The Relationship of Teacher Behavior and Young Children's Social Interaction with Peers:
A Review of Research

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Abstract

Through a selective review of the research literature, this study explores the relationship of teacher behavior and children's social interaction with peers. The two resources of the empirical research literature are examined: observational & intervention(coaching) studies. First, the studies in each literature resource are introduced individually in terms of specific teacher behavior and its effects on, or relations to children's peer interaction. Taking the individual studies together, several issues, then are discussed. The issues include the intensity vs. the frequency of teacher behavior, the relationship of teacher behavior and thought process, changes in teacher behavior over time, teacher behavior with children of different peer status, adaptation of the coaching approach into the classroom, and so on. Implications for future research and for teaching practices are provided.

Key words: teacher behavior, peer interaction, observational studies, coaching studies, review of research

I. Introduction

Peers provide an important developmental context to children by serving many unique functions: provisions for emotional support, companionship, sense of belongings, social comparison, teaching social knowledge and skills, and so on (Hartup, 1983; Ladd & Asher, 1985). Nowadays, social interactions with peers are regarded more important than they were in the past due to societal changes. The increasing number of working mothers has resulted in earlier entry of young children into peer group settings (e.g., daycare centers, family care homes). Moreover, children today frequently participate in extracurricular activities with peers after school. Most of children, therefore, spend a considerable amount of time with peers throughout childhood (Asher & Coie, 1990). Having ample time and opportunities for social interaction with peers is necessary but not sufficient for children to have quality peer experiences. In fact, up-to-date research findings in the field have revealed serious developmental and adjustment problems

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derived from negative functions of peer interaction, such as peer pressure and peer rejection (Parker & Asher, 1987). Thus, adults should take an active role in ensuring children to have satisfactory experiences and relationships with peers. Especially, children's social contacts with peers during the early childhood are likely to bearranged and monitored by adults, and thus, to be influenced by adult behavior.

With regards to the relationship of adult behavior and children's peer interaction, there is unbalanced information. While there has been numerous empirical evidence on parental behavior on children's peer interaction (e.g., parenting & discipline styles, family process) (Parke & Ladd, 1992), evidence on teacher behavior has been rare. Perhaps, the most under-researched area in the field of peer relation may be teacher behavior with children's social interaction.

The role of teacher in promoting children's peer interaction has long been strongly emphasized. According to the teacher education literature (e.g., Katz & McClellan, 1997; Ramsey, 1991), teachers can and should contribute to children's positive peer interaction. Teachers are therefore encouraged to reflect on how their behaviors related to young children's peer interaction.

Regarding how teacher behavior is related to young children's peer interaction, File (1993) suggests two resources of information. One source is the descriptions of recommended teaching practices found in textbooks, teaching manuals, and journals. The other source is observations of what teachers are doing in the classroom in terms of young children's peer interaction.

With regard to the first source of information, there are numerous books and articles devoted to this subject. The second source of information is very limited in that most observational studies have been conducted in integrated programs of children with and without disabilities. As mentioned previously, there are little hard data evidence on the relationship between teacher behavior and children's peer interaction in non-integrated classrooms. Besides the two resources suggested by File (1993), information on teacher behavior in relation to children's peer interaction can be found in the intervention literature on the coaching approach. Unlike observational studies, teacher behavior appeared in the intervention studies is not naturally occurring, but prescribed by the researcher in order to help children with difficulties in interacting with peers. In most intervention studies, the classroom teacher has not served as the training agent. Fortunately, in some studies in which 'the coaching approach' was used, the teacher implemented intervention procedures. In the coaching approach, the teacher acted as a coach who taught social skills through verbal instruction and consulted children throughout the entire intervention process. Thus, examining the teacher-implemented coaching procedures may illuminate how teacher behavior affects children's social interaction with peers.

As mentioned above, there is very little empirical research on the relationship of teacher behavior and children's peer interaction in regular (i.e., non-integrated) classrooms. Nevertheless, examining the two separate sources of literature may shed light on this

subject: (1) observational studies including both natural and experimental contexts, and (2) intervention(coaching) literature.

