A Comparison of Aspects of Social Skills Development to Build Friendships as Portrayed in Thai and American Award Winning Children's Books
การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบพัฒนาการทางสังคม เพื่อการสร้างมิตรภาพที่ปรากฏในหนังสือเด็กของไทยและของอเมริกันที่ได้รับรางวัล

Yaowaluk Suwannakhae[1] and Lin Moore[2]

Abstract

This cross cultural study evaluated and compared the similarities and differences of children's friendship roles as portrayed in books for preschoolers. The criterion for selecting materials used in this study was threefold. Firstly, the 120 books were children's literature award winners published in the United States or Thailand from 1996-2016. The awards considered for this study included the Caldecott, Coretta Scott King, the Notable Children's Book Awards (US.), the Wankeaw, Nanmee, Nai-In Book Awards (Thai), the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) Award, and other highly recommended books for preschool children. Secondly, the books were developmentally and culturally appropriate when adults were interactively reading with preschool and kindergarten children (ages 3-6). Lastly, content of the books portrayed children's friendship roles, and/or animal characteristics demonstrating friendships. To gather data, *the Children's Book Evaluation Form (updated August, 2016)* was used to evaluate the content of each book in these areas: language, genre, setting, plot, theme, writing style, illustrations, behaviors, and feelings as depicted. The form also recorded bibliographical details, book details, types of friendships, story elements, and recommendations. The children's literature evaluations were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 22.0 (SPSS). Findings revealed that certain positive behaviors and pro-social skills were necessary to build and maintain friendships, for example, helping, sharing, spending time together, face to face communication , and the acceptance of others, etc. In the development of friendships, the results indicated that certain psychological states, like happiness, satisfaction, empathy, sympathy, closeness, and affection were strengthened.

Keywords: Social Skills Development, Friendship, Award Winning Books.

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาข้ามวัฒนธรรมเรื่องนี้เป็นการประเมินเปรียบเทียบความเหมือนและความแตกต่างของการพัฒนาทักษะทางสังคม เรื่องการสร้างมิตรภาพที่ปรากฏอยู่ในหนังสือสำหรับเด็กก่อนวัยเรียน เกณฑ์การคัดเลือกหนังสือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคือหนังสือที่ได้รับการตีพิมพ์ในประเทศไทยและสหรัฐอเมริกา ซึ่งได้รับรางวัลในช่วง พ.ศ. 2539-2559 เช่น รางวัลคัลดีคอต (Caldecott) รางวัลคอเร็ตตา สก็อต คิง (Coretta Scott King) รางวัลหนังสือสำหรับเด็กดีเด่น (The Notable Children's Book Awards) รางวัลแว่นแก้ว รางวัลนานมีบุ๊คส์ รางวัลนายอินทร์อะวอร์ด รางวัลหนังสือดีเด่น โดยสำนักงานคณะกรรมการการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน รวมทั้งหนังสือดีที่เด็กปฐมวัยควรอ่าน เพราะเป็นหนังสือที่มีความเหมาะสมกับพัฒนาการและวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งผู้ใหญ่สามารถใช้อ่านให้แก่เด็กก่อนวัยเรียนและเด็กอนุบาลในช่วงอายุ 3-6 ขวบ แบบประเมินวรรณกรรมเด็กที่ได้รับการ

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[1] Asst. Prof. Dr., Library and Information Sciences and Communication Arts Program. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University, 90000

[2] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Early Childhood Development & Education, Texas Woman's University, USA, 76204

