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**'We're friends, right?': Children's use of  
access rituals in a nursery school<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, children's use of access rituals in peer interaction in a nursery school is examined and a discussion of the implications of the findings regarding the development of communicative competence is presented. The findings show that entry into play is a production of some importance involving considerable time and strategy to accomplish, while leave-taking usually involves unmarked physical movement from play areas. The importance of peer interaction in the acquisition of access rituals and the necessity of studying children's verbal routines in natural settings are discussed. (Developmental sociolinguistics, peer interaction, children's use of access rituals, US English.)

**INTRODUCTION**

Social interaction is dependent upon social actors gaining access to each other's interpersonal space. Goffman (1971) maintains that for adults in American society almost every kind of transaction is opened and closed by ritual. Goffman defines greetings and farewells as 'ritual displays that mark a change in degree of access' and terms such behavior 'access rituals' (1971: 79).

Prior analyses of access rituals (cf. Goffman 1963, 1971, 1974, and Schiffrin 1977) demonstrate both the complexity of the use of these communicative devices and their importance for the production and maintenance of social order in everyday interaction. Recent work on greetings (Yousouf, Grimshaw & Bird 1976) and other politeness formulas (Ferguson 1976) considers access rituals as universals, presenting extensive cross-cultural data.

Although these studies demonstrate the importance of access rituals, there are few references to, and even fewer studies of, the *acquisition* of access rituals. In one of the few studies bearing on acquisition, Gleason & Weintraub (1976)

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examine a verbal 'routine' (Trick or Treat) used by American children at Halloween. Gleason and Weintraub found that correct performance of the routine increased with age, but they were more concerned with the role of adults in the children's acquisition of the routine. Gleason and Weintraub maintain that verbal routines of this type are acquired differently from much of language, because correct performance precedes understanding. They argue that as a result of formal training (e.g., 'Say *bye-bye*,' 'What do you say?' 'Say *hello* to Mrs. Jones,' etc.), children produce correct routines long before they learn 'why'.

Gleason and Weintraub call for the study of less constrained routines, but they fail to consider the role of peer interaction in their acquisition. The data in the present report suggest that for learning 'why' access rituals are necessary for entry into peer interactive events, and peer interaction itself is of equal or greater importance than adult-child interaction.

The study of children's acquisition of communicative competence should be based on observations of children in a range of social-ecological settings (cf. Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro 1977). Preschool children have interactive experiences in a broad range of contexts (home, nursery school, playground, play areas near the home, homes of playmates, etc.) with a variety of interactive partners (parents, teachers, and other adults as well as peers and older and younger children). In the company of adults, children may not always be concerned with the need for access rituals, because adults either relinquish interpersonal space without demanding ritual displays,<sup>2</sup> or, as Gleason & Weintraub (1976) have observed, perform (or elicit the performance of) the appropriate display for children (e.g. 'Say *bye-bye*,' 'Say *hello* to Mrs Jones,' etc.).

Although there is an established literature on peer relations and dominance hierarchies in children's play groups (cf. Hartup 1970; Omark, Omark & Edelman 1975; Sluckin & Smith 1977; Strayer & Strayer 1976), we know little about how children gain interpersonal access in settings where adults are not present (like playgrounds) or are not continually available to ensure access (like nursery schools).<sup>3</sup> In these interactive settings, children must gain access by themselves if they are to participate in ongoing events.

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[2] As Gleason & Weintraub (1976) implied in their research, adults (especially if not the parents of the child) relinquish access to children without demanding ritual display. The basis for this departure from expected ritual is, of course, the shared understanding among adults of the social immaturity of the child. However, just as the non-parent is expected to relinquish access, the parent or caretaker (if present) is expected to either provide the access display for the child or elicit the appropriate display. I would argue that the expected parental behavior on such occasions has as much to do with adult etiquette as with conscious attempts to teach access rituals to young children.

[3] In another report (Corsaro in press b) I have examined the relationship between the structure of social contacts in peer relations and strategies for attempts to gain access as well as types of resistance to access attempts. I did not find any clear dominance hierarchy in either age group at the school. Furthermore, there were no instances in which certain children were consistently either accepted or excluded.

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In a short but provocative paper Sutton-Smith (1971) discusses the possible relationship among spatial and temporal boundaries, children's access behavior, and cognitive development. In this report I attempt to expand upon some of the issues raised by Sutton-Smith by carefully examining children's use of access rituals in the nursery school. As we will see, many of the children's access strategies in peer interaction appear to be quite different from adult rituals. These strategies do, however, involve the children's developing awareness of the *functions* of access rituals, a central feature of competence. In this sense, many of the children's early strategies for gaining access in peer interactive settings may be precursors to adult access rituals and merit careful analysis on that score alone. In addition, the study of children's access rituals is important for understanding the organization of the child's world on its own terms.

### METHOD

#### *Ethnographic context and population*

The data for this report were collected from direct observations of children in a nursery school, part of a child study center staffed and operated by a state university for education and research. The teaching strategy (or curriculum) and schedule employed in the nursery school allowed for a substantial period of self-selection of activities by the children. As a result, I was able to sample a broad range of peer interactive events.

There were two groups of children at the school, with approximately 25 children in each group. One group attended morning sessions and ranged in age from 2.10 to 3.10 years. The second group (which had been at the school the year before) attended afternoon sessions and ranged in age from 3.10 to 4.10 years at the start of the school term. The occupational and educational backgrounds of parents of the children ranged from blue-collar workers to professionals, with the majority of the children coming from professional (middle and upper class) families.