For the review, selected are solely empirical studies which directly focus on teacher behavior in relation with peer interaction of typically developing young children. The purpose of this study is to review these two sources of literature, and to discuss related issues in terms of specific teacher behavior with children's peer interaction.

II. Observational Studies

A. Review

Although several studies about daycare effects on children's social development have investigated teacher factors, overall these studies have tended to focus more on the child's length of daycare attendance, the group size, and the teacher-child ratio rather than on teacher behavior in itself (e.g., Clark-Stewart, 1984 & 1989; Galluzzo, Matheson, Moore, & Howes, 1988; Howes, Phillips, & Whitebrook, 1992; Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987). General, rather than specific, teacher qualities or behaviors (e.g., security, responsiveness, verbalization) were examined in these studies.

More direct attention to the relationship of teacher behavior to children's peer interaction was provided in the following six studies[2]: Anderson (1939); Thompson (1944); Innocenti et al. (1986); McLean (1991); Kim & Lee (1997); and Moon (2000). Since to the author's knowledge these are the only published empirical studies explaining how teacher behaviors are related to children's peer interaction, somewhat detailed review of research procedures and findings of these studies will be provided. Based on the notion of "circular behavior," Anderson (1939) investigated whether teachers' socially integrative and dominative behaviors induced the same set of behaviors in kindergarten children. Integrative behavior refers to flexibility, the ability to find the commonality among different views, and the inclination to consider the wishes of another in working toward a goal. Dominative behavior is defined as a rigidity of responses to stifle difference in others and the attempt to impose one's will on others. Twenty-three categories of teacher's integrative and dominative behaviors were developed by Anderson (1939) based on observations of teacher behavior. Dominative behaviors involved direct refusal, determining the details of activities or acts for the child, and relocating, reseating, or placing children in different relation or to property. In contrast, integrative teacher behaviors included approval, sympathy, questioning regarding a child's interest, and participating in joint activities with children.

Forty-nine children and two teacher from three different kindergarten classes in two school buildings were studied. Each child's behavior with another paired child in an experimental play situation was observed and then related to contacts with his/her teacher. Adopted from a previous study with preschool children (Anderson, 1937),

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2) Although the studies of Anderson(1939) and of Thompson(1944) are quite old, they are cited here to show there are truly very few studies up-to-date on this topics.

categories of child's dominative behavior included forceful attempts to secure materials, verbal commands to direct a peer's behavior, criticizing or reproving a peer, and so on. On the other hand, integrative behavior categories included showing common purpose by word or action, a verbal request or suggestion to direct a companion's behavior or to secure materials, complying with a request, and setting a pattern which a peer imitated.

The results ofAnderson's complex study indicated thattheteachers' dominative contacts with the children outnumbered their integrative ones. In addition, the child most frequently dominated in the classroom was found to be most frequently dominating of his peer in the experimental play situation. Thus, it was generally supported that higher levels of dominative behavior in teachers were associated with high domination in children. Similarly, it was suggested that the more a teacher works with a child in an integrative manner, the more the child will seek help, answer spontaneously, and volunteer social contributions.

Contrary to Anderson's (1939) naturalistic observational study of teacher behavior, an experimental study on the effects of teacher guidance styles on children's social development was conducted by Thompson (1944). At the beginning of the school year, twenty-three 4-year-old children at a laboratory school were divided into two experimental groups, containing no significant initial differences in chronological age, IQ, social and emotional development, or parental SES. Both groups were taught by the same teachers using the same play materials and attended school for the same eight-month period. However, the teachers were instructed to adopt different guidance styles, except for being responsive to children's physical safety. With Group A, the teachers were asked to be impersonal and to give information or help only upon the children's specific request. In Group B, the teachers were instructed to develop a personal friendship with each child. The teachers in group B also were asked to help each individual child in relating with peers and in using play materials according to each child' needs. These teachers' aim was to facilitate the child's own thinking and self-control in social situations.

An observational measure was developed to assess the impact of the types and amounts of teacher-child and child-child contacts. Contacts by both teachers and peers were distinguished as either being "extensive" or "restrictive."