ปรับปรุงในเดือนสิงหาคม พ.ศ. 2559 นำมาใช้เพื่อการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล โดยการประเมินหนังสือในด้านภาษา ประเภท โครงเรื่อง เนื้อหาหลัก วิธีการเขียน ภาพประกอบ พฤติกรรม ความรู้สึกที่แสดงออกของตัวละคร ทั้งในทางบวกและทางลบนอกจากนี้ยังมี รายละเอียดอื่น ๆ ของหนังสือ เช่น บรรณานุกรม รูปแบบของมิตรภาพ องค์ประกอบของเรื่อง และคำแนะนำต่าง ๆ เป็นต้น ผลการประเมินได้ถูกกำหนดรหัสและวิเคราะห์ ด้วยชุดโปรแกรมสถิติเพื่อสังคมศาสตร์ เวอร์ชั่น 22.0 ผลการวิจัยพบว่า พฤติกรรมทางบวกและทักษะทางสังคมที่จำเป็นต้องสร้างขึ้นนับตั้งแต่วัยเด็ก เพื่อการรักษามิตรภาพ เช่น การช่วยเหลือ การ แบ่งปัน การใช้เวลาร่วมกัน การสื่อสารแบบพบหน้าและการยอมรับผู้อื่น นอกจากนี้สภาวะทางจิตใจที่สัมพันธ์กับการพัฒนา มิตรภาพ เช่น ความสุข ความพึงพอใจ ความเห็นอกเห็นใจ ความสนิทสนมและความรักที่มีต่อกัน

คำสำคัญ: การพัฒนาทักษะทางสังคม มิตรภาพ หนังสือที่ได้รับรางวัล

Introduction

Friendship by definition is a dyadic relationship. Young children's friendship skills are essential for creating a place in the world that surrounds them. The abilities needed to make and maintain friendships are crucial to a child's development by constructing the framework for positive social and psychological health from childhood into adulthood. Vital characteristics do not emerge naturally; specific social skills require training and encouragement. Young children develop in four important learning and educational areas. They include knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings from interacting with literature [1]. Children literature can have a remarkable and far reaching power in a young child's life. One of literature's most subtle contributions is its ability to facilitate transitions and build bridges in the lives of young children [2]. Literally, children's literature is the body of written works and accompanying illustrations created to entertain and instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works including, picture books, easy to read stories, fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials [3]. The contents of children's books are about the experiences of childhood, both good and bad. For example, you could read about enjoying a birthday party, losing that first tooth, anticipating adulthood, camping out and telling ghost stories, getting a new pet, and enduring siblings, etc. [4]. Children's literature can provide education and social settings that communicate society's goals, fears, expectations, and demands, thus making children aware of society's values by demonstrating appropriate patterns of behavior and traditional beliefs [5].

Young children learn to work cooperatively, compassionately, and empathetically in the early years. The playmate relationship is vitally important in the preschool years [6]. The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development [7] describes that one of the main developmental tasks of the preschool period is to learn how to make and keep friends, because these friendships can help children avoid having social, psychological, and academic problems in the upcoming years. Friendships develop as a child develops; children around age 3 start to demonstrate the ability to relate to peers in groups. They learn how to make a friend in order to have friends, how to put themselves in another person's place, and they see how various kinds of behavior impact their budding friendships [8]. Here are three common perspectives for defining friendships. The psychologists define friendships as a dyadic relationship; it is a horizontal relationship built on mutuality, reciprocity, mutual support, and the give and take. The sociologists expect friendships to create social lives for children based on the frequency of interactions and their participation in common activities. Lastly, to anthropologists, the term friendship refers to relationships that materialize in a particular social and cultural context, developing the appropriate behavior needed to be friends [9]. In the past, Furman & Bierman [10] discussed five common situational requirements of the friendship building environment; shared activities, proximity, emotional development, support, and affection. And finally, Sullivan [11] described that friendships are based on closeness,

self-disclosure, reciprocity, similarity, and collaborations that require sensitivity toward others. Young children can learn a lot from relationships with other children of the same age in the early years of their lives. They will develop communication skills, emotion controlling skills, conflict solution skills, and cooperation skills [12]. Children today live in a world fraught with regular reminders of social violence, wars, economic uncertainties, and global tension [13]. Children need to be aware of global and cultural differences and how acceptance and flexibility are needed when responding to this diversity [14]. Learning to display kindness and compassion for others is a crucial part of the ongoing developmental process so important to a young child's evolving pro-social competence [15]. Education's goal is not only cognitive development, but also to produce young children of caring, compassionate, and loving characteristics who demonstrate respect for others. All human beings can be helped to lead lives of deep concern for others, as well as for the natural world and its creatures [16].