#### *Data collection*

For purposes of brevity, I present only a short outline of data collection procedures here. A detailed description of field entry, participant observation and videotape recording procedures appears in Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro (1977) and Corsaro (in press a).

Data collection moved through a series of phases. The first involved the monitoring of activities in the school from a concealed observation area and was followed three weeks later by two months of participant observation. In the fourth month of the research, video equipment was introduced into the setting, and for the next five months I videotaped peer interaction at least twice a week and continued participant observation on other days. Sampling decisions were

theoretical (see Glaser & Strauss 1967) in that they were based on patterns isolated in field notes during participant observation. Overall, I collected 27 hours of videotaped data which contained 146 interactive episodes.

*Terms and procedures of analysis*

The data-analysis procedure employed in this research is inductive and a variant of the 'grounded theory method' of Glaser & Strauss (1967). In this procedure, data analysis moves through a series of stages from the generation of analytic categories (here, the basic terms of analysis) and their properties to the discovery of patterns among categories and properties (here, sequencing patterns regarding access and withdrawal) and the generation of hypotheses based on the patterns (here, grounded hypotheses regarding children's acquisition of access rituals).

The generation of analytic categories is the initial phase of analysis upon which both later data collection and analysis are based. Early in the research process, I formulated a definition of the 'interactive episode' as a basic unit of analysis. The definition was based upon field notes of interaction in the nursery school, which I collected while first observing from a concealed area in the school and later during participant observation in the school itself. In the nursery school, interactive episodes are defined as those sequences of behavior which begin with the *acknowledged presence* of two or more interactants in an ecological area and the overt attempt(s) to arrive at a shared meaning of ongoing or emerging activity. Episodes end with physical movement of interactants from the area which results in the *termination* of the *originally-initiated* activity.<sup>4</sup> This definition guided later data collection procedures (both participant observation and videotaping) as well as data organization and analysis.

The generation of definitions of episode-access strategy, episode-withdrawal strategy, and their corresponding responses occurred after I had moved into the videotaping phase of the research process.<sup>5</sup> The definitions were based on intensive analysis of access and withdrawal behavior recorded in field notes and initial

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[4] The interactive episode is quite similar to Mehan *et al.*'s notion of the 'event'. One difference is that in Mehan *et al.* the focus is on classroom lessons where the teacher initiates and has a clear notion of the purpose and even duration of the event beforehand. In the present study the focus is on peer interaction; episodes are initiated and maintained by the children and vary substantially in terms of content, purpose, and duration. See Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro (1977) for an extensive discussion of the implications of this definition for the video recording and analysis of peer interaction in the nursery school setting.

[5] I should repeat that the basic categories (terms) for analysis emerged *prior* to the discovery of properties and the later search for patterns among categories and properties. I did not first look for interesting patterns involving access or withdrawal and then work back to the specification of basic units. In fact, the research process described here led to the discovery of patterns and, eventually, of actual sequences of data which were theoretically relevant to children's acquisition of access rituals. Finally, I also isolated a strategy I have termed *temporary leave-taking* which I do not have space to explicate here, but which will be the basis of a forthcoming report.

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videotapes (10 hours of taping involving approximately 75 episodes). The definitions are:

*Episode-access strategy* – Any behavior (verbal or non-verbal) which is produced to gain entry (i.e. acknowledged presence plus attempts to arrive at shared meaning) into an ongoing episode.

*Episode-withdrawal strategy* – Any behavior (verbal or non-verbal) which is produced by an interactant to terminate his or her participation in an ongoing episode.

*Access response* – Any behavior (verbal or non-verbal) which overtly acknowledges the access strategy of another interactant.

*Withdrawal response* – Any behavior (verbal or non-verbal) which overtly acknowledges the withdrawal strategy of another interactant.

The generation of these definitions guided sampling decisions for videotaping as well as initial data analysis regarding children's acquisition of access rituals.

The second phase of analysis involved the isolation of properties of the access strategy, access response, withdrawal strategy, and withdrawal response categories by way of comparative analysis (cf. Glaser & Strauss 1967). I selected for analysis all the field notes involving access and/or withdrawal as well as 20 of the 146 videotaped episodes.<sup>6</sup> The analysis process involved taking each sequence (datum) involving access or withdrawal behavior from its original source (field notes or transcripts of videotaped episodes) and recording them verbatim on note cards. The cards were then sorted into groups (piles) based upon initial (intuitive) recognition of similarity. After the sorting process was complete, I composed analytic memos which specified what each datum in a group had in common with the others. This phase of analysis (memo writing) often led to some changes in original sorting in that some data were shifted and some groups combined. The memos were the basis of the definitions of the properties of the episode-access strategy, access response, episode-withdrawal strategy, and withdrawal response categories which appear in Figs 1 and 2.

The final stage of analysis involved a search for patterns among the categories and properties. In this phase, I coded and analyzed 82 videotaped interactive episodes.<sup>7</sup> In the analysis, I isolated patterns in the frequency distributions and

[6] Of the 146 episodes, 102 contained access and/or withdrawal data. From the 102, 20 were selected based on theoretical sampling. The 20 episodes were representative in terms of participants, type of activity, number of participants, ecological area of the school, and month of the school term. In the episodes I selected, I analyzed only peer access and withdrawal sequences (i.e. adult-child sequences were excluded from the analysis).

[7] These 82 were all the episodes which contained access or withdrawal except the 20 used in phase two to generate the coding scheme. Although I do not have space to

sequencing of the categories and properties and checked the consistency and strength of these patterns over time and across contexts, activities, and participants. I again composed memos which described the features of these patterns as well as their strength and consistency. This phase of analysis is presented in truncated form in the next two sections of this report. The memos were the basis of grounded hypotheses regarding children's use of access rituals in peer interaction.

