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EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

RELATED TO PROMOTING CHILDREN'S CONFLICT RESOLUTION

IN CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOMS:

A STUDY OF TWO TEACHERS

A Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:
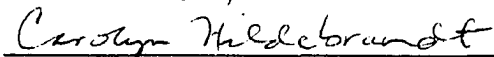
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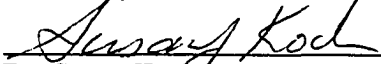
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May 1996

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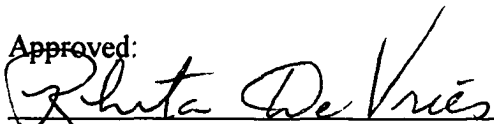An Abstract of a Dissertation
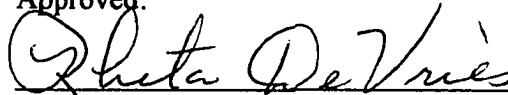
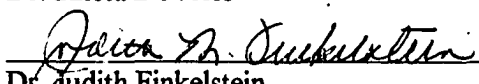Submitted

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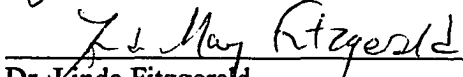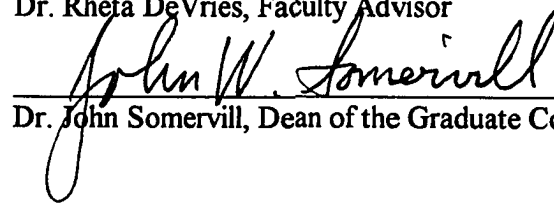
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Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The study involved six weeks of classroom observations and in-depth interviews with two teachers, kindergarten and first grade, who are currently engaging in an on-going process of implementing constructivist education in a public school in Missouri and whose teaching practices are considered to be exemplary. The purpose of the study was twofold: (a) to describe and analyze the teachers' practical approaches in promoting children's conflict resolution in the classrooms and (b) to examine how the teachers' beliefs and practices related to conflict resolution reflect the theoretical framework of the constructivist program.

The results of the data collection were analyzed and presented according to the following four aspects: (a) characteristics of teacher-initiated and solicited interventions in children's conflict situations, (b) characteristics of teachers' mediations, (c) teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution in the classroom, and (d) teachers' approaches to creating a classroom environment for promoting children's conflict resolution.

The study found that the teachers initiated interventions only under certain conditions. In their responses to children's solicitations for intervention, the teachers effectively promoted the children's abilities to solve their conflicts by themselves. The study also identified the constructivist teachers' characteristics that were guided by underlying aims of mediating children's conflicts: to teach children practical strategies to manage conflicts, to foster positive attitudes toward solving interpersonal conflicts in children, and to promote the development of children's interpersonal understanding.

The teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution were consistent with the theoretical approach of constructivist education and were reflected in their classroom practices: The teachers integrated conflict resolution as an essential part of the curriculum and fostered the children's abilities to manage conflicts through various experiences in the classroom.

The study also identified and analyzed the teachers' efforts to create a classroom environment that were closely tied to promoting children's conflict resolution according to three features: (a) providing and using the peace chairs, (b) involving children in making classroom decisions and rules, and (c) establishing a community in which the children and the teacher build close connections by sharing experiences and, at the same time, freely exchange their points of view and respect different ideas.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices related to promoting children's conflict resolution in constructivist classrooms. This qualitative study involved classroom observations and in-depth interviews with two teachers who are currently engaging in an on-going process of implementing constructivist 'education and whose teaching practices are considered to be exemplary. The purpose of the study was twofold: to describe and analyze the teachers' practical approaches to children's conflict resolution in the classrooms, and to examine the teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution in relation to the theoretical framework of the constructivist program.

