

**Final Report on the Research Enhancement Program Grant:
Preschool Children's Peer Conflict and Related Teacher Management Strategies
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Teachers are asking for help in managing young children's peer conflict. There is an urgent need in the early care and education community for more information about conflict management because teachers have reported that preventing and responding to peer conflict, particularly physical conflict, is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching young children. This aspect of teaching contributes to teacher burnout and subsequent staff turnover, both of which have a deleterious impact on the quality of care and education experienced by the children. Additionally, young children need to learn ways of solving their disagreements in verbal, prosocial ways rather than by hurting each other. Solving conflict in a socially responsible manner is a life skill that children can build upon throughout their childhood and beyond. However, there are gaps in the research literature which prevent teachers and those who educate teachers from building a complete and accurate understanding of the dynamics of young children's peer conflicts which, in turn, inhibits the identification of related, effective teacher management strategies.

The goal of this exploratory study has been to address gaps identified in the literature regarding young children's peer conflict and the related strategies teachers use to manage children's conflict in early care and education classrooms. It is hoped, that by addressing these gaps, teachers of young children would have additional information about the dynamics of young children's conflicts and strategies found to be effective in helping children learn how to settle their conflicts in a nonviolent, prosocial manner.

The four gaps being addressed by this study are: 1) the influence of ethnicity and socioeconomic status on the dynamics (e.g., causes, conflict behaviors, outcomes) of young children's peer conflict, 2) the strategies teachers use to manage conflict in early childhood classrooms, 3) the reasoning teachers follow when deciding if, when, and how to intervene in preschoolers' peer conflicts, and 4) the factors which influence teachers' decisions about which conflict strategies to use with individual children. There is some evidence to show that the teachers' beliefs about teaching and caring for young children, and qualities of the teacher-child relationship may affect choice of management strategies.

Data related to the above identified gaps, gathered from interviews, observations, and questionnaires, are in the initial stages of being analyzed. The collection of the data for

this modest research project proved to be a much more complicated process than envisioned. It took the entire Fall 2004 semester to: 1) orient the 15 teachers, and their directors with the study, obtain the teachers' consent to participate, and obtain their permission to approach the parents of the children they teach with an invitation to participate in the study; 2) acquire parents consent forms for the 219 children who participated in the study; and 3) train the four graduate students working on the study on data collection procedures. The actual data collection process took the entire Spring 2005 semester.

The data that was gathered during Spring 2005 are summarized below:

- 75 hours of videotaped peer interaction of primarily low-income African-American and Hispanic preschool children
- 2 instruments completed by the teachers about each child's social development and the child's relationship with the teacher (A total of 400 plus questionnaires collected.)
- 1 20-minute teacher interview about choice of management strategies and 1 45-minute interview related to teachers' beliefs (A total of 16 hours plus of audiotaped interviews)
- 2 observation instruments collected per teacher (A total of 30 observations or over 40 hours of observation related to the quality of teacher-child interactions and the quality of the ECE classroom)
- 3 questionnaires from each teacher related to potential influences on teachers' conflict management strategies (A total of 45 questionnaires)
- 1 demographic form for each teacher and for most of the children (some parents did not complete the form) (A total of about 175 forms completed.)

Additionally, multiple hours were spent coordinating the data gathering activities of the seven members of the research team – four graduate students and three faculty members (two from Texas State University and one from the University of Texas at Austin).

We anticipate that from three to five papers based on the data gathered can be written and submitted for publication. Furthermore, the results of this research project will be discussed in external grant applications as preliminary findings needing additional study.