

## **A CASE STUDY OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN THREE YEARS OLD CHILDREN'S PEER CONFLICTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study was to investigate how kindergarten teachers respond to peer conflicts among 3-year-olds, with the aim of identifying common patterns and distinguishing features in their interventions. The age of three is a unique transitional period when young children begin attending kindergarten as their first social setting. The study was conducted in Hangzhou in China, using a case study methodology and involved ten teachers from eight different kindergarten settings and 157 three-year old children in eight classes. The 120-observed record identified 214 peer conflicts, 54% of which were caused by object and space disputes; 18% by physical collisions; 16% by verbal disputes among young children; 12% by violations of disciplines and rules. Participating kindergarten teachers' approaches for resolving peer conflicts illustrated in the case study included (1) perfunctory response; (2) simple suppression; (3) authoritative determinations; (4) scientific guidance; and (5) objective factors influencing teachers' involvement (e.g., teacher children ratio; child characteristics; teacher child relationship; parent understanding and support; classroom management; inspection; co-teacher cooperation. Class size, curriculum, teacher-child connections, parental support, and teacher collaboration are some of the objective elements that affect kindergarten teacher participation, as are the professional attributes of teachers and their perspectives on education and children. Practical recommendations for kindergarten teachers' involvement in peer conflict among young children were given based on the research findings.

**Keywords:** kindergarten teacher, peer conflict, resolutions

### **INTRODUCTION**

Three-year-olds in China, characterized by strong self-centeredness (Hong, & Wang, 2023), encounter challenges in handling peer conflicts as they start attending kindergarten, making the involvement of kindergarten teachers unique and essential in guiding their social development (Yang & Li, 2022). Chinese children typically focus on family interactions before the age of three, transitioning to kindergarten after this period of home single child prioritized environment (Yang & Li, 2022). The urbanized lifestyle, coupled with financial pressures, contributes to the prevalence of one-child families in China (Su-Russell, & Sanner, 2023). Most three-year-old children enter kindergarten during a crucial transitional period, shifting from a self-centered home environment to a collective-centered kindergarten setting (Peng, Liu,

Zhang, & Yue, 2022). This transition often involves conflicts as children establish behavioral norms and adapt to the new social environment.

The research underscores the critical role of kindergarten teachers in facilitating positive outcomes in three-year-olds' peer conflict resolution. Peer conflict is a social interaction between children, typically of similar developmental age, that disrupts social harmony resulting from differences in ideas, interests, or behaviors (Chen, Fein, Killen, & Tam, 2001). Three main modes of conflict resolution are identified, with a particular focus on third-party involvement (Lu, Whittaker, Ruzek, Pianta, & Vitiello, V. E. (2023). The "third party" includes kindergarten teachers, parents, and children's peers. Kindergarten teachers are specifically emphasized as significant third parties, given their role in teaching and managing group dynamics in the kindergarten setting (Moore, 2020). The study delineates the manner, context, timing, and frequency of kindergarten teachers' involvement in resolving peer conflicts, emphasizing their direct influence on conflict resolution outcomes and conflict education (Chen, Lindo, Blalock, Yousef, Smith, & Hurt-Avila, 2021; Hay, Paine & Robinson, 2022).

Kindergarten teacher involvement is conceptualized as a purposeful educational process demonstrated through the actions, words, and emotions of teachers (Alves, Guedes & Cadima, 2024; Andrews, 2001). It is considered an outward manifestation of the educational process, driven by teachers' educational consciousness and concepts (Vatou, Gregoriadis, Tsigilis, & Grammatikopoulos, 2020). The term "involvement" is interpreted as participation in dealing with and solving specific problems, emphasizing the interaction between kindergarten teachers and children, as well as the educational process of teachers (Andrews, 2001; Spilt, Verschueren, K., Van Minderhout, & Koomen, 2022; Wintz & Abdul-Majied, 2023). This study defines kindergarten teacher involvement as a process wherein teachers, guided by their educational concepts, apply certain methods to address problems and provide guidance to young children in educational activities. A kindergarten teacher's involvement behavior is seen as a complete, relatively independent educational process (Sertic, 2017; Strycharz-Banaś, Dalli, & Meyerhoff, 2022).