Overview

As a response to increasing violence in schools and the larger society, conflict resolution education has been widely integrated into curricula and developed as school-based programs (Koch, 1993; Williams, 1991). The National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) estimates that more than 5,000 schools nationwide currently offer conflict resolution programs (Willis, 1993). In this rapidly growing trend, researchers and educators are claiming that teaching students the attitudes, knowledge and skills to manage conflicts constructively is essential for preparing them to live in as well as to create a peaceful world (Deutsch, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Conflict resolution has also become a part of early childhood curricula that emphasize the importance of

guiding young children to interact positively with others, especially peers. Fostering the

child's ability to cope with interpersonal conflicts is often considered one of the objectives

in the social domain of curriculum (Katz & McClellan, 1991; Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, &

Soderman, 1993). It is also included in discussion of various issues such as classroom

discipline, problem-solving skills training, and peace education.

<center>Statement of the Problem</center>

Since the introduction of the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices

by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Bredekamp,

1987), early childhood curricula in general are becoming more grounded in the knowledge

base which reflects the cognitive-developmental, constructivist approach to learning

(Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Caruso, Dunn, & File, 1992; Jipson, 1991). This

particular theoretical orientation has inspired distinct approaches to promoting young

children's conflict resolution that are contrary to the traditional behaviorist approach. In

the traditional approach, children's abilities to manage conflicts are defined and assessed in

terms of observable skills and behaviors and taught through direct instruction. The

cognitive-developmental view, in contrast, emphasizes that young children's

understanding of interpersonal situations is qualitatively different from that of older

children and adults and proceeds through developmental stages. It also stresses that

children develop their knowledge and abilities to manage conflicts through active

interactions with other people. From this approach, researchers suggest that the teacher

be able to understand and assess the developmental nature of young children's reasoning

in conflict situations (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992b; DeVries & Zan, 1994; Ramsey, 1991), create a classroom environment in which children interact freely with others (Collins & Hatch, 1992; Edwards, 1992; Katz & McClellan, 1991), and guide children in the direction of solving their own interpersonal problems (Bredekamp, 1987). DeVries and Zan (1994) further identified constructivist teaching principles in children's conflict situations.

Researchers have reported positive effects of the constructivist approach on children's interpersonal understanding and conflict resolution. A study by DeVries, Haney and Zan (1991) contrasted teacher-child interactions in a constructivist kindergarten classroom with a behaviorist classroom and an eclectic classroom, and a study by DeVries, Reese-Learned, and Morgan (1991) compared children's interpersonal negotiation strategies in conflict situations in those three classrooms. They found that in the constructivist classroom, where the teacher actively promoted conflict resolution, the children showed more advanced interpersonal understanding and resolved about twice as many of their conflicts in a game situation as children in other classrooms. However, the children were assessed outside the classroom, and the study of teacher was limited to observations of one constructivist classroom for two days. Therefore, more elaborate observational study in classrooms is needed to provide information on how successful constructivist teachers promote children's development and practical conflict resolution abilities.

In order to acquire more understanding of effective constructivist teaching related to promoting children's conflict resolution, the study reported here focuses on teachers' beliefs as well as their teaching behaviors. Teaching practices, as some researchers emphasize, cannot be evaluated solely by teachers' observable behaviors, but significant differences in teaching exist at the level of individual teacher's beliefs, values, and principles that guide their educational decisions and practices in classrooms (Bussis, Chittenden, & Amarel, 1976; Richardson, 1990; Yonemura, 1986). In the process of implementing a theoretical approach in classrooms, teachers' implicit beliefs are not necessarily consistent with the theoretical perspective they explicitly espouse (Caruso et al., 1992; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Kontos & Dunn, 1993; Verma & Peters, 1975). Implementation of constructivist education thus often involves processes in which teachers consciously examine their beliefs and reconstruct their ways of thinking about teaching practices based on the new set of assumptions about children's development and learning. More specifically, becoming an effective constructivist teacher requires development of the teacher's ability to connect theory and practice, that is, to define classroom practices that are consistent with and supported by the theoretical framework of constructivist education (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990). To advance our knowledge about constructivist teaching related to conflict resolution, the study reported here examines teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution in the classroom and how successful constructivist teachers link theory and teaching practices in their thinking.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions.