Several previous research studies on interactive reading times have examined the use of storybooks, but the subject matter of the books being used has generally been ignored [17]. Our study aims to support the idea that interactive reading helps children develop pro-social behaviors and empathetic reactions when it is explained why some behaviors are so important, and how someone's actions can help or harm others. Interactively reading stories that illustrate certain characteristics can help to provide insight into a wide range of behaviors, as well as demonstrate the positive outcomes of constructive social interactions [18]. Also, this study was conducted with the assumption that friendships are vitally important to children's fundamental development and their ability to adjust to future surroundings [19]. Suitable behavior, (the capacity to express feelings and to treat others appropriately), needs to be nourished in the child, only then will they be suitably equipped to establish useful and lasting friendships. This cross cultural study focused on young children's social skills development by evaluating children's friendship roles as portrayed in selective Thai and American Award winning children's books. We also wanted to evaluate the various aspects of social skills development necessary to build healthy friendships. The study's objectives were to obtain answers to the following research questions: 1) What are children's friendship roles as portrayed in Thai and American Award winning children's books, 2) Are there differences in how children's behaviors are depicted in relation to friendship building between Thai and American children's books?, and 3) Is there a difference in the aspects of positive/negative psychological states as seen in the contents of Thai and American Award winning children's book s? Our expectation is that out of the research findings we will discover information that will be beneficial to educational policy makers, classroom teachers, school librarians and parents when building useful strategies for selecting books to help children (ages 3-6) develop lasting friendships. Moreover, authors and publishers can use the research findings as a guideline for the production of appropriate children's literature to promote young children's friendship development as a part of their overall social skills development.

Methodology

This research study utilized various research methods to evaluate children's friendship roles as portrayed in selected children's books for preschoolers from a group of Thai and American Award winners. Also, the study sought to compare the various aspects of social skills development needed to build friendships and to see if they were adequately covered in our selected books. The study consisted of 120 children's books that were written with a friendship theme, (59 titles from Thai children's literature, and 61 titles from American children's literature). The books had to be award winners or highly recommended for preschoolers from the United States or Thailand, with publication dates from 1996 to 2016. Various

theories relevant to friendship development, including Ecological Systems Theory and Attachment Theory were reviewed in order to create avenues of inquiry and formulate our research questions. Bronfenbrenner [20] emphasized in his Ecological System Theory that children grow and develop relationships in various surroundings, such as family, school, neighborhood, and peer groups. And Bowlby [21], a British psychiatrist believed that these earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a remarkable impact on the quality of future relationships.

Instrument

To gather data, *the Children's Book Evaluation Form (*designed by researchers and educators from Thailand, the US, Taiwan, and Peru, and *updated August, 2016),* was used along with literature reviews and general knowledge of children's literature evaluation and selection. This form consisted of three parts: Part I: General information about the books including bibliographical details, awards, languages, and genres; Part II: Contents of the books including types of friendships, characters, plots, themes, styles of writing, points of view, and illustrations; Part III: Aspect of friendship as presented, including 26 positive behaviors (such as sharing, caring for a friend, taking turns, gaining friends, etc.); 7 negative behaviors (such as name calling, teasing, disagreeing, lying, ignoring a friend etc); 12 positive psychological states of emotions or feelings (such as empathy, happiness, satisfaction, closeness, affection, generosity, and honesty, etc.); and 7 negative psychological states (such as sadness, regret, unhappiness, anger, dissatisfaction, etc.).

Criteria for children book selections

The criterion for selecting materials used in this study was threefold. Firstly, the 120 books were children's literature award winners published in the United States or Thailand in the years 1996-2016. The awards considered for this study included the Caldecott, Coretta Scott King, the Notable Children's Book Awards (US.), the Wankeaw, Nanmee, Nai-In Book Awards (Thai), plus the Office of the Basic Education Commission Award and other highly recommended books for preschool children. Secondly, the books were developmentally and culturally appropriate for adult interactive reading sessions with preschool and kindergarten children (ages 3-6). Lastly, content of the books portrayed children's friendship roles, and/or animals showing characteristics demonstrating the many aspects of friendships.