Determining an individual kindergarten teacher's involvement in young children's peer conflict resolution involves observing language, expression, and body movement (Rhoades, 2023; Spilt & Koomen, 2022). The process begins with the teacher noticing a peer conflict event, followed by direct or indirect involvement with different responses, and concludes when the teacher ceases to have a role in the conflict event. This operational definition encapsulates the key elements of kindergarten teachers' actions in response to young children's peer conflicts (Vatou, Gregoriadis, Tsigilis, & Grammatikopoulos, 2020). The research aims to fill this gap by examining kindergarten teachers' involvement behaviors from the perspective of teachers themselves within the context of their work (Moore, 2020; Sha, Zhang, G., Feng, Peng, & Luo, 2022; Hay, Paine, & Robinson, 2022). The primary objective of this study is to investigate the nature of kindergarten teachers' involvement in resolving peer conflicts among three-year-old children, with a focus on identifying common characteristics of such involvement. Additionally, the study aims to elucidate the challenges associated with kindergarten teachers' participation in handling peer conflicts within the specific context of kindergartens.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a multi-faceted research methodology (Agee, 2009), combining case study, unstructured observations, and interviews to comprehensively investigate kindergarten teachers' involvement in the peer conflict behaviors of three-year-old children (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study method involved meticulous observation of kindergarten teachers' interactions with three-year-old children during peer conflicts. Typical cases were systematically recorded, providing a basis for a preliminary analysis and summary of kindergarten teachers' involvement behaviors. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of specific instances, contributing to a nuanced understanding of teacher-child dynamics in conflict situations. The study systematically observed peer conflicts among three-year-old children and the corresponding intervention behaviors of kindergarten teachers at Kindergarten A in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Utilizing observation record sheets, the researcher categorized and summarized various types of peer conflicts and the corresponding involvement behaviors of kindergarten teachers (Golafshani, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The observation covered all small classes in Kindergarten A, resulting in the collection of 120 valid record forms from eight small classes. The research conducted interviews with ten kindergarten teachers from 3-year-old classes at Kindergarten A. Referring to an interview outline, the aim was to explore the underlying thoughts guiding kindergarten teachers' involvement in the conflict behaviors of three-year-old children. Interviews were designed to gather insights from the perspectives of kindergarten teachers, their families, and the children involved in conflicts. The interviews were intentionally informal and unstructured to ensure authenticity and flexibility in responses.

Case collection began on August 17, 2023, involving the refinement of the original transcript form based on video observations and notes from kindergarten teachers' involvement in resolving young children's peer conflicts and ended in November 20, 2023. Uncertainties arising during case collection were addressed by contacting kindergarten teachers at appropriate times after the observed events (Stake, 1995; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Overall, the combination of case study, observations, and interviews provided a holistic approach to studying kindergarten teachers' involvement in three-year-old children's peer conflicts (Yin, 2015). The research aimed to offer valuable insights, identify challenges, and contribute to the improvement of teacher practices based on the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Kindergarten A in Hangzhou took three years old children from seven kindergarten classes and observed 10 teachers and 157 three years old children in these eight classes. Pseudonyms were employed for participants in the case illustrations.

The basic information of kindergarten teachers of 10 teachers in these eight classes in Kindergarten A in Hangzhou is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1  
*Participant teachers work experience and education*

Class	Total number of children in the class	Length of teaching experience	Education attainment
KG teacher 1	32	17	Undergraduate
KG teacher 2	30	9	Undergraduate
KG teacher 3	27	8	Undergraduate
KG teacher 4	-	3	Bachelor's degree

*continued*

KG teacher 5	3-year-old class	31	15	Undergraduate
KG teacher 6		27	5	Undergraduate
KG teacher 7		30	11	Bachelor's degree
KG teacher 8		24	3	Bachelor's degree
KG teacher 9		-	3	Bachelor's degree
KG teacher 10		27	6	Undergraduate

The data analysis supports the development of a narrative to provide exploratory experiences and a common theme based on stories how and why a child in peer conflicts, involvement by teachers to guide the communication, and actual records of experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An additional purpose of the data analysis is to further clarify raw data by analyzing and categorizing the emerging themes from collected data (Yin, 2015).