#### CHILDREN'S ACCESS STRATEGIES

The following example is drawn from field notes collected during the third month of participant observation in the nursery school.

Two girls, Jenny (4.0) and Betty (3.9), are playing around a sandbox in the outside courtyard of the school. I am sitting on the ground near the sandbox watching. The girls are putting sand in pots, cupcake pans, bottles, and teapots. Occasionally one of the girls would bring me a pan of sand (cake) to eat.

Another girl, Debbie (4.1), approaches and stands near me, observing the other two girls. Neither J nor B acknowledges her presence. D does not speak to me nor to the other girls, and no one speaks to her.<sup>8</sup> After watching for some time (5 minutes or so), she circles the sandbox three times and stops again and stands next to me. After a few more minutes of watching, D moves to the sandbox and reaches for a teapot in the sand. J takes the pot away from D and mumbles 'No'. D backs away and again stands near me observing the activity of J and B. She then walks over next to B, who is filling the cupcake pan with sand. D watches B for just a few seconds, then says:

- (1) D-B: We're friends, right? We're friends, right, B?  
(B, not looking up at D and while continuing to place sand in the pan, says:)
- (2) B-D: Right.  
(D now moves alongside B and takes a pot and spoon and begins putting sand in the pot.)
- (3) D-B: I'm making coffee.

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describe specific analytic procedures employed in this phase of the research process, I should point out that the procedures are similar to recent work on the micro-sociolinguistic analysis of naturally occurring behavior by Cicourel (1976), Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz (1976), Erickson & Shultz (1977) and McDermott *et al.* (1978). The focus of this work is to identify *how* interactants signal and code contextual information to negotiate a shared understanding of what they are doing (an interpretive frame) which they can then use strategically to shape the outcome of interactive events (cf. Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz 1976).

[8] Throughout participant observation, I always followed the lead of the children in determining my degree of participation in peer activities. I tried purposely *not to act* like an adult, therefore, I rarely initiated activity (see Corsaro in press a).

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### STRATEGIES

*Non-verbal entry* – Entering into or near area where episode is underway without verbal marking.

*Producing variant of ongoing behavior* – Entering into area where episode is underway and (verbally and/or non-verbally) producing behavior similar to that underway.

*Disruptive entry* – Entering into area where episode is underway and (verbally and/or non-verbally) producing behavior which physically disrupts ongoing activity.

*Encirclement* – Physically circling area where episode is underway without verbal marking.

*Making claim on area or object* – Entering into area where episode is underway and verbally making claim on area or an object in the area.

*Request for access* – Entering into area where episode is underway and verbally requesting permission for access.

*Questioning participants* – Entering into area where episode is underway and questioning participants regarding ongoing activity.

*Reference to adult authority* – Entering into area where episode is underway and producing verbal reference to adult authority or rules regarding access to play areas.

*Offering of object* – Entering into area where episode is underway and (verbally and/or non-verbally) offering an object (gift) to one or more of the participants.

*Greeting* – Entering into area where episode is underway and verbally greeting one or more of the participants.

*Reference to affiliation* – Entering into area where episode is underway and producing verbal reference to affiliation (friendship) with one or more of the participants.

*Aid from non-participant* – Verbally requesting aid or help to gain access from non-participant(s) prior to or during entry into area where episode is underway.

*Accepting invitation* – Entering into area where episode is underway to accept an invitation to participate from one or more of the participants.

*Suggest other activity* – Entering into area where episode is underway and asking one or more participants to engage in other activity.

*Reference to individual characteristics* – Entering into area where episode is underway and producing verbal reference to individual characteristics of one or more participants.

### RESPONSES

*Positive response* – Verbal and/or non-verbal acknowledgement of access behavior and acceptance into activity with or without participation specified.

*Negative responses* – Verbal and/or non-verbal rebuke (refusal to access) with or without justification.

FIGURE 1. Access strategies and responses.

- (4) B-D: I'm making cupcakes.
- (5) B-J: We're mothers, right, J?
- (6) J-B: Right.

(This now triadic episode continued for 20 more minutes until the teachers announced 'clean up' time.)



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<p>STRATEGIES</p> <p><i>Verbal description or justification</i> – Verbally describing and/or justifying termination (without mutual 'farewell') prior to or during withdrawal from area where episode is underway.</p> <p><i>Ritual farewell</i> – Verbally producing ritual farewell as a marker of termination prior to or during withdrawal from area where episode is underway.</p> <p><i>Unmarked with later return</i> – Unmarked withdrawal from area where episode is underway which is followed by later return to ongoing activity.</p> <p><i>Unmarked without return</i> – Unmarked withdrawal from area where episode is underway with no subsequent return.</p> <p>RESPONSES</p> <p><i>Discourage withdrawal</i> – Verbal and/or non-verbal attempt by one participant in an ongoing episode to discourage or prevent the withdrawal of another.</p> <p><i>Acknowledge withdrawal</i> – Verbal acknowledgement of withdrawal behavior of one participant by other participant(s) in an ongoing episode.</p>
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FIGURE 2. Withdrawal strategies and responses.