1. What are the general characteristics of teachers' interventions in children's peer conflicts in constructivist classrooms? What beliefs guide these interventions? Specifically,

   a. When and how do teachers initiate intervention in children's peer conflicts?

   b. How do teachers respond to children's solicitations for intervention?

   c. How do teachers encourage children to resolve conflicts by themselves?

   d. How do teachers view their role in guiding children to resolve their own conflicts?

2. What are the characteristics of teachers' mediations in children's conflict situations? What beliefs guide these mediations? Specifically,

   a. How do teachers mediate and facilitate children's conflict resolution processes?

   b. Do teachers demonstrate the principles of constructivist teaching in promoting conflict resolution?

   c. What are the teachers' aims in mediations?

3. What are teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution in the classroom? How are these reflected in their teaching practices? Specifically,

   a. How do teachers view the developmental nature of children's conflict resolution abilities?

b. What do teachers believe children are learning through experiences of resolving interpersonal conflicts?

c. To what extent do teachers value conflict and its resolution in relation to children's whole development?

4. What are teachers' efforts to create a classroom environment to promote children's conflict resolution? What are their beliefs? Specifically,

a. How do they use group activities for promoting children's conflict resolution?

b. How do they view the role of the teacher in creating a classroom atmosphere for promoting conflict resolution?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter consists of four main sections. In the first section, the current status of conflict resolution education in the field of early childhood education is summarized. The discussion here focuses on the recent emphasis on development of social competence in early childhood curricula, violence prevention programs and young children, and educational implications of recent research on young children's conflicts. In the second section, the theoretical differences between two educational paradigms, the cultural-transmission and the cognitive-developmental views, are examined in relation to approaches to conflict resolution in early childhood programs and curricula. In the third section, the constructivist approach to promoting young children's conflict resolution in the classroom is examined in comparison with various other practical approaches that are all considered educational applications of the cognitive-developmental view. Finally, the closing section addresses the issue of teachers' beliefs and practices in the process of implementing constructivist education.

Conflict Resolution in Early Childhood Education

As in the field of education in general, conflict resolution has gained considerable interest in early childhood education in the last decade. Teaching conflict resolution has become a part of curricula and a topic for research, and its educational significance has been widely acknowledged (Wheeler, 1994). Early childhood professionals who serve children from birth through age eight, however, have approached conflict resolution

education somewhat differently from those who are concerned with older students. That is, the discussion of conflict resolution in early childhood education has been tied closely to developmental theory and research and to educational practices that are congruent with the nature and process of young children's development.

Recent Emphasis on Development of Social Competence in Early Childhood Curricula

Early childhood professionals are recognizing the importance of facilitating children's social competence more than ever before on the basis of the knowledge that social development has a crucial and long-term effect on every aspect of a child's life. An accumulating body of research indicates that children who fail to establish positive peer relations are more likely to experience unsuccessful adjustment in school, indicated by academic failure and dropping out of school (Ladd, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987). Longitudinal studies also show that children with poor peer relations are at greater risk for adjustment difficulties including delinquency, emotional and mental illness, and job and marital problems when they reach adolescence and adulthood (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987).

In recent early childhood curricula, promoting children's social competence, namely the development of social understanding and skills that enable them to initiate and maintain positive and reciprocal relationships with peers, is identified as an essential educational objective (Katz & McClellan, 1991; Ramsey, 1991). Teaching children how to manage interpersonal conflicts is a crucial aspect in helping them relate to and interact with peers positively. Early childhood educators are acquiring better understanding of

young children's peer conflicts and making an effort to facilitate their conflict resolution abilities in the classrooms (Wheeler, 1994).

Since the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices by NAEYC (Bredekamp, 1987) have been widely accepted, social development has gained renewed attention as a core of the early childhood curriculum (Wittmer & Honig, 1994). One of the basic premises of developmentally appropriate practice is that all areas of the child's development--physical, emotional, social, and cognitive--are inseparable and should be promoted in an integrated manner. Advocates argue that an emphasis on cognitive development alone can be antithetical to children's development:

> Development in one dimension influences and is influenced by development in other dimensions. This premise is violated when schools place a great emphasis on ... