

Research on Strategies for Resolving Peer Conflict in Children's Autonomous Play

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Abstract— *Autonomous play is a common activity in kindergarten, during which young children often experience various conflicts. If these conflicts are not properly addressed, they can negatively impact children's psychological and social development. Therefore, it is important to explore effective resolution strategies. This study selected children from the senior class of a public kindergarten, referred to as Kindergarten D, as the research subjects to conduct an in-depth investigation into peer conflicts during autonomous play. Through data collection, interview outlines, and case analysis, the study found that differences in teachers' perceptions of conflicts lead to varied guidance approaches for children; the kindergarten lacks scientific environmental design; parents hold diverse understandings of conflicts and employ different parenting styles, while also failing to fully exercise their agency in home-kindergarten collaboration. In response to these findings, the following recommendations are proposed: teachers should enhance their professional competence to better guide children in resolving peer conflicts; classrooms should be designed more scientifically; parents should understand the universality of peer conflicts, avoid excessive intervention or solving problems on behalf of their children, serve as role models, and emphasize the importance of home-kindergarten collaboration; children themselves should improve their cognitive abilities and undergo social skills training.*

Keywords— *Autonomous Play, Peer Conflict, Resolution Strategies.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Autonomous play is an essential part of early childhood development, playing a significant role in promoting peer interaction and conflict resolution. Through peer conflicts that arise during autonomous play, children learn how to cooperate with others, express their thoughts and emotions, and gradually develop a healthy self-concept, thereby enhancing their ability to adapt to society and better face future challenges. This study analyzes children's peer conflict behaviors in autonomous play, aiming to help educators gain a more comprehensive understanding of the occurrence and resolution processes of conflicts. It also examines the factors influencing peer conflicts among young children and offers concrete suggestions to assist teachers in responding to and intervening in conflicts more effectively. Additionally, it seeks to raise parents' awareness of the phenomenon of peer conflicts in early

childhood, thereby providing practical and strategic guidance to optimize positive interactions among children.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research on teachers' guidance strategies for Autonomous play

Regarding the guidance of autonomous play, Qiu Xueqing proposed three guidance methods: verbal guidance, material provision, and game intervention[1]. Chen Qi emphasized that teachers should conduct in-depth observation during game guidance, keenly capture educational opportunities, and assist children in resolving difficulties encountered in play. At the same time, teachers should carefully consider the necessity and method of intervention before stepping in[2]. Wang Caiping argued

that children should be granted full autonomy in play. Therefore, teachers should provide appropriate game materials and create a favorable play environment. Teachers' guidance methods should be flexible and adaptable, employing reasonable strategies based on actual situations and formulating effective guidance plans through practical observation[3]. Yue Li believed that the methods and attitudes teachers adopt when intervening in conflicts directly impact children's peer interactions[4]. Ekaterina Moore suggested that conflicts allow children to experience various emotions and attempt to resolve disagreements between themselves and others[5].

2.2 Research on strategies for resolving peer conflicts in young children

Xiang Haiying and Sun Wenjie identified the following strategies for resolving conflicts among young children: cooperative, aggressive, withdrawal, and seeking-help strategies[6]. Xue Yuanyuan's research indicated that the most frequently used strategy after a conflict is seeking help from teachers. Among negative strategies, verbal disputes and threats are the most common, while positive strategies such as negotiation and explanation also account for a certain proportion[7]. Duan Jingfeng suggested that kindergartens should scientifically create environments to reduce external factors inducing peer conflicts. Teachers should update their educational concepts and adopt methods such as cognitive training and role-playing to cultivate children's internal abilities to resolve conflicts. Parents should foster a positive family environment and collaborate effectively in home-kindergarten partnerships[8]. Tang Minhong emphasized that teachers should learn to observe children's conflict behaviors and provide appropriate guidance[9]. Roland Nji Angu advocated training children to use play and humor to negotiate and control disagreements and anger[10].

Through a systematic review of relevant literature, scholars generally agree that the role of teachers should be multifaceted. Particularly in guiding strategies for peer conflicts, teachers need to fully recognize the educational value inherent in conflicts, observe children's conflict behaviors during peer interactions, and encourage children to independently address challenges in interpersonal relationships. Synthesizing domestic and international research, current studies often broadly focus on children's daily activities, which offers extensive research value. However, there remains a lack of in-depth research specifically targeting peer conflicts in autonomous play. Therefore, this study aims to explore the specific

manifestations and root causes of peer conflicts in autonomous play, with the goal of proposing more targeted and actionable suggestions and solutions. It seeks to enrich the theoretical research on peer conflicts in young children and provide practical references and insights for kindergarten teachers facing similar issues in actual teaching.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 Research subjects

Over a four-month observation period, the author conducted systematic recordings of 34 children in the senior second class of Kindergarten D, with detailed documentation of peer conflict incidents that occurred during autonomous play activities.