Descriptive coding and value coding (Saldana, 2021) will be utilized to analyze the documents, interview transcriptions, and observation notes (Miles, Huberman, 1994).

## FINDINGS

Data analyses and case studies regarding peer conflicts among three-year-old children in Chinese kindergarten settings categorized as analysis of peer conflict causes, teacher intervention methods, guiding apology and reconciliation, establishing norms and orientations, determining ownership of toys, leveraging empathy, providing conflict resolution methods, issues in teacher involvement, factors influencing teacher involvement. As the cases described in the study, pseudonyms were used for the participating children.

### Analysis of Three-Year-Old Children's Peer Conflict Causes

Based on on-site observations conducted by kindergarten teachers, total of 214 peer conflicts were recorded in the 120 video records. The incidents of peer conflict were meticulously categorized and summarized, yielding insights into the various causes underlying these conflicts.

- 1) Disputes over objects and space: 54% of peer conflicts.
- 2) Physical collisions: 18% of peer conflicts.
- 3) Verbal conflicts among young children: 16% of peer conflicts.
- 4) Violations of discipline and rules: 12% of peer conflicts.

There is a highly significant difference in the frequency of peer conflict causes among three-year-old children. Object and space disputes emerge as the most prevalent triggers, accounting for the majority of conflicts. Physical confrontation, verbal conflict, and violations of discipline and rules are comparatively less frequent as causes of peer conflict.

### Chinese Kindergarten Teachers' Intervention Methods in Three-Year-Old Children's Peer Conflicts:

For the participant kindergarten teachers' involvement in young children's peer conflicts, the community generally categorizes involvement behavior into various ways. Characteristics of these involvement behaviors are (1) Perfunctory Response, (2) Simple Suppression, (3) Authoritative Determinations, (4) Scientific Guidance (McClelland, & Morrison, 2003). First, teachers address conflicts by calming down offended children without

resolving the substantive issues. This involves comforting, hugging, and showing concern without guiding the children towards conflict resolution. "Deal with it later" but not dealing with it: Teachers postpone addressing conflicts, often claiming to handle them later but failing to do so amidst their busy schedules and tasks.

Second, teachers physically separate conflicting children to swiftly end the conflict. This involves isolating the parties involved without promoting understanding or social development.

Third, teachers assume a judicial role, determining responsibility and deciding conflict outcomes. Methods include establishing ownership, determining right and wrong, and guiding the sequence of actions. An authoritative decision-making process is illustrated through a case involving a dispute over cup ownership. Lastly, teachers deeply engage in conflicts, listening to children's ideas, exploring causes, and guiding parties involved toward understanding by involvements encompass, problem-solving, helping children find solutions to conflicts, norm establishment, assisting in the establishment of norms for interaction, promoting growth, and focusing on social development and growth. This categorization provides a nuanced understanding of the diverse ways Chinese kindergarten teachers intervene in three-year-old children's peer conflicts. It underscores the importance of moving beyond simplistic responses and embracing methods that contribute to children's social development. Here are cases in the classrooms for each category of conflict resolution:

### **Guiding young children to apologize and reconcile**

In instances of peer conflict within small groups of children, some kindergarten teachers adopt a reconciliation approach, often involving the practice of apologizing. The process typically entails the offending party offering an apology, the offended party forgiving, and the teacher guiding both children to make amends. This is exemplified in the following case:

Si Ran and Jiujiu were engaged in play within a classroom play area. Si Ran observed a small toy in Jiujiu's possession, grabbed it, and, before JiuJiu could react, the kindergarten teacher promptly intervened. The teacher instructed Si Ran to apologize and then facilitated a physical gesture of reconciliation, bringing the hands of both children together while emphasizing the importance of friendship. This orchestrated process aimed at formal reconciliation is outlined in a field video observation diary from September 18, 2023. While this method involves guiding the conflicting parties toward reconciliation through an apology, it is considered a lower level of scientific guidance. The focus is primarily on achieving a formal reconciliation rather than fostering a genuine understanding between the children, facilitating substantial emotional experiences, and promoting more profound social development. In essence, the process of apology and reconciliation often follows a predetermined script rather than encouraging a deeper level of connection and comprehension.