In this example, one of the girls, Debbie, wanted to enter an ongoing episode involving Jenny and Betty. All three of these children had frequently played together (both in dyads and triads) before the occurrence of this episode. Debbie's first access strategy was fairly simple. She merely *physically placed herself in the ecological area* in which the episode was occurring. She received no response and, therefore, expanded her attempt at access via a device I call *encirclement* (i.e. she physically circled the area). When this strategy also received no response, she entered directly into the area and *produced behavior similar* to that of the two girls playing there (i.e. she picked up a teapot). However, J responded negatively by taking the teapot away from D, who then moved to the fringe area again for a short time. D then entered the area and made a verbal *reference to affiliation* (friendship) to B. B responded positively to this strategy without explicitly inviting D to play. D, repeating an earlier strategy, *produced similar behavior*, this time verbally describing what she is doing ('making coffee'). B responded with a verbal description of her activity ('making cupcakes'), going on to define the situation further ('we're mothers') and eliciting the acknowledgement of her playmate, J, by way of a tag question.

There was a wide variety of access sequences in the peer interactive data. Many, unlike this example, did not always result in successful entry into an ongoing episode. However, this particular example is, in one respect, representative of the overwhelming majority of cases in the data. Note that in this example there is no formal negotiation regarding entry (e.g. Debbie does *not* say 'Hi', 'What ya doing?' or 'Can I play?'), as we might expect to find in adult-adult interaction. The child attempting access relied instead on more indirect and often non-verbal

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strategies (e.g. non-verbal entry, circling, producing a variant of the ongoing behavior, and, finally, making a reference to friendship).

As we see in Table 1, these were, except for the verbal reference to friendship, among the most frequently employed access strategies. In fact, these three strategies (non-verbal entry, encirclement, and producing a variant of the ongoing behavior), along with *disruptive entry* and *making a claim on the area*, account for nearly 80% of the children's access attempts.

Of the five strategies referred to above, four (all but *claim on an area*) basically involve the children's production and monitoring of non-verbal cues. *Disruptive entry* is almost always physically disruptive, usually including the taking of objects from participants or, in some cases, pushing and other physical conflict. It is also interesting that only one of these strategies, *producing a variant of ongoing behavior*, is even moderately likely of receiving a positive response (63.1% of the time). I should point out here, however, that children who fail to receive a positive response to their initial access attempt may still eventually gain access. For purposes of this report, *successful access* is defined as eventual acceptance into an ongoing episode, and may be preceded by an unlimited number of negative responses or non-responses. *Unsuccessful access* is defined as termination of an access attempt by leaving an area without further attempts at access during the course of the episode, or as failure to gain acceptance prior to the end of the episode. As we shall see shortly, however, the sequencing of access strategies is more important than initial response.

What is most interesting about the data in Table 1 is the infrequent use of more direct, verbal access strategies. The children *did* produce such strategies (e.g. *request for access*, *questioning participants*, and *greeting*), which could be taken as a demonstration of competence. But why are these adult-like (at least based on my adult intuition) strategies employed so infrequently? One possibility is the nature of peer interaction in the nursery school. When we look at the percentage of response type for the total access data (Table 1), we see that the probability of being ignored or receiving a negative response is much higher than that of receiving a positive response (65.7% to 34.3%). Having participated in peer interaction in this setting for a year, I am not surprised by this finding. Though I did not expect this pattern, I soon learned that access into peer activities was a fragile process, and that one must be prepared for overt rejection. What is surprising, however, is that the children do not rely on access strategies which are more likely to lead to positive responses (e.g. the three adult-like strategies discussed previously among others: see Table 1). Since the data cover a nine-month period as well as two age groups, this finding appears to argue against an explanation of acquisition based solely on function. The children do not seem to learn to rely on strategies that work. Or do they? Should we be so quick to put aside the lack of competence argument just because the children can and do produce adult-like access strategies?

TABLE I. *Frequency distribution of access strategies and responses*

Strategy	Response			Response			
	N	%	%	Positive	Negative	No response	
	N	%	%	N	%	N	
Non-verbal entry	203	(34.3)	(15.8)	32	(32.5)	105	(51.7)
Producing variant of ongoing behavior	148	(25.0)	(64.2)	95	(64.2)	26	(17.6)
Disruptive entry	43	(7.3)	(11.6)	5	(81.4)	3	(7.0)
Encirclement	43	(7.3)	(4.6)	2	(14.0)	35	(81.4)
Claim on area or object	29	(4.9)	(27.6)	8	(55.2)	5	(17.2)
Request for access	23	(3.9)	(47.8)	11	(30.4)	5	(21.8)
Questioning participants	25	(4.2)	(52.0)	13	(12.0)	9	(36.0)
Reference to adult authority	15	(2.5)	(13.3)	2	(66.7)	3	(20.0)
Offering of object	12	(2.0)	(50.0)	6	(41.7)	1	(8.3)
Greeting	12	(2.0)	(58.3)	7	(25.0)	2	(16.7)
Reference to affiliation	8	(1.4)	(30.0)	4	(37.5)	1	(12.5)
Aid from non-participant(s)	6	(1.0)	(0.0)	0	(33.3)	4	(66.7)
Accepting invitation	13	(2.2)	(76.9)	10	(0.0)	3	(23.1)
Suggest other activity	10	(1.7)	(60.0)	6	(10.0)	3	(30.0)
Reference to individual characteristics	2	(0.3)	(100.0)	2	(0.0)	0	(0.0)
TOTAL	592	(100.0)	(34.3)	203	(31.1)	205	(34.6)

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*Explanations*

To answer these questions we must: (1) examine the frequency distribution data by age group and over time to check on shifts which might indicate developing competence or learning; (2) go beyond static production-response data and examine access-sequencing patterns; and (3) interpret sequencing patterns regarding both the nature of peer interaction in the nursery school and recent theory on the development of communicative competence.