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Observation method

Throughout the four-month observation period, systematic observations were carried out on the 34 children in the senior second class of Kindergarten D. The strategies adopted by the children to resolve conflicts in different situations were recorded.

3.2.2 Interview method

This study selected two lead teachers from the senior second class as interviewees. Through in-depth exchanges, the research aimed to explore differences in teachers' perspectives on peer conflicts and to further examine the significance and effectiveness of teachers' guidance strategies in the process of resolving peer conflicts among children.

IV. STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS OF PEER CONFLICT BEHAVIORS AMONG SENIOR KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN DURING AUTONOMOUS PLAY

This study, conducted over a four-month period, involved systematic observation of 34 children in the senior class of Kindergarten D, with a focus on recording various peer conflict incidents that occurred during play activities. After collation and screening, a total of 107 valid cases were obtained. These cases were then analyzed in depth, and drawing on existing scholarly research, an analytical framework was developed. Specific details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical Framework for Peer Conflict Behaviors in Young Children

Types of game activities	Morning games, area games, corridor games, outdoor games
Gender of the conflicting parties	Same-sex (male-male; female-female), opposite-sex (male-female)
Types of conflicts	Competing for game resources, violating game rules, game opinion differences, interfering and controlling others, physical actions causing conflicts
Duration of conflicts	Within 1 minute, 1-2 minutes, 2-3 minutes, more than 3 minutes
Strategies for resolving conflicts	Negotiation and mediation, apology and comfort, reporting and seeking help, third-party intervention, neither side giving in, aggressive behavior, threatening and commanding, crying and getting angry

Through in-depth field investigations, data were collected on the occurrence and gender distribution of peer conflicts, the time periods in which conflicts occurred, conflict types, resolution strategies, and duration during autonomous play among senior kindergarten children. These data were coded and statistically analyzed using an observational framework. By comparing and examining this information, the study aims to comprehensively reveal the characteristics and existing issues of peer conflict behaviors among children in the senior kindergarten class.

4.1 Types of activities in which peer conflicts occur among young children

By categorizing the 107 collected conflict incidents, the distribution of children's conflicts across four types of play activities was obtained, as shown in Table 2.

As can be seen from the table, conflict behaviors among young children occurred most frequently during

Table 2. The situation of children's conflict behaviors in different types of game activities

	Morning games	Area games	Outdoor games	Corridor games	Total
Number (times)	22	47	7	31	107
Percentage (%)	20.6	43.9	6.5	29.0	100

Table 3. Types of Peer Conflict Behaviors in Young Children

	Scrambling game resources	Violating game rules	Disagreement on game opinions	Interference in controlling others	Physical actions triggering conflicts
Number (times)	32	26	20	21	8
Percentage (%)	30.0	24.3	18.7	19.2	7.5

From an overall analysis of the causes of conflicts, the following patterns can be observed:

First, competition for play resources is particularly prominent. Children in the senior kindergarten class tend to focus primarily on their own needs and interests, often

area play, while corridor play and morning play ranked second and third, respectively. Conflicts occurred less often in outdoor areas, primarily because other curricular activities encroached on outdoor time, resulting in relatively fewer opportunities and shorter duration for outdoor play.

4.2 Types of peer conflict behaviors in young children

The author has categorized factors likely to trigger conflicts among children during autonomous play activities into five main types: competition for play resources, violation of game rules, disagreements over play ideas, interference with or control of others' behaviors, and conflicts arising from physical actions. These categories account for 30.0%, 24.3%, 18.7%, 19.2%, and 7.5% of the total conflicts, respectively, as detailed in Table 3.

lacking awareness of fairness and cooperation in the distribution of play resources. Second, as children in this age group begin to develop independent thinking skills and form their own opinions, they become more sensitive to perceived violations of game rules by their peers. Third,

some children in the senior class have started to attempt to demonstrate their strength or attract others' attention by interfering with or provoking their peers. Finally, due to their ongoing cognitive and social development, conflicts arising from physical actions are relatively infrequent among senior kindergarten children.

4.3 Gender distribution of peer conflict behaviors in young children

An analysis of the 107 collected conflict incidents revealed that 78 cases involved conflicts between children of the same gender, while 29 cases occurred between children of different genders, as detailed in Table 4.