Data collection

The researcher and research assistant gathered data by utilizing *the Children's Book Evaluation Form (updated August, 2016).* The Thai research assistant was trained on how to use the evaluation form, as well as having a clear understanding of the meaning of each item. The researcher and the research assistant read each of the selected books twice, and then evaluated the content of each book in these areas: language, genre, setting, plot, theme, writing style, illustrations, behaviors, and feelings as depicted. The form also recorded bibliographical details, book details, types of friendships, story elements, and recommendations.

Data analysis

The children's literature evaluations were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 22.0 (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) were employed to explain general information about the children's books, such as bibliographical details,

awards, languages, genres, fiction or non-fiction, and contents (types of friendships, characters, plots, themes, styles of writing, points of view, and illustrations). Independent samples *t* Test were used to compare means of children's friendships as portrayed in the contents of the selected Thai and American Award winning children's book.

Results and Conclusion

The following results are derived from the completed evaluation forms utilized to collect data from our selection of 120 Thai and American Award winning children's books, written in the friendship theme. These results come from our analyses of the data as related to the previously stated research questions.

General information about the children's books

The *Children's Book Evaluation Form*s were used to evaluate 120 children's books. Half of the award winning children's books were American (50.8%), and (49.2%) were Thai. Fifty-nine of the books were in the other category which are the highly recommended books for preschool children (49.2%), twenty-two books (18.3%), were Nanmee Award winners, fifteen books (12.5%), were Wankeaw Award winners, twelve books (10.0%), were Caldecott Award winners, and the remaining (4.2%), being the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) Award winning books. Details are shown in Figure 1.

Regarding genres of the books, ninety-seven (80.8%), were picture story books, eleven (9.2%), were pattern or concept books, and seven books (5.8%), were poetry.
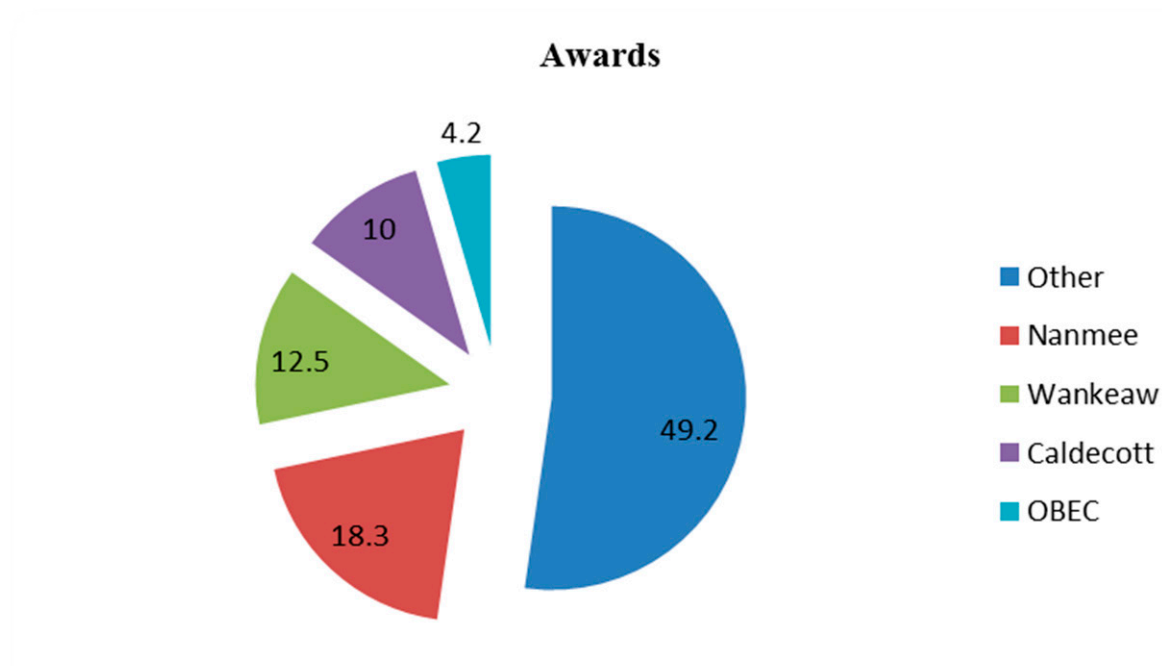

Figure 1 Children's Book Awards

Elements of children's books

In this study, our research evaluated the content of 120 children's books in four areas including type of friendships, style of writing, point of view (who narrates the story?), and illustrations. First, concerning the type of friendship portrayed in the selected children's books, forty-eight stories (40%), were a presentation of a friendship by using animals with human characteristics, forty stories (33.3%), were

presentations of a friendship of a child with another child, and fifteen stories (12.5%), presented a friendship of a child with an animal. Second, the style of writing, 105 (87.5%) of the authors wrote by using simple sentences, nine (7.5%) of the authors wrote by using of similes, metaphors, or symbolism, and five (4.2%) of the author wrote by using rhyming words or repeated rhythms. Third, the point of view (or who narrates the story), forty-four narrators (36.7%), were omniscient and know the feelings and thoughts of all characters, forty-one stories (34.2%), were in the first person (I) and one character narrates, and eighteen stories(15%), were an objective view where the actions are described. And lastly, illustrations, seventy-four books (61%), used water color or other paintings, fourteen (11.7%), were cloth books, and twelve books (10%), had pen/ink drawings, (See details in Table 1).

Table 1 Elements of the Children's Books (n=120)

Story elements	f	%
Type of friendship		
Child with child	40	33.3
Child with adult	8	6.7
Child with animal	15	12.5
Animals with human characteristics	48	40.0
Child with inanimate object	6	5.0
Animals with animals	3	2.5
Style of writing		
Sentences (Simple, Complex, Very Expressive)	105	87.5
Use	9	7.5
of similes, metaphors, or symbolism	5	4.2
Use of rhyming words or repeated rhythms	1	.8
Other		
Point of view	41	34.2
First person (I)	18	15.0
Objective view	44	36.7
Omniscient	17	14.2
Limited omniscience		
Illustrations	10	8.3
Line drawings	6	5.0
Realistic color images	14	11.7
Cloth books	74	61.7
Water color or other paintings	1	.8
Photographs	12	10.0
Pen/ink drawings	1	.8
Collages	2	1.7
Digital collage of acrylics		

Aspects of Friendships: Positive/Negative Behavior

This study evaluated the aspects of friendships consisting of positive, negative pro-social actions, and psychological states as portrayed in our selection of Thai and American Award winning children's books. Regarding positive behavior, fifty-five children's books, (45.8%) portrayed "helping", fifty-four of

the books (45%) portrayed "sharing", fifty-two books (43.3%) portrayed "spending time to gain friends", forty-seven of our books (39.2%) portrayed "gaining a friend", and forty-six of the children's books (38.3%) portrayed "face to face communication". As related to negative behaviors, twelve books (10%) portrayed "losing friends", eleven of the books (9.2%) portrayed "ignoring friends", ten books (8.3%) portrayed "fighting", nine books (7.5%) portrayed "teasing", and seven of the books (5.8%) portrayed "bullying" (See figure 2).