Table 2 contains data on the frequency distribution of access strategies by age group. Overall, the data are similar for the two groups. The only major difference is that the older children are somewhat less likely to disrupt ongoing activity in their attempts at access. On the other hand, the older children are more likely

TABLE 2. *Frequency distribution of access strategies by age group*

Strategy	Morning*		Afternoon†	
	N	%	N	%
Non-verbal entry	113	(34.1)	90	(34.6)
Producing variant of ongoing behavior	92	(27.8)	56	(21.5)
Disruptive entry	28	(8.4)	15	(5.8)
Encirclement	27	(8.1)	16	(6.2)
Claim on area or object	7	(2.1)	22	(8.5)
Request for access	14	(4.3)	9	(3.5)
Questioning participants	10	(3.0)	15	(5.8)
Reference to adult authority	11	(3.3)	4	(1.5)
Offering of object	9	(2.7)	3	(1.1)
Greeting	6	(1.8)	6	(2.3)
Reference of affiliation	3	(0.9)	5	(1.9)
Aid from non-participant(s)	1	(0.3)	5	(1.9)
Accepting invitation	8	(2.4)	5	(1.9)
Suggest other activity	2	(0.6)	8	(3.1)
Reference to individual characteristics	1	(0.3)	1	(0.4)
TOTAL	332	(100.0)	260	(100.0)

  

	Response by age group					
	Positive		Negative		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Overall						
Morning (N = 332)	102	(30.7)	100	(30.1)	130	(39.2)
Afternoon (N = 160)	92	(35.4)	89	(34.2)	79	(30.4)
Six most frequent strategies						
Morning (N = 285)	76	(26.7)	88	(30.9)	121	(42.4)
Afternoon (N = 241)	72	(33.7)	75	(35.0)	67	(31.3)

\* Children ranged in age from 2.10 to 3.10 years.

† Children ranged in age from 3.10 to 4.10 years.

to make a verbal *claim on an area or object* in the area than the younger children. These differences suggest that the older children are more likely to negotiate claims on areas and objects than are the younger children, who tend to move into an area and physically take an object which leads to disruption. It may be that the older children, now in their second year at the school, are moving to more efficient (and adult-like) access strategies.

Pursuing this point, we can compare the two groups regarding their use of the three adult-like strategies (*request for access, questioning participants, and greeting*). These strategies account for 11.6% of the older children's access behavior, compared to 9.0% for the younger children. The difference indicates some learning, but both the difference and the percentages themselves are small. Overall, the data suggest a heavy reliance on non-verbal and indirect access behavior, even when we take age into account.

Again the question arises: is this reliance due to the success of the most frequently used strategies for gaining access? Again the answer seems to be no. In the lower section of Table 2, we see that, overall, the older children are more likely to receive positive access responses than are the younger children, but they are also more likely to receive negative responses. We can also see that there is still no clear relationship between frequency of use and positive response. The most frequently employed access strategies are not the most effective, regardless of the age of the participants.

In addition to the data in Table 2, I also examined the frequency distribution of access strategies by age group over a four-month period (February through May). There was no consistent pattern in these data for either age group. In particular, there was *no support* for learning (i.e. movement toward a set of highly successful strategies) over time. I should point out, however, that these data were limited. To check for learning over time, it was necessary to compare relatively small sets of occurrences in each time period (often less than 100 cases) and to work with a small sample of episodes (as few as 12 in some time periods). With such small samples, the individual characteristics of participants or the nature of the activities could be more important when comparing the frequency of access strategies and responses than learning over time. Finally, since the videotaping did not begin until the fifth month of the school year, a great deal of learning regarding access behavior may already have occurred.

Overall, the frequency data by age group and over time suggest only specific learning regarding formal negotiation of claims on areas and objects in peer interaction. We still know relatively little about *why* the children rely on particular strategies. We need to expand our criterion of 'effectiveness' beyond the initial access response and examine access-sequencing patterns in the data.

Table 3 contains sequencing data for the five most frequently employed access strategies and all other strategies combined. In Table 3 the data are organized into rounds (access strategy-response exchanges) for all access

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sequences. A one-round sequence is defined as an access attempt which involves the use of only one strategy and is not pursued after the initial response. In one-round sequences the child (interactant) is either successful (gains entry) or is unsuccessful (decides not to pursue access after his or her initial attempt is rebuked or ignored). Each column in Table 3 contains the percentage breakdown of rounds by strategy (i.e. 41.4% of all one-round sequences contained only *non-verbal entry*; 30.9% of all two-round sequences contained *non-verbal entry*, with 45 instances occurring in the initial position and 7 in the second position of the sequence; etc.). As we can see, 64.5% of the sequences were one round in length, with 41.4% of the one-round sequences containing only *non-verbal entry*. If an attempt moved to a second round, the children tended to employ either *non-verbal entry* (30.9%) or *produce a variant of the ongoing behavior* (29.8%) more often than any other strategy. The children were most likely to *produce a variant of the ongoing behavior* (27.4%) if access moved to a third round. If access went beyond three rounds, the children relied mainly on *non-verbal entry*, *producing a variant*, or one of the more infrequently employed strategies (i.e. 'other' in Table 3).