As shown in the table, conflicts are more likely to occur between children of the same gender. Specifically, conflicts between male-male, female-female, and male-female pairs account for 51.4%, 21.5%, and 27.1% of the total incidents, respectively. Boys are involved in conflicts

Table 4. Specific Situations of Peer Conflicts Occurring Among Children of Different Genders

	Same-sex (Man-Man)	Same-sex (Woman-Woman)	Different-sex (Man-Woman)	Total
Number (times)	55	23	29	107
Percentage (%)	51.4	21.5	27.1	100

Positive strategies include negotiation mediation and apology comforting, comprising 12.8% and 7.6% of the total, respectively. Compromise strategies consist of seeking adult intervention and third-party involvement, accounting for 24.4% and 19.8%, respectively. Negative strategies encompass refusing to yield, aggression, threats, and crying/anger, representing 11.0%, 9.3%, 9.3% and 7.0%, respectively.

The data analysis indicates that senior kindergarten children primarily employ compromise strategies to

Table 5. Specifics of Peer Conflict Resolution Strategies in Children's Play

	Negotiation Mediation	Apology Comforting	Seeking Adult Intervention	Third-Party Involvement	Refusing to Yield	Aggressive Behavior	Threats Commands	Crying Anger	Total
Number (times)	22	13	42	34	19	16	14	12	172
Percentage (%)	12.8	7.6	24.4	19.8	11.0	9.3	8.1	7.0	100

4.5 Duration of peer conflict behaviors in young children

significantly more often than girls. These findings indicate that during the preschool stage, children tend to interact more frequently with peers of the same gender.

4.4 Resolution strategies for peer conflicts in young children

This study categorizes the strategies used by children to resolve peer conflicts during autonomous play into the following eight types. Analysis of the 107 recorded conflict incidents identified a total of 172 strategy instances, as detailed in Table 5.

Based on the analysis of the eight resolution strategies and in accordance with existing classification standards, the author categorizes children's conflict resolution strategies into positive strategies, compromise strategies, and negative strategies [15], accounting for 20.4%, 44.4%, and 35.4% of the total, respectively.

resolve conflicts, with negative strategies and positive strategies ranking second and third, respectively. These findings reflect the cognitive developmental level of children in this age group. Senior kindergarten children are in the preoperational stage, characterized by egocentric thinking. Consequently, they often struggle to consider others' perspectives when resolving conflicts and tend to view situations solely from their own standpoint. This, to some extent, explains why children in this stage less frequently adopt positive strategies during conflicts.

Among the 107 recorded incidents of peer conflicts, the specific duration of these conflict behaviors is detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. Overall Distribution of Peer Conflict Resolution Strategies in Children's Play

	< 1 min	1-2min	2-3min	> 3 min	Total
Number (times)	89	15	1	2	107
Percentage (%)	83.2	14.0	0.9	1.9	100

83.2% of the recorded conflict incidents lasted no longer than one minute. Following these conflicts, most children did not show significant emotional distress and quickly resumed their original play activities. Approximately 14% of the children exhibited a subdued emotional state after the conflict but were able to regulate their emotions within 1–2 minutes, with minimal disruption to their ongoing play. In very few cases, the conflict state persisted for a longer period until the children's attention was diverted by other stimuli.

Overall, the duration of peer conflicts among young children was relatively short. This observation is generally consistent with findings from the author's previous studies.

V. FACTORS INFLUENCING PEER CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN CHILDREN'S AUTONOMOUS PLAY

Based on interviews with teachers and observations of children, the author analyzes the causes behind the emergence of peer conflicts and the choice of resolution strategies among senior kindergarten children during autonomous play, thereby providing direction for proposing effective guidance strategies.

5.1 Teacher factors

5.1.1 Perception of conflict

Teachers' views and attitudes toward conflict directly influence their educational methods. If teachers perceive conflict as negative and something to be avoided, they tend to intervene quickly and stop the conflict, which may deprive children of opportunities to learn how to resolve conflicts independently. Conversely, if teachers view conflict as an opportunity for growth and learning, they are more likely to adopt an open and supportive attitude, encouraging children to resolve conflicts through negotiation and communication.

In the interviews, Teacher A believed that conflicts help children correct mistakes, reflecting a positive and open attitude. Teacher B believed that most conflicts among senior kindergarten children are resolved by the children themselves, with only a few children frequently involved in conflicts, requiring targeted management. This indicates that Teacher B holds a relatively negative view

of conflict, focusing only on easily observable conflicts rather than all students.

During play activities, both teachers recommended observing children's behavior, assessing conflicts before deciding whether to intervene, and allowing space for children to resolve issues independently while observing their natural responses and conflict resolution abilities.

When handling conflicts, Teacher A emphasized flexibility, tailoring strategies to individual children's personalities and receptiveness. Teacher B stressed the importance of reasoning with children but also believed in displaying sternness to ensure compliance, indicating a belief that authority and attitude are crucial in conflict resolution.

In summary, teachers' perceptions of conflict vary significantly, leading to different approaches in handling conflicts.

Below are excerpts from interviews with the two teachers:

Interview 1: How do you view conflicts among senior kindergarten children?