### **Establishing norms and orientations for engagement**

In instances of peer conflict involving three-year-old children, kindergarten teachers often intervene to impart norms related to interactions and guide conflict resolution outcomes. This approach serves to educate young children on concepts and rules associated with interpersonal interactions and provides a general orientation toward conflict resolution. The focus is on cultivating knowledge and experience in interpersonal interactions and conflict resolution, emphasizing the understanding of interpersonal norms rather than solely addressing

emotional experiences or providing operational conflict resolution methods. This is illustrated in the following case:

During morning playtime in the classroom, Xiaodong was engaged in play with Anping and peers in a corner. Despite Anping's repeated requests to play with Xiaodong's toys, Xiaodong remained unresponsive. Yasuhira attempted to take Ultraman's head from Xiaodong, leading to a conflict where Xiaodong resisted. In response to Anping's call for the teacher, the kindergarten teacher swiftly intervened.

The teacher addressed Xiaodong, inquiring about the refusal to share and explaining the consequences—playing alone with no one to play with. Xiaodong, understanding the situation, eventually agreed to share the smaller Ultraman. The teacher further suggested sharing the larger Ultraman. This intervention, documented in the live video observation diary from October 12, 2023, demonstrated the teacher's engagement by reasoning with Xiaodong. In this case, the kindergarten teacher's involvement included reasoning with Xiaodong, explicitly outlining the consequences of not sharing, and guiding him to a resolution that involved sharing the toys with his peers. Beyond resolving the immediate conflict, this approach aimed to instill the concept of sharing in interpersonal relationships. By teaching Xiaodong the importance of sharing, the teacher facilitated his integration into kindergarten life and contributed to his overall growth. This method not only resolves the immediate conflict but also imparts valuable lessons about interpersonal norms and cooperation.

### **Determining public ownership of toys**

Young children, especially three-year-olds, often exhibit self-centered behaviors, leading to conflicts, particularly related to object grabbing. Kindergarten teachers commonly face the challenge of intervening in such conflicts, where children perceive a particular object, usually a toy, as exclusively "mine," leading to disputes. In practice, teachers often resolve these conflicts by asserting that the object is not owned by a specific individual but rather belongs to everyone and is available for shared play. The following case illustrates this intervention strategy:

During morning playtime in the classroom, Xiaodong held a pile of toys at a table, engrossed in playing. Suddenly, Ball, seated nearby, took one of the toys from Xiaodong's arms, prompting Xiaodong to protest loudly, asserting ownership with shouts of "Mine! Mine!" Xiaodong attempted to reclaim the toy, but Ball resisted, holding onto it. Xiaodong's cries caught the attention of the kindergarten teacher, who intervened by addressing Xiaodong and reminding him, "Toys are for everyone to play with; have you forgotten again?" The teacher emphasized that toys in kindergarten are for collective use, and anyone can play with them. Xiaodong, upon hearing this, ceased fixating on the conflict, resumed playing with the remaining toys, and the situation de-escalated. The kindergarten teacher, satisfied with the resolution, moved on to other tasks. In this case, Xiaodong's conflict was rooted in the perception of the toy as a privately owned item, leading to a struggle when someone else attempted to take it. The kindergarten teacher's decisive stance that toys are publicly owned helped rationalize the situation for Xiaodong. By emphasizing the concept of shared ownership, the teacher facilitated the resolution of the conflict, encouraging Xiaodong to let go of the fixation on personal possession and continue playing.

This determination of public ownership contributes to the development of the concept of sharing, fostering positive personality traits and promoting socialization among young children.

### **Leveraging "empathy" in conflict resolution**

When addressing conflicts among three-year-old children, kindergarten teachers often employ a strategy that involves fostering empathy in the offender. By guiding the child to understand and appreciate the feelings of the offended party, teachers aim to evoke an "empathy effect." This approach helps children recognize their behavioral mistakes, contributes to the establishment of interaction rules, and promotes social development. The following example illustrates this intervention strategy:

During a classroom playtime session, a loud cry caught the kindergarten teacher's attention. Investigation revealed that Nana had bitten Yanan's finger while attempting to snatch a toy from Yanan's hand. The teacher promptly intervened, admonishing Nana for her biting behavior. The teacher then escorted both Nana and Yanan to the infirmary. In the infirmary, the teacher engaged the medical staff in treating Yanan's wounds while consistently communicating to Nana, "Look at how much it hurts." Once the wounds were attended to, the teacher took Nana to an open space outside the infirmary and proposed a form of reciprocity: "You bit him once, so let him bite you once, okay?" Nana hesitated, expressing reluctance. The teacher probed further, asking why it wasn't acceptable. Despite Nana's silence, the teacher continued, warning that if Nana bit Yanan again, the teacher would permit Yanan to bite back, helping Nana comprehend the pain associated with such actions. In this case, the teacher leveraged the concept of empathy by actively involving Nana in the process of observing and understanding Yanan's pain. By repeatedly emphasizing the consequences of Nana's actions and proposing a reciprocal experience, the teacher aimed to cultivate empathy in Nana. This approach encourages Nana to consider Yanan's perspective, recognize her own mistakes, and comprehend the impact of her behavior on others. Integrating empathy into conflict resolution contributes to the ongoing development of social skills among young children. It's worth noting that in practice, kindergarten teachers often combine the use of "empathy" with other intervention strategies to effectively address conflicts among children.

### **Providing conflict resolution methods: empowering children with social skills**

In the context of Chinese kindergarten classrooms, young children often lack experience in dealing with conflicts due to being only child in their home. Consequently, when conflicts arise with peers in kindergarten, children may resort to inappropriate solutions, leading to escalated conflicts. Recognizing this, kindergarten teachers play a crucial role in equipping children with effective methods for conflict resolution. The following case exemplifies how a teacher intervened to guide a child through a peer conflict:

During an outdoor playtime session organized by the kindergarten teacher, a child named Chao Chao approached the teacher with a complaint: "Teacher, they won't let me play." JiuJiu and XiaoHuan were engaged in playing with toys by the wall, and Chao Chao wished to join them. However, his attempt to join their play resulted in a conflict as JiuJiu and XiaoHuan perceived it as an attempt to steal the toys, denying Chao Chao's participation. Distressed, Chao Chao sought assistance from the kindergarten teacher. In response, the teacher provided Chao Chao with a practical and constructive conflict resolution method: "If you want to play together,

go over and ask them if you can play with them." Encouraged by this guidance, Chao Chao approached JiuJiu and XiaoHuan, asking if he could join in. To his delight, they agreed, and the three children were able to play together harmoniously. In this instance, the kindergarten teacher recognized Chao Chao's lack of knowledge on how to navigate conflicts and proactively provided him with a specific operational method. By suggesting that he ask for permission, the teacher empowered Chao Chao with a social skill that not only resolved the immediate conflict but also contributed to his overall social development. The teacher's intervention not only helped Chao Chao adapt quickly to kindergarten life but also laid the foundation for his future interactions and conflict resolutions in the older classes. Incorporating conflict resolution methods into their interactions with children, kindergarten teachers play a vital role in fostering social skills and promoting a positive social environment within the classroom.

### **Kindergarten Teachers as the Key Factors Influencing Involvement in Peer Conflict Resolution**

Kindergarten teachers play a crucial role in shaping the early character and personality of young children, and several key factors influence their involvement behaviors in peer conflict resolution such as professional qualities of kindergarten teachers, kindergarten teachers' views on education and children, kindergarten teachers' view of conflict, emotional state of kindergarten teachers, kindergarten teachers' educational intelligence and reflective skills. First, professional qualities encompass various aspects such as ideological and moral qualities, basic cultural qualities, educational skill qualities, personality, psychological qualities, and physical fitness.

Teacher 6 shared, "I have been working in kindergarten for 5 years, but I am still on a non-regular contract. My salary is lower than others, yet my responsibilities remain the same. The care and benefits aren't great, and when I think about it, I feel disheartened and consider taking an exam for a position in another organization. However, it's not that easy. Sometimes I get very upset when the children are noisy, and I struggle to be patient. But the pressure and workload are so overwhelming that it's nearly impossible."

Teacher 9 said, "I love children, and I love teaching. Although I am still on a contract, I am preparing for the exam and will do my best to secure this position." From the conversations with the two teachers, it's clear that Teacher 6 is dissatisfied with his job and at risk of losing patience and confidence due to the reality of work pressures. As a result, he tends to get angry when dealing with conflicts and often resolves issues from his own perspective, without much discussion. On the other hand, Teacher 9 is more passionate about his work. He listens to the children, offers advice, and remains patient when they encounter conflicts with their peers. The atmosphere in Teacher 9's group is calmer and more harmonious as a result. The teachers' qualities significantly impact a teacher's approach to peer conflict resolution. For instance, a teacher's level of passion for early childhood education and patience directly influences how conflicts are managed. A comparison between two teachers, one less enthusiastic and more easily frustrated, and another passionate and patient, reveals the impact of professional qualities on their involvement behaviors.

Second, educational perspectives shape teachers' views on the function of education and their own competence. While all teachers recognize the collaborative effort required from family, society, and kindergarten for children's development, differences in views on parental cooperation can lead to varying involvement approaches. Teachers with positive views on education and children tend to exhibit patience and emotional control in conflict resolution, fostering a harmonious classroom atmosphere. Third, teachers' understanding of young children's peer conflict, including its connotation, causes, and value, significantly influences their involvement behaviors. Teachers recognizing the educational opportunities within conflicts tend to provide children with space for independent resolution and intervene in a manner that encourages educational growth. In contrast, teachers perceiving conflicts as disruptions may resort to more authoritative and coercive approaches. Fourth, the demanding nature of kindergarten teaching, long working hours, and high emotional commitment can affect teachers' emotional states during peer conflict resolution. Negative emotions stemming from work pressure, dissatisfaction with income, and lack of parental support may impact involvement attitude, style, and effectiveness. Teachers' self-control over emotions plays a crucial role in determining their patience and overall approach. Fifth, the occurrence of peer conflicts requires flexible and skillful handling by teachers. The ability to reflect on involvement behaviors is crucial for improvement. Some teachers may lack clarity in evaluating their own involvement behaviors, highlighting the need for enhanced reflective skills. Improved reflective abilities enable teachers to make rational attributions, correct inappropriate behaviors, and avoid undesirable educational effects. These factors collectively contribute to the varied involvement behaviors of kindergarten teachers in the resolution of young children's peer conflicts. Recognizing the importance of these factors is essential for fostering a positive and developmentally enriching classroom environment.

### **Objective Factors Influencing Kindergarten Teachers' Involvement in Peer Conflict**

Research showed (Handoko & Sakti, 2023) that each class context can be varied depending on the objective factors such as number of children in class, kindergarten curriculum, individual characteristics of young children and teacher-child relationships, parental understanding and support, approaches to classroom management, inspection by the education administration, degree of cooperation with co-teachers. First, the size of the class is a crucial factor influencing kindergarten teachers' involvement in young children's peer conflicts. As the number of children increases, the probability of conflicts over resources and space rises, making it challenging for teachers to effectively handle each conflict. Kindergarten teachers may prioritize the majority, leading to quicker, but potentially less thorough, conflict resolution for the few children involved although there are two teachers and one assistant teacher averagely 30 children in one kindergarten classroom (Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China, 2012). Teacher 9 said, "There are many children in the class, so conflicts are normal. When I first started working, I thought I should be patient and apply what I had learned from life experiences. However, after a few years, I realized that there is a gap between ideal expectations and reality. Sometimes we have to navigate the supervision of our superiors. Additionally, we must consider the children's safety. If some children argue or conflict with each other, we cannot always explain it to their parents." It is clear that the teacher 9 understands the role conflicts play in the social development of young children. However, due to the pressures of her workload and the realities of the situation, she feels compelled to resolve conflicts through direct intervention and commands in the classroom.

Second, the nature and intensity of the kindergarten curriculum can impact teachers' abilities to address conflicts among children. Specific and intense programs may create a stressful environment for teachers, affecting their capacity to deal with peer conflicts effectively. The pace and demands of the curriculum can contribute to negative and passive involvement strategies by teachers. Teacher 1, "Conflicts between children are a valuable educational opportunity. If children are unable to resolve conflicts on their own, teachers can step in to help. This provides a great chance to support their social development." Teacher 1 recognizes that conflicts are an opportunity to support children's socialization, emphasizing that when resolving conflicts between peers, children should be given the chance to think independently and solve problems on their own. Additionally, the teacher herself intervenes and offers guidance when children are unable to resolve conflicts independently. From this conversation, it is clear that teachers who understand the value of conflict in children's development and approach it correctly can create space for children to solve their problems on their own.

Third, personal characteristics of children, such as activity levels, can influence how teachers respond to conflicts. Teachers may display favoritism or strictness based on their perceptions of individual children, impacting conflict resolution approaches. Formed teacher-child relationships play a role in shaping teachers' evaluations of children's behaviors during conflicts. Fourth, the relationship between parents and kindergarten teachers affects teachers' attitudes and involvement in peer conflicts. Understanding and support from parents contribute to positive teacher attitudes, patience, and effective conflict resolution. Lack of understanding or trust from parents can lead to frustration and negatively impact teachers' involvement with young children. The relationship between parents and the teacher influences how the teacher intervenes in peer conflicts within the class. One of the criteria that teachers often use to assess parents' attitudes toward young children is their own attitude toward the teacher.

Case 1: At breakfast, Xiaoqing's mother asked the teacher in a questioning tone, "What's wrong with our child 16?" The teacher quickly advised the parents not to address the issue in front of their child. When the mother began crying outside the classroom, the teacher suggested that if the child was unhappy, it might be better to take them home. The teacher then explained the situation to the parents. The incident occurred when Child 16, while Child 17 was not paying attention, moved Child 17's chair, causing Child 17 to fall and sit on the floor. The teacher comforted Child 17 by holding them and instructed Child 16 to sit at an empty table to reflect on the situation. However, the parents did not agree with the teacher's perspective. They first believed that Child 16 was a well-behaved child and could not have done such a thing, and second, they felt that Child 17 would not have cried even if they had sat on the floor. Additionally, because the teacher was responsible for the child's meals, there was a lack of rapport between the parents and the teacher.

Case 2: Child 18 is an energetic and playful boy who is always moving and active. Because of his restlessness, he often gets into trouble, such as bumping into other children's huts or running violently. His behavior sometimes causes resentment among other children, leading to disagreements. Each time Child 18 faces issues, the teachers respond with patience. One reason for this is that the child's grandmother understands the teachers' roles very well and, when needed, encourages them to provide necessary discipline, telling the teachers not to be afraid to criticize Child 18.

The teacher praised the grandmother's positive attitude toward their work. From the interviews with the teachers, it is clear that whether parents understand and support the teachers' work directly impacts the teachers' attitudes toward the children, and consequently, their views on the kindergarten as a whole.

Fifth, classroom routines and rules, designed for efficient management, may inadvertently contribute to conflicts among children. Teachers may resort to criticizing children to quickly resolve conflicts and maintain order within the constraints of established routines. Sixth, educational inspections and visits can create stress and disruptions in kindergarten routines, affecting teachers' focus on peer conflict resolution. Limited time and increased workload during inspections may result in a decrease in attention to children's conflicts. Sixth, the collaboration and cooperation between the main and supporting kindergarten teachers impact conflict resolution outcomes. Close cooperation enhances conflict resolution effectiveness, while a lack of collaboration may hinder teachers' ability to address conflicts promptly. These objective factors, such as class size, curriculum intensity, individual characteristics of children, parental support, classroom management approaches, educational inspections, and co-teacher cooperation, collectively influence kindergarten teachers' involvement in peer conflicts among young children. Recognizing and addressing these factors can contribute to more effective conflict resolution strategies in early childhood education.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the study, here are practical implication aimed at improving teacher involvement in managing peer conflicts among three-year-old children in kindergartens. These suggestions are designed to enhance teachers' effectiveness in guiding children through conflicts, promoting social development, and ensuring a positive learning environment.

1. Cultivating the proper perspective on conflict in kindergarten teachers. Teachers should treat young children as independent individuals, recognizing their social development and respecting individual differences. It's important for teachers to understand both child development principles and the role of peer conflict in children's growth. Teachers should integrate theoretical knowledge of education and peer conflict resolution with practical approaches, which will allow them to intervene effectively and support children's overall development.
2. Teachers should actively reflect on improving their participation. Self-reflection enables teachers to evaluate their conflict resolution practices. By examining the timing, method, and appropriateness of their interventions, teachers can continuously improve their participation. Reflection helps teachers assess whether their involvement supports the children's social development and growth, enabling them to adjust their approach based on the situation.
3. Teachers should choose the right time and form of participation. Teachers should carefully consider when and how to intervene in peer conflicts. Immediate intervention is not always necessary; teachers should observe conflicts and only step in when necessary. If children are trying to resolve conflicts independently, teachers can allow them to continue, stepping in only when the conflict escalates. During intervention, teachers should guide children in seeing the situation from a third-person perspective and teach important social skills like cooperation, sharing, and humility.

4. Teachers should pay attention to the regulation of play. Since peer conflicts often arise during play, teachers should focus on organizing play activities. This includes structuring play areas, setting clear rules, and monitoring the number of children in each area to reduce conflicts. Properly organized play environments enable smoother interactions, minimizing conflicts and providing teachers with more opportunities to guide positive social behavior.
5. Kindergartens may purchase additional play materials. Providing a variety of play materials helps reduce the frequency of peer conflicts by offering children more options and opportunities for cooperative play. Additionally, teachers can use these materials to mediate conflicts, guiding children toward peaceful resolutions while continuing to engage them in shared activities.
6. Kindergartens should appropriately reduce teachers' workload. Reducing teachers' administrative burdens, such as the frequency of daily reflections, can help alleviate stress and prevent burnout. A more manageable workload, such as shifting from daily to weekly reflections, will free up teachers' time and energy, allowing them to focus more on direct interaction with children and resolving conflicts effectively.
7. Strengthen education to prevent daily conflicts in cooperation with families. Teachers should work closely with parents to prevent everyday conflicts by teaching children important social skills and conflict resolution techniques both at school and at home. Activities like role-playing and case studies can help children practice conflict resolution. Teachers can also guide parents on setting behavioral expectations and modeling positive behaviors at home, such as reducing aggression and discouraging over-indulgence.

By enhancing teacher involvement in peer conflict management and collaborating with families, kindergartens can provide a nurturing environment that supports children's social growth, helping them develop essential skills for resolving conflicts and adapting to their educational environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research conducted at Kindergarten A in Hangzhou City, using methods such as case study, observation, and interviews, has provided valuable insights into kindergarten teachers' involvement in the peer conflicts of three-year-old children. For the three year old young children's peer conflict, as result of the study four primary causes of peer conflict among three-year-olds: conflict over objects and space, physical collisions, language-related conflicts, and violations of discipline and rules. For the involvement methods and characteristics of involvement, highlighted four common involvement methods employed by Chinese kindergarten teachers: perfunctory response, simple stopping, authoritative judgment, and scientific guidance. Identified four distinctive characteristics of kindergarten teachers' involvement in peer conflicts: intervention in explicit conflicts, intervention in a play-based context, intervention in the middle stage of conflicts, and involvement in a "shallow" manner. Summarized four problems related to kindergarten teachers' involvement, such as passive involvement, hasty intervention, programmatic responses, and subjective and objective factors influencing involvement.

According to the study the main support for teacher's proper involvement in the peer conflict are cooperation and external factors should be considered primarily. Emphasized the significance of collaboration between kindergartens, teachers, and parents in strengthening daily conflict prevention education. Acknowledged the impact of various factors, including teachers' professional qualities, views of education, and children, on involvement, as well as objective factors like class size, curriculum, teacher-child relationships, parental support, classroom management style, educational administration inspections, and cooperation among teachers. Recognized that beyond individual teachers, the cooperation of parents, kindergarten hardware facilities, rules, and regulations significantly influence teachers' involvement in peer conflicts among three-year-old children. The study concludes by stressing the need for a holistic approach involving teachers, parents, and kindergarten facilities to effectively address and improve kindergarten teachers' involvement in the peer conflicts of three-year-old children. This collaborative effort is deemed essential for promoting a positive and developmentally appropriate environment for young children in kindergarten.

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## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

The author was responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript.

## **DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE**

No generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of the findings, or writing of this manuscript.

## **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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