Table 4 contains data on both sequencing and probability of successful access. Successful access is defined as eventual acceptance into an ongoing episode, and may be preceded by an unlimited number of negative responses or non-responses. Unsuccessful access is defined as the termination of an access attempt by leaving an area without further attempts at access during the course of the episode, or as failure to gain acceptance prior to the end of an episode. In Table 4 the five most frequently employed strategies as well as all the other strategies combined are grouped in terms of frequency by round (e.g. 51.6% of the 194 occurrences of *non-verbal entry* appeared in one-round sequences, 26.8% in two-round sequences, etc.). These data are interesting in several respects. First, *non-verbal entry* is primarily confined to one- and two-round sequences, which implies a move to one of the remaining strategies in case access moves to multiple rounds. Second, the probability of successful access increases if the sequence moves beyond one round for all strategies except *disruptive entry*, where successful access is always unlikely, and *producing a variant of ongoing behavior*, where there is a rather high probability of successful access across all rounds. Finally, the sequencing data indicate that for most of the strategies the probability of successful access is highest in sequences of three or more rounds.

Given this information about sequencing of access strategies and its relationship to the probability of successful access, we can return to an earlier question about the data. Why do children rely on indirect and often non-verbal access strategies which have less probability of initial positive outcomes? As the data indicate, although these strategies may not lead to immediate access, they often *do work* if the sequence continues beyond the initial exchange. In sum, the children often rely on a sequence of strategies which: (1) best meets the social-

TABLE 3. Sequencing of access strategies

Strategy	Position in sequence (rounds)*											
	N	%	N	% <sup>2</sup>	Pos.	N	% <sup>3</sup>	Pos.	N	% <sup>4</sup>	Pos.	
Non-verbal entry†	100	(41.4)	52	(30.9)	1 45 2 7	26	(25.5)	1 18 2 4 3 4	16	(26.7)	1 10 2 4 3 2 4 0	
Producing variant	52	(21.5)	50	(29.8)	1 9 2 41	28	(27.4)	1 5 2 10 3 13	16	(26.7)	1 2 2 4 3 5 4 5	
Disruptive entry	23	(9.5)	6	(3.6)	1 3 2 3	7	(6.9)	1 4 2 2 3 1	6	(10.0)	1 0 2 2 3 1 4 3	
Encirclement	8	(3.3)	14	(8.3)	1 5 2 9	13	(12.7)	1 3 2 7 3 3	4	(6.6)	1 1 2 2 3 0 4 1	
Making claim	10	(4.1)	11	(6.5)	1 2 2 9	6	(5.9)	1 0 2 3 3 3	2	(3.3)	1 0 2 1 3 0 4 1	
Other	49	(20.2)	33	(19.6)	1 18 2 15	22	(21.6)	1 4 2 8 3 10	16	(26.7)	1 3 2 2 3 6 4 5	
TOTAL	242	(100.0)	168	(100.0)		102	(100.0)		60	(100.0)		
Rounds	242	(64.5)	84	(22.4)		34	(9.1)		15	(4.0)	375 100%	
Strategies	242	(42.3)	168	(29.4)		102	(17.8)		60	(10.5)	572 100%	

\* There was one 5-round sequence, one 7-round sequence, and one 8-round sequence, which accounted for the remaining 20 strategies.  
 † In reading Table 3, 41.4% of all one-round sequences contained only *non-verbal entry*; 30.9% of all two-round sequences contained *non-verbal entry*, with 45 instances occurring in the initial position and 7 in the second position; 25.5% of all three-round sequences contained *non-verbal entry*, with 18 cases in the first position, 4 in the second position, and 4 in the third position, etc.

TABLE 4. *Success of strategy across sequence rounds*

Strategy	Position in sequence (rounds)*									
	1		2		3		4		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-verbal entry†	100	(51.6)	52	(26.8)	26	(13.4)	16	(8.2)	194	(100)
	‡%S = 28.0		‡%S = 51.9		‡%S = 42.3		‡%S = 56.2		‡%S = 38.7	
Producing variant	52	(35.6)	50	(34.2)	28	(19.2)	16	(11.0)	146	(100)
	‡%S = 75.0		‡%S = 76.0		‡%S = 75.0		‡%S = 75.0		‡%S = 75.3	
Disruptive entry	23	(54.8)	6	(14.3)	7	(16.7)	6	(14.3)	42	(100)
	‡%S = 21.7		‡%S = 0.0		‡%S = 28.6		‡%S = 33.3		‡%S = 21.4	
Encirclement	8	(20.5)	14	(35.9)	13	(33.3)	4	(10.3)	39	(100)
	‡%S = 12.5		‡%S = 35.8		‡%S = 46.2		‡%S = 50.0		‡%S = 35.9	
Making claim	10	(34.5)	11	(37.9)	6	(20.7)	2	(6.9)	29	(100)
	‡%S = 40.0		‡%S = 36.4		‡%S = 50.0		‡%S = 100		‡%S = 44.8	
Other	49	(40.8)	33	(27.5)	22	(18.4)	16	(13.3)	120	(100)
	‡%S = 65.3		‡%S = 72.7		‡%S = 59.1		‡%S = 75.0		‡%S = 67.5	

\* There was one 5-round sequence, one 7-round sequence, and one 8-round sequence, which accounted for the remaining 20 strategies.

† In reading the table, 51.6% of the 194 occurrences of *non-verbal entry* appeared in one-round sequences, and, of the 100 cases, 28% led to successful entry; 26.8% of the 194 occurrences of *non-verbal entry* appeared in two-round sequences, and, of the 52 cases, 51.9% led to successful entry; 13.4% of the 194 occurrences of *non-verbal entry* appeared in three-round sequences, and, of the 26 cases, 42.3% led to successful entry; etc.

‡ %S = percentage of cases which resulted in successful entry.



ecological demands of the nursery school setting; and (2) reflects the children's communicative abilities at this stage of development.