Aspects of Friendship: Positive/Negative Feelings

The findings relating to positive and negative psychological states of being as seen in our Thai and American award winning children's books selection. Regarding positive feelings, seventy of the children's books (58.3%) portrayed "happiness, and/or satisfaction", thirty-eight books (31.7%) portrayed "genuine smiles", thirty-two books (26.7%) portrayed "empathy or sympathy", thirty of the books (25%) portrayed "closeness, and/or affection", and twenty-three of the children's books (18.3%) portrayed "trust". On the other hand, negative feelings like "sadness" are seen in thirty-nine children books (32.5%), thirty-five books (29.2%) portrayed "general unhappiness", seventeen books (14.2%) portrayed "disappointment", thirteen of the books (10.8%) portrayed "anger", and twelve of the children's books (10%) portrayed "dissatisfaction" (See figure 3).
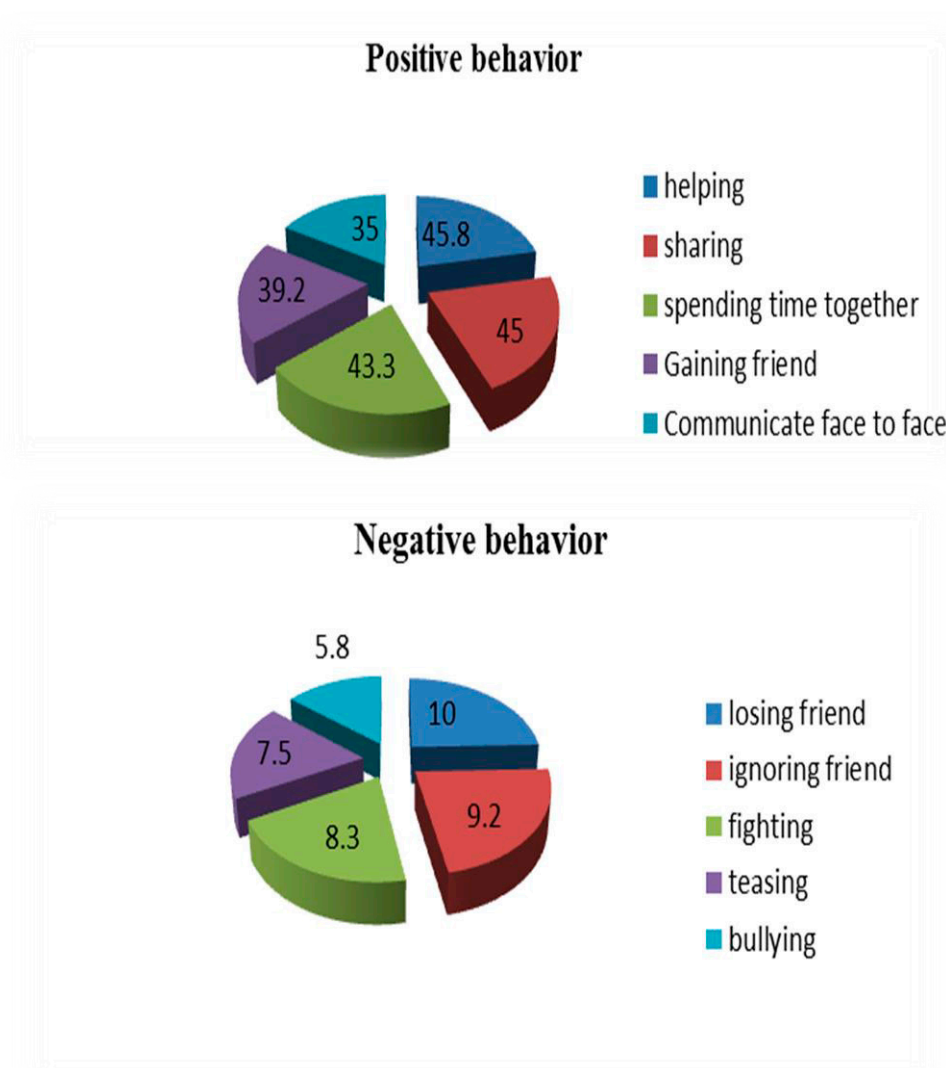