Teacher A: "During conflicts, we can clearly see children's progress. For example, Cai Cai, who has a quick temper, often conflicts with others. But with proper guidance, he avoids repeating the same mistakes. So, as long as it benefits the children, we should view conflicts objectively and guide them correctly."

Teacher B: "Senior children have higher cognitive development than younger ones. They usually resolve conflicts themselves. prolonged conflicts are rare, and only a few children frequently cause trouble. Managing those few is sufficient."

Interview 2: What should teachers do during play activities?

Teacher A: "Observe children's performance. When conflicts occur, we should first observe and then decide whether to intervene."

Teacher B: "Definitely observe the children."

Interview 3: How do you handle conflicts between children?

Teacher A: "Experts propose many methods, but they aren't always practical. Managing children requires authority. Gentleness doesn't work with our class—being firm makes them remember. We need to tailor solutions

based on what each child responds to.”

Teacher B: “Reason with them, but be stern. Otherwise, they won’t listen.”

5.1.2 Lack of scientific design in kindergarten environments

Creating an environment requires comprehensive consideration of spatial layout, area arrangement, and the selection of toys and materials. The physical environment and rational use of space significantly influence children’s daily behavior. In the observed kindergarten, corridor autonomous play is held weekly for senior children, leading to overcrowding in popular areas. Competition for space often results in physical collisions, highlighting the importance of adequate space.

5.2 Family influences

5.2.1 Parental perception of conflict and parenting styles

Parents’ words, actions, attitudes, and methods toward conflict serve as models for children to learn and imitate. Therefore, parents’ correct understanding and handling of conflicts positively influence children, helping them learn appropriate ways to respond to and resolve conflicts.

Based on Interview 4, Teacher A emphasized the importance of parents’ correct understanding of conflict. When parents demonstrate calmness, rationality, and problem-solving abilities, children observe and imitate these behaviors in their daily lives. Such parenting styles not only reduce conflicts but also help children develop emotional management and problem-solving skills.

Teacher B explained the impact of parenting styles on children’s conflict behaviors, further emphasizing the role of parental modeling.

In summary, parental perceptions of conflict and parenting styles significantly influence how children resolve peer conflicts.

Below are excerpts from the interviews:

Interview 4: Do you think families influence children’s conflict behaviors?

Teacher A: “Parents’ understanding of conflict is crucial. If parents handle conflicts correctly, children are more likely to adopt appropriate methods.”

Teacher B: “Parenting styles affect children. If parents calmly resolve problems, children will imitate them, reducing the likelihood of conflicts.”

5.2.2 Lack of parental agency in home-kindergarten collaboration

Some parents misunderstand the concept of home-kindergarten collaboration, overly relying on kindergartens and believing that teachers shoulder the primary responsibility for educating children.

Interview 5 revealed that both parents and teachers play essential roles in home-kindergarten collaboration, with parents being particularly important.

Interview 5: What factors adversely affect children’s conflict behaviors with peers?

Teacher A: “It’s related to families. There’s a saying online: ‘5 + 2 = 0.’ Five days of good habits learned in kindergarten can be undone by two days at home with parents—though this refers to some parents.”

Teacher B: “Many factors are involved, but families play a bigger role. Many parents think education is the teacher’s job, but parents are children’s first teachers. Their words and actions are crucial.”

5.3 Children’s cognitive and social skills

Senior kindergarten children are in the “egocentric” stage of cognitive development, where they prioritize their own perspectives and struggle to consider others’ viewpoints. In the first case study, when Cai Cai and Yuan Yuan competed for magnetic tiles, they focused solely on winning the toys rather than considering each other’s feelings.

As children grow, their social skills improve, and they tend to adopt positive strategies to resolve disputes. However, some children with weaker social skills may feel helpless in conflicts and resort to inappropriate or even violent methods. For example, observations showed that some children attempted to join peers’ games by 强行介入 (forcing their way in) rather than using appropriate strategies.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study selected children from the senior second class of Kindergarten D as research subjects and employed observation, interviews, and case study methods to conduct an in-depth investigation into peer conflict behaviors during autonomous play. Through data collection, analysis of interview outlines, and case studies, the research found that: differences in teachers’ perceptions of conflicts lead to divergent guidance approaches; the kindergarten’s environment lacks scientific design in its setup; parents vary in their understanding of conflicts and parenting styles, and fail to fully exercise their agency in home-kindergarten collaboration. In response to these findings, the following recommendations are proposed: teachers should enhance their professional competence to better guide children in resolving peer conflicts; classrooms should be designed more scientifically; parents should understand the universality of peer conflicts, avoid excessive intervention or solving problems on behalf of their children, serve as

role models, and emphasize the importance of home-kindergarten collaboration; children themselves should improve their cognitive abilities and undergo social skills training. It is hoped that this study will provide valuable insights and references for early childhood educators and parents.

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