*Social-ecological demands*

A brief discussion of the nature of peer interaction in the nursery school is in order. The children spend the majority of their time in peer interaction while at the nursery school. Peer activities are, for the most part, self-selected; each child must either initiate an activity and recruit others or enter into ongoing interactive episodes. A child may often be alone in the school (for a variety of reasons) with the desire to gain access into an ongoing event.

In many respects, the nursery school is like what Goffman (1961) has termed a *multi-focused party* (in layman's terms, a cocktail party), at which there are generally several clusters of participants (who usually know one another) dispersed in various areas of the setting. The participants, somewhat like the young child in the nursery school, often feel there is a need to circulate from one group to another. When party members find themselves alone, for whatever reason, they, very much like the children in the nursery school, have a strong desire to gain access into an ongoing conversation or activity.

There are, to my knowledge, no careful studies of access rituals at multi-focused parties and, therefore, no adult model for access in such settings which could be used for comparative purposes. However, the value of an adult model, even if one existed, would be limited. Although the nursery school shares features with the multi-focused party, there are important differences. Interaction in the nursery school is fragile, and ongoing activities can break down with even minimal disruption. It may be that children *protect* interaction in ongoing episodes by discouraging most initial attempts at access by other children. The low percentage of positive responses in one-round access attempts would support such a possibility. Also, I repeatedly observed groups of children deciding 'not to let anyone else in' their activity while in early stages of deciding exactly what it was they were doing. Note the following exchanges of two boys as they arrive in a vacant area of play (the outside sandbox):

A and B move to sandbox and each picks up hoses in sand. The teacher had just turned on the hoses so that water was flowing into the sandbox from each of several individual hoses.

A: Hey, the hoses are on!

B: Yeah, let's make a lake.

A: And nobody else can come in, right?

B: Right.

In the nursery school, unlike the adult multi-focused party, participants in ongoing events are often on guard against intrusion while those who wish to enter often expect to be rebuked or discouraged. Even the most socially active

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and popular children in the school often received, and came to expect, initial negative responses to access attempts. A careful review of all interactive episodes revealed that there were no children who were consistently welcomed into ongoing activities.

Patterns in the employment of access strategies and the probability of successful entry reflect these basic facts about the nursery school setting. The high percentage of single-round sequences is a case in point. We saw earlier (see Table 3) that 41.4% of these sequences began with *non-verbal entry*. This strategy when used in one-round sequences led to successful entry only 28% of the time (Table 4), again an indication that the children anticipate the approach of others into their play areas and are prepared to discourage entry. Although *non-verbal entry* does not often lead to successful entry in one-round sequences, it is, nevertheless, a useful strategy. A child who, while employing this strategy, receives no overt response, often monitors the ongoing activity. Careful monitoring leads to the acquisition of information which can be useful for the production of other access strategies in later rounds. The most common multi-round sequence was the following:

<i>Round</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Response</i>
1	Non-verbal entry	No response
2	Producing a variant of the ongoing behavior	Positive (acceptance)

This strategy (*non-verbal entry* followed by *producing a variant*) led to successful entry in nearly 90% of the cases in which it was employed.<sup>9</sup>

[9] Below I have listed the two most frequent access strategies and the proportion that led to successful entry for two-round sequences as well as the most frequent strategy and proportion successful for three- and four-round sequences.

Most frequent sequences	N	Percentage of sequences	Percentage successful
<i>Two-Round</i> (N = 84)			
1. Non-verbal entry,			
2. Producing a variant	26	30.9	88.5
1. Non-verbal entry,			
2. Encirclement	8	9.5	12.5
<i>Three-Round</i> (N = 34)			
1. Non-verbal entry,			
2. Non-verbal entry,			
3. Producing variant	4	8.5	75.0
<i>Four-Round</i> (N = 15)			
1. Non-verbal entry,			
2. Encirclement,			
3. Non-verbal entry,			
4. Producing variant	2	13.3	100.0

Given the nature of peer interaction in the nursery school, the *non-verbal entry* plus *producing a variant of ongoing behavior* sequence, as well as other indirect sequences (e.g. *encirclement* plus *producing a variant*, and *non-verbal entry* plus *reference to affiliation* or *offering a gift*), may be favored by children over more direct strategies like *greetings*, *questioning of participants*, or *requests for access*. As we know from the work of Schegloff (1972) on conversational openings, the structure of these more direct access strategies demands a response from the hearer. Since the children come to expect that initial responses are often negative, they may develop more indirect (and multiple sequence) strategies like those described above.

#### *Communicative abilities*

We still cannot overlook the possibility that the children's use of access strategies in these data may be a reflection of their developing communicative competence. What is most interesting about the data in this regard is the children's heavy reliance on non-verbal strategies and the successive stringing of non-verbal and verbal strategies in access sequences. In a recent paper on context in children's speech, Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz (1976) argue that adults foreground attention to the verbal semantic-syntactic channel of information, while relying on a background of non-verbal information in other modalities. In this view of what Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz refer to as 'contextualization', adults communicate in line with 'performance rules which require them to make a statement in several modalities at once, by movement, kinesic gesture, semantic routine, intonation patterns - all the full battery of communicative signaling' (1976: 21). Children's communication, on the other hand, is marked by a lack of modality redundancy, and as Cook-Gumperz (1975) has observed, the division between foreground and background features is more fluid for children than for adults. In this sense, children's communication (including strategies for access in peer interaction) is both more literal and more indirect than adult communication.