Observations of the children's behavior indicated significant differences between the two groups. Group B, with the greater and more friendly teacher involvement, showed greater social participation and leadership and was more ascendant and constructive. In addition, children in Group B received more extensive teacher contacts and fewer restrictive peer contacts. The children in Group B were less rejected, refused or ignored, hit or shoved, persecuted, and threatened by their peers.

There were no significant differences between the two group in receiving restrictive teacher contacts (i.e., being ascendant to stop a child's behavior, being stern, and ignoring child's approach) and extensive peer contacts(i.e., giving information, help, and

materials, complying with other peers' requests, and developing social situations with other peers). In short, Thompson's (1994) study claimed that extensive teacher guidance promoted children's social behavior with peers, such as social participation and leadership, and reduced peer rejection and aggression.

While teachers' personal guidance styles were found to have significant differences on preschool children's social behavior and peer interaction, teacher presence/absence was found to be a critical factor in the study by Innocenti and his colleagues (1986). These researchers investigated relations between children's peer interaction and three setting events(teacher behavior, material use, and peer presence) in four classroom activity contexts (free play, snack/lunch, individual choice activity, and large group activity) at six different schools. Based on teacher ranking the children in the five lowest and five highest peer interaction levels were observed for a three-month period. Peer interaction was defined as being positive or negative, or continuous (i.e., an interaction in one interval continues into subsequent intervals). Positive and negative interaction also was defined as either initiation or reciprocation (in response to peer initiation). Four categories of teacher behavior were observed: directing non-peer associated behaviors of a group; directing on-peer associated behaviors of an individual child; prompting and praising of peer interaction; and no presence. Material use was categorized as being in proximity, orientation to peers(eye contact between the subject and a peer in proximity) or alone.

It was found that only one setting variable, teacher behavior, had a clear relation to children's peer interaction. Since negative interaction (both initiation and reciprocation) averaged less than 1% during the observation period, peer interaction referred to mostly positive, in all contexts peer interaction mainly occurred when no teacher was present; special direct teacher attention to an individual child was found to reduce peer interaction by that child. in addition, teacher prompting and praising of peer interaction were rarely observed in any activity context.

Two points should be considered with regard to the study by Innocenti and his colleagues (1986). First, this study took into account only four categories of teacher behaviors that might affect children's peer interaction. There are, however many other types of teacher facilitating behaviors, such as coaching, modeling, curriculum provisions, and structuring the physical environment. Unfortunately, these researchers did not provide information about why they categorized teacher behaviors as they did. Second, though high and low peer interactors were selected for the study, no analysis was reported regarding differential peer interaction status. As Innocenti and his colleagues point out ranking all children according to their total interaction rates by context rendered the high/low distinction meaningless. Rankings of individual children were found to vary among the six schools and also by classroom activity contexts. It would be interesting to know the effects of teacher behavior on children with differential peer interaction status and the reasons for the variabilities among schools as well as across activity contexts.

Although the studies reviewed above focused on teacher behavior in relation to children's social behavior with peers, missing in these studies were teacher beliefs, values. and intentions, and their relations to teacher behavior. McLean (1991) conjectures that a teacher's individual beliefs about self as teacher and personal perceptions of the teacher role both might guide and allow interpretation of his/her classroom action. In her study, McLean explored teacher involvement in peer interaction in the light of the individual teacher's "image of self as teacher."

Unlike the studies reviewed above, McLean's (1991) study used a qualitative case study method. Four experienced teachers from different preschool and daycare settings participated in the study. Each teacher was observed for one month regarding her involvement in children's peer interaction. Each teacher also was interviewed 4 to 5 times (for a total of 6-7 hours) regarding observational events as well as personal and professional life experiences, such as individual biographies and views about teaching and children. Through observations and interviews, salient themes and patterns of teacher beliefs and involvement in peer interaction were identified for each teacher and for the teachers as a group. In addition, connections between the teachers' self-images and observed teacher involvement were explored.

Across the teachers, teacher behaviors were grouped into six areas: (1) resolving peer conflict; (2) helping children gain group entry; (3) involvement in children's dramatic play; (4) use of rules; (5) arrangement of the physical environment to support peer interaction; and (6) developing a sense of community.