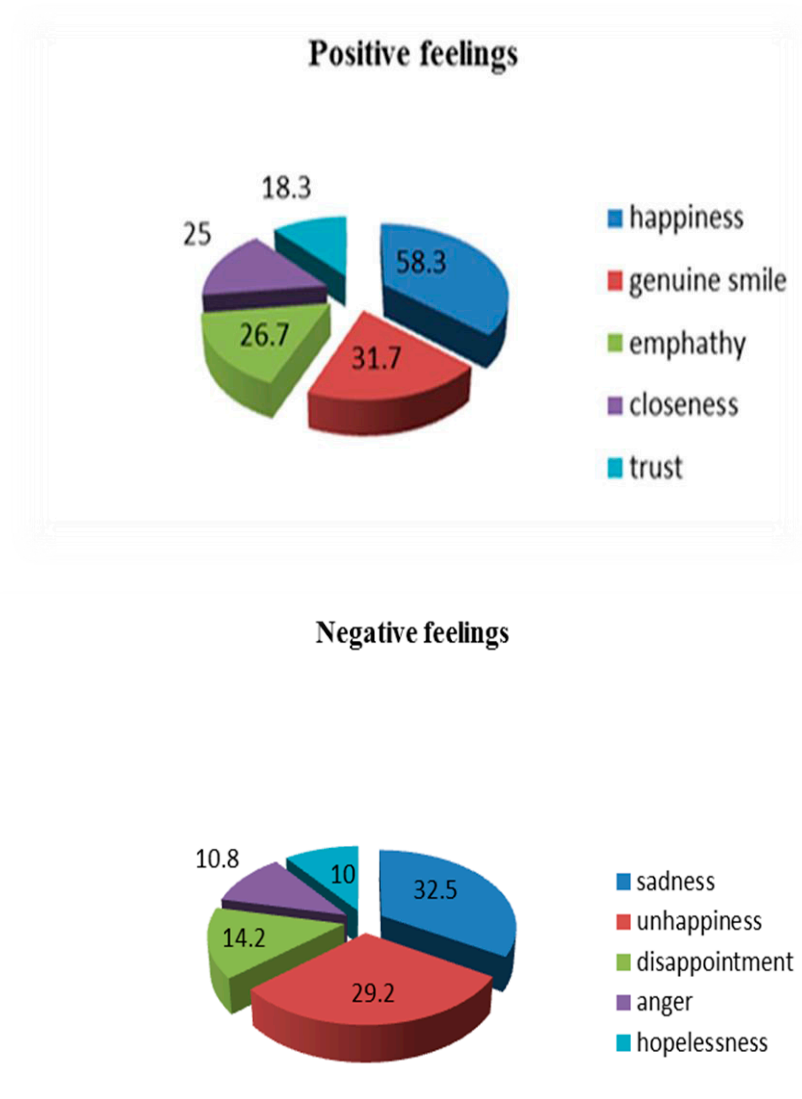Figure 2 Aspects of Friendship: Positive and Negative Behavior

Positive feelings

- happiness: 58.3
- genuine smile: 31.7
- emphathy: 26.7
- closeness: 25
- trust: 18.3

Negative feelings

- sadness: 32.5
- unhappiness: 29.2
- disappointment: 14.2
- anger: 10.8
- hopelessness: 10

Figure 3 Aspects of Friendship: Positive and Negative Feelings

Differences and Similarities of Children's Friendships as Portrayed in the Contents of Thai and American Award Winning Children's Books

This study utilized Independent samples *t* Test to compare means of how positive and negative behaviors and feelings are portrayed when comparing the contents of our selection of Thai and American Award winning children's books. Findings are as follows: 1) There are significant differences in the aspects of what positive behaviors encourage children's friendships when comparing the contents of Thai to American Award winning children's books; 2) There are no significant differences of in the aspects of how negative behaviors impact children's friendships when comparing Thai to American children's books; 3) There are no significant differences in the aspects of how positive psychological states influence friendships when comparing Thai to American children's books; 4) There are no significant differences in how

children's friendships are affected by negative psychological states when comparing Thai to American children's books.

Conclusion

The evaluation and comparison of selected Thai and American Award winning children's books gave findings that demonstrated how important children's books can be in the promotion of positive pro-social actions and psychological states in children as they learn to build and maintain friendships at an early age. As a teaching tool during interactive reading times, adults can use stories to encourage or discourage actions as they relate to the development of a child's positive social and psychological health. Preschoolers are fully able to learn the foundational qualities and skills needed to be a good friend; therefore educational policy makers, classroom teachers, school librarians and parents will be given strategies that they and the teachers can use when selecting books to help children (ages 3 to 6) develop friendships. Meanwhile, educational policy makers can focus on creating environments and classroom activities that support healthy friendship development. As a result of this study, The "Jai Jai is finding friends" children's book series is designed for use by the early childhood teacher to promote young children's healthy social skills. The series is presented in the multi-language format for usage as an early childhood classroom story time activity. The multi-language (Thai, English, and Taiwanese) format makes the "Jai Jai is finding friends" children's book series useful in the multi-ethnicity classroom setting

Acknowledgements

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