The patterns in the access data seem to be in line with this interpretation of child speech. The children produced a broad range of strategies involving several modalities but relied more on non-verbal and indirect access strategies. Also, the children often produced strings of successive strategies which in many instances involved movement across modalities. We know, of course, that the features of this particular setting have some bearing on these patterns. However, the range of children's access strategies and the sequencing techniques can be seen as precursors to adult access rituals. In time, through additional interactive experiences in a variety of settings, the children may combine (or collapse) many of the access strategies which appear in these data into a smaller set of access rituals or routines via modality redundancy. Additional data on children's use of access rituals in other settings is necessary to properly evaluate this hypothesis.

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CHILDREN'S WITHDRAWAL STRATEGIES

The following example was drawn from a videotaped interactive episode collected during the eighth month of the study:

Three girls, Barbara (3.8), Susan (3.9), and Linda (4.6), have been playing for several minutes when they decided to pretend a wooden box in the outside yard was a TV. After a few minutes of watching TV and a great deal of channel-changing the following sequence occurred.

B-SL: I want to - I want Charlie Brown.

S-B: OK -

L-BS: You're gettin' it [the TV] too close.

S-BL: OK, we'll turn on Charlie Brown.

(Pretends to change channel)

(L now gets up and stands on top of TV)

(B and S also stand up)

B-S: I'm tired. Oh -

(B suddenly runs off across outside yard to swings. Another child, Rita, is in one of the swings and the other swing is vacant. B runs to vacant swing. B made no verbal marking of her withdrawal and S and L show no awareness of her absence.)

S-L: Hey, let's jump on the bug, L. (S points to a bug in front of the TV.)  
This now dyadic episode continued for approximately 10 more minutes until teachers announced 'clean up time'.

The withdrawal strategy in this example was a simple one. The child, without comment or remark, merely left the ecological area where the interactive episode was underway.<sup>10</sup> What is also interesting is the lack of response to her leaving from those interactants who remained in the area. As we can see in Table 5, withdrawal without a marker or later return accounts for over 60% of the data for both age groups, and this withdrawal strategy is rarely acknowledged (14.1% of the time). There was a total of 187 withdrawal sequences in the data, and, of these 187, 127, or 67.9% were *withdrawal with no marker or later return*, which received no overt response or acknowledgment.

The withdrawal data are especially interesting in light of the previous discussion of children's developing communicative competence. The children seem to see no need to mark the obvious fact of leaving the scene as cessation of activity. To verbally mark withdrawal with a ritual farewell or a justification, as adults do,

[10] The phrase 'I'm tired' could possibly be interpreted as a warrant for withdrawal. However, earlier in this interactive episode, Barbara had used the same phrase and then pretended to go to sleep but was awakened by the TV play. Also, the 'I'm tired' was said while looking at Susan. There was then a pause, and Barbara turned and saw Rita at the swings; then she said 'Oh' and ran off.

TABLE 5. *Frequency distribution of episode withdrawal strategies and responses*

Strategy	Morning* N	%	Afternoon† N	%	TOTAL N	%	Discourage N	%	Positive acknowledge N	%	No response N	%	T°
Description and/or justification	17	(13.6)	17	(27.4)	34	(18.2)	5	(14.7)	16	(47.1)	13	(38.2)	100
Farewell marker	4	(3.2)	0	(0.0)	4	(2.1)	0	(0.0)	3	(75.0)	1	(25.0)	100
Unmarked withdrawal, with later return	16	(12.8)	6	(9.7)	22	(11.8)	3	(13.6)	3	(13.6)	16	(72.8)	100
Unmarked withdrawal, no later return	88	(10.4)	39	(62.9)	127	(67.9)	5	(3.9)	13	(10.2)	109	(85.9)	100
TOTAL	125	(100.0)	62	(100.0)	187	(100.0)	13	(7.0)	35	(18.7)	139	(74.3)	100

\* Children in morning group ranged in age from 2.10 to 3.10 years.

† Children in afternoon group ranged in age from 3.10 to 4.10 years.

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is again a form of modality redundancy.<sup>11</sup> The adult redundancy in this case does, however, carry important ritual meaning. The verbal marking preceding or accompanying the physical movement from interpersonal space goes beyond the literal meaning, 'I am about to be no longer a part of the activity'; it is also a way of communicating one's feelings about the participants in, and activities of, the encounter.

### CONCLUSIONS

As the present study is limited to peer interaction in a nursery school, additional research on children's use of access rituals at different ages is needed. Still, the findings are in line with recent research that demonstrates that 'kids are competent' and that young children *actively develop and use* communicative skills to produce socially-ordered events in everyday interaction with adults and peers.

It is noteworthy that the children are both more concerned with and have more complex strategies for access than for withdrawal. In this regard peer interaction would seem to be important for children's acquisition of access rituals or routines and their discovery of the importance and utility of modality redundancy in the communicative process. When it comes to withdrawal or termination routines, however, Gleason & Weintraub (1976) may be correct in their stressing of the importance of formal training by adults. Gleason and Weintraub may also be correct (for termination routines) when they argue that performance comes first by way of formal training and 'only later, long after he has learned to say *bye-bye* or *thank-you* - might the child come to know what, if anything, it all means' (1976: 134). The data in this report suggest that, when that time comes, the child might also come to see the relationship between the social rules and cognitive skills acquired earlier in learning access strategies and those necessary for the processing and production of termination routines.

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[11] I should point out that I am not claiming universality here. I am referring to middle-class children and adults in the United States. Hymes, as cited in Youssouf *et al.* (1976), explicitly challenges any claims of universality and points to data on North American Indians where farewells are not explicitly marked.

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