Large differences were found in the extent and nature of teacher behavior in these six areas because of the teachers' individual self-images as teacher (beliefs about children and teaching and perceptions of the current needs of the children). For example one teacher, who considered herself as the classroom organizer, developed rules for children that effectively limited the number of peer conflicts. "Being unhelpful" was treated as a rule violation and was punished in her classroom. Another teacher, who believed in the importance of acquiring conflict resolution skills, devoted a large amount of time to this skill, allowing children to retain ownership of their problems. Despite valuing children's acquisition of conflict resolution skills, a third teacher usually tried to terminate peer conflicts by pronouncing a resolution. She focused on helping children gain entry to play groups because of her own childhood experience of failure. The fourth teacher, who described herself as "a burn-out", tried to minimize demands on herself, avoiding or downplaying peer conflict situations.

Perhaps the most important interpretation by McLean (1991) was that the teachers in her study attempted to maintain a balance between the demands of the here and now, and the promotion of peer interaction. The former, however, was three of the four teachers' more fundamental concern. If the physical safety and psychological well-being of the children and the teachers were met, then the promotion of social interaction with peers seemed to become the dominant concern.

Above all, McLean's (1991) study showed a strong impact of teachers' self-images on

their involvement in peer interaction. In addition, not only personal(image of self as teacher), but also situational and individual child factors were noted as affecting the teachers' attempts to help children's peer interaction.

Using a qualitative approach, Moon (2000) investigated the goals and teaching strategies of three experience preschool teachers regarding peer interaction facilitation. Data were collected during one year in a full day program for 4-year-old children. Unlike McLean's (1991) study, the commonalities, rather than differences, among the teachers were analyzed. The teachers were found to have goals for fostering social autonomy and social sensitivity in children. They also varied their goal priorities in different activity contexts in order to balance the children's social vs. solitary time as well as to coordinate promotion of peer interaction and classroom management. In particular, Moon (2000) examined the processes of teacher mediation of children's peer conflicts. In mediating processes, the teachers' verbal instructional behavior enhanced children's generation of conflict resolution strategies. The teachers' modeling and positive reinforcement were related to children's prosocial behaviors with peers.

As the only empirical domestic study on teacher mediation of 5-year-old children's peer conflict was conducted by Kim & Lee (1997). Teacher mediation processes were unfold in a similar way of those found in Moon's(2000) study including emotional support, clarification of conflict situation, and generation of conflict resolution. According to the issues of peer conflicts, the teachers in the study employed a variety of mediating strategies such as, providing alternatives, applying rules, and modeling. It was notable that children rarely suggested alternatives by themselves when the teachers asked children open-ended questions like 'what can you do?' or 'what do you think?' This may hint that teachers need to provide timely children with adequate ideas and clues for conflict resolution.

B. Discussion

Taking all six studies reviewed above into consideration, several issues warrant attention. First, whileThompson's (1994) study was an experimental observational study, the others were naturalistic observational studies. That is, the teachers in Thompson's study were given certain roles to play(i.e., being impersonal vs. friendly toward children)to assess the effectiveness of different teaching styles, whereas in the other studies teachers' actual behavior was the focus at hand. Thompson's experiment sought to control teachers' behavior for an entire school year, and such controls may lead one to question some of the results, particularly whether teachers always try to be ethical by trying "what is best" for children.

Second, besides McLean (1991) and Moon (2000), all the authors attempted to measure only frequency, not degree, intensity, or relative strength of teacher behavior. For example, a teacher's sternness in response to a child's hitting other and to a child's tattling is not likely to be the same. For a more refined analysis of teacher behaviors,

this difference needs to be considered.

Third, the finding of Innocenti et al. (1986) that teacher presence depressed children's peer interaction highlights the importance of unobtrusive teacher behavior. Teachers telling children what to do, such as "You need to use words" or "You have to take a turn" may hamper the development of children's peer interactive skills because such directed intervention is likely to take away children's ownership of thinking (File, 1993). Thus, unobtrusive teacher behaviors and children's tolerance level of teacher obtrusiveness need to be identified.

