setting

Sixty-four children 3 and 4 years old participated that attended Child Development and Learning Center located at the university. Most of the children in the lab are in the Head Start program, and the rest are the children of students, faculty, and university staff. There are children for whom English is a second language, and at home they speak one or two other languages. There are children of Chinese, East Indian, African-American, and Russian origins, Slavic, German, and many of mixed heritage.

2.2 Procedure for Data Collection

The data collection included a warm-up task (drawing) and an open-ended interview. The researcher asked preschool children to each draw a picture of friends. When the children finished their drawings, the researchers asked them 3 questions: What did you draw? Why are they friends? and A friend is like.

They were asked to draw friends and answers questions who these friends were and why.

3 RESULTS

The results of the study demonstrated that almost all children pointed to real people such as peers and family as friends, but none of them named characters from the video games or movies as their friends or friends in general. None of the children answered that they are friends because they play videogames together or do Play Station together. They identified family members or peers as friends. Many of them named mother or brothers or sister as friends. Children did not identify fictional character as illustrations of a model of friendships.
According to the results most children (26) named peers and they gave their names as friends, the second largest number of children (11) named Mom as their friend, next 7 children called Dad their friend, Grandma is a friend for 3 children, but Grandpa is a friend just for 1 child. For 7 children their siblings are their friends: brother for 4 children and sister for 3 and for 1 cousin. Animals like a cat is a friend for 1 child and an elephant for 1 child. Also, for 1 child a toy car is a friend and for 1 a monster is a friend. For 1 child a snow woman is a friend.

Two children drew themselves and said that they are waiting to have a friend. NOT even one of children answered that they are friends because they play videogames together or play Station together. The most common attribute for being a friend is somebody that help you, play together in school and after school.

4 CONCLUSION

Our study demonstrated that for most children real people are friends, most of their friends come from preschool, their neighborhood or are family members. Even previous research stated that young children watch television and play video games many hours per day, children do not associate fictional characters that they watch with friends, and they don’t draw them as friends. Not even one child drew the characters from the Sesame street and described them as friends. The researcher purposely asked to “draw friends” not “your friends” even though children drew spontaneously their friends. No of the children associated for example Winnie the Pooh and Eeyore as an illustration of friendship. It could be concluded that children’s needs are real people and that fictional characters cannot replace them. Even though media tries to play a big part in children’s lives as they may spend more time watching TV and playing video games, virtual reality remains in the fictional world.

REFERENCES