Fourth, there are inconsistent research findings among the studies reviewed on the use of teacher prompting and praising of peer interaction. While some teachers in the studies of McLean (1991), Kim & Lee (1997), and Moon (2000) were found to make use of prompting and praising in their practice, the teachers in Innocenti et. al.'s (1986) study were not. Were teachers in Innocenti et. al's (1986) study not skillful at translating their knowledge into practice? Did teachers believe that they should not be involved in children's peer interaction? More studies on teacher thought processes and teacher behavioral repertories need to further investigate this issue.

Fifth, except for Thompson's (1944) and Moon's (2000), all the studies were conducted for relatively short periods of time. As children mature socially and as teachers come to know them better, teacher behaviors is likely to change. It would be interesting to know whether there were changes in teacher behavior over an entire school year.

Sixth, teacher behaviors toward children with social difficulties(peer rejection and neglect) were notexplored in these studies. Is there anydifference in teachers' treatment and guidance of non-rejected versus rejected children? If there is, how and why are they different? According to Scarlett (1980), teachers in his study reported that they did not treat and interact with social isolates and non-social isolates differently. Reflecting upon the possibilities that children with social difficulties may need special help from their teachers, it would be particularly informative to know about teacher behaviors in relation to children with social difficulties.

III. Intervention Studies

A. Review

As mentioned earlier, the coaching approach is an effective way of promoting children's social interaction with peers. The coaching procedures consist of verbal instruction and discussion, behavioral rehearsal, and self-monitoring and evaluation. Other additional methods, such as modeling or reinforcement, are sometimes used in combination with in the coaching approach.

In most intervention studies for preschool children through adolescents, the classroom teacher has rarely served as the training agent. There are four studies in which the classroom teacher implemented intervention procedures to foster peer social skills in

preschool and kindergarten children: Zahavi & Asher (1978); White & Poteat (1983); Lee (1992); and Chung (1995).

In Zahavi and Asher's (1978) study, for example, a daycare teacher adopted verbal instruction for aggressive preschool children. Based on behavioral observation, eight selected boys were taught three social rules and concepts : 1) the harmfulness of aggression; 2) the ineffectiveness of aggression as a social strategy; and 3) prosocial alternatives to conflict resolution. Although she was given a training script by the researchers, the teacher alone instructed each child individually through informal conversation. Results from time-lagged design indicated that children's aggressive behaviors decreased and positive behaviors increased due to teacher instruction. Furthermore, it was found that the teacher's verbal instructions had a lasting effect on the children's changes over time.

Particularly noteworthy are speculations by Zahavi and Asher (1978) regarding the effectiveness of the provision of classroom rules. They provided some explanations for why the provision of rules in their study was effective while the provision of teacher-stated classroom rules (e.g., "No hitting at school") was not likely to be effective. Contrary to the typical method of stating rules to the entire class, in Zahavi and Asher's (1978) study, rules were presented to each child individually. Moreover, the teacher in the study tried to be inductive in formulating the rules by listening to each child's ideas as rules were presented. These factors might have enabled the teacher to help the children increase their attention and commitment to the rules. These speculations may have implications for typical classroom rules designed by teachers.

The success of teacher intervention also was found with kindergarten children in a study by White and Poteat (1983). Based on teacher judgment and behavioral observation, four withdrawn children (two boys and two girls) were selected for the study. Without singling out the selected children, the teacher involved the entire class in discussing and practicing participation, cooperation, communication, and validation of skills drawn from Oden and Asher's (1977) study. The intervention consisted of consultation with a school psychologist and teacher-directed training. An overall improvement in three children's behavior (One boy was dropped from the study because the pretest behavioral observation did not support the teacher's selection) was noted: increases in physical and verbal approaches to peers, helpful suggestions, smiles, sharing, and cooperating; and decreases in being off-task, spending time alone, and daydreaming. In addition, the teacher reported behavioral gains for the majority of the class, and less aggression in several children.

There are two domestic intervention studies conducted by a classroom teacher in collaboration with a researcher. In Lee's (1992) study, low-peer-status children trained by the teacher in peer tutoring or peer collaboration programs showed overall improvements in acquiring social skill concepts and behaviors. The low-peer-status children, individually or as a small group, were taught sixteen social skills for 10 weeks. Lee's (1992) study demonstrated a possibility that a teacher can serve as a competent

training agent by integrating an intervention program inro the regular curriculum and daily classroom activities and routines.

In her study, Chung (1995) also enabled the classroom teacher to implement a peer-mediated intervention program for low-peer-status preschool children.Theprogram contents included a variety social skills such as approaching, explaining, helping, cooperating skills. The children who received peer-mediated training by the teacher improved in their social skill concepts, and had a more specific and richer repertoire of coping behaviors with peers. The low-peer-status children who interacted with the trained children increased remarkably in their approaching behaviors toward peers.

B. Discussion

Although classroom teachers have rarely served as training agents in intervention studies, the potential effectiveness of teacher implementation or adaptation of coaching programs has been suggested. All the studies reviewed above showed that a teacher can successfully conduct social skills training in the course of daily classroom events. According to Ladd and Asher (1985), there are similarities between the coaching approach and teachers' intervention strategies for children with peer difficulties in terms of content(e.g., prosocial skills) and procedures (e.g, providing peer activities or arranging peer partners) to improve these skills.

In the same vein, Mize (1987) points out the advantages and necessities of teachers' adapting the coaching program. Teachers, compared to researchers, are considered to have better opportunities to provide children with individualized coaching and to help children generalize their learned skills in the classroom.

Teachers also may and should take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to facilitate peer interaction. Furthermore, Mize highlights the potential of the coaching program for use as a classroom management tool because it addresses underlying sources and problems by focusing on teaching children appropriate social skills rather than merely seeking to eliminate inappropriate behaviors.

Above all, Oden (1986) and Mize and Ladd (1990) suggest that both children with and without social difficulties, early social skills training needs to be an ongoing part of a curriculum for primary school and preschool children. Although teachers help children with social difficulties through the use of various strategies, their action tends to be more or less incidental and reactive rather than systematic and proactive. By reflecting on their teaching styles and individual children's needs and abilities, teachers should be able to adapt and integrate intervention programs into daily classroom activities and routines.

Unfortunately, there are very few studies available at current status regarding teacher adaptation of coaching programs. Lee (1992) provides an excellent case of adapting coaching programs. Both Lee (1992) and Chung (1995) combined coaching with peer collaboration and peer mediation, and had a flexibility in intervention schedule.

Especially, Lee (1992) employed a range of fun and interesting activities as well as props to teach social skill concepts to children. Further research needs to explore such adaptation processes by understanding teachers' decision-making on the coaching content, procedures, schedule, and medium (e.g., puppets and stories). In addition, it is necessary to document the overall effects of teacher intervention, such as on changes in children's social skills, peer status, and the classroom climate.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The observational and the intervention studies reviewed here reveals that teacher behavior is closely related to children's social interaction with peers. Socially integrative and extensive teacher behavior elicits and fosters children's positive social behaviors with peers, and reduces peer rejection and aggression. Especially, teacher's verbal instructional behavior enhances children's ability to generate peer conflict resolution strategies. Teacher modeling and positive reinforcement are related to children's prosocial behaviors. To the contrary, dominant teacher behavior is related to children's control of peers and obtrusive teacher behavior tends to extinguish children's sustained peer interaction.

Not surprisingly, teacher behavior related to children's peer interaction found in the empirical research is highly consistent with teaching guidelines and strategies for children's peer interaction recommended in the teacher education literature. A key characteristic of teacher behavior with children's peer interaction advocated across different sources of the literature (i.e., observational and intervention studies as well as teacher education literature) is the avoidance of heavy assistance for children's peer interaction. Thus, the teacher needs to be aware of and reflect on his / her behavior as well as to attend to children's needs in their social interaction.

Due to a paucity of available empirical research, this study has several limitations, such as sorting out teacher behavior with and without intention to influence children's peer interaction; categorizing teacher behavior by important issues of peer interaction (e.g., peer conflict, close friendship, and group acceptance); identifying teacher behavior with peer interaction of children at different age levels; comparing relative effectiveness of teacher behavior on individual children as well as in various social situations; identifying cultural variations in teacher behavior with children's peer interaction. These limitations invite future research and more empirical studies are especially in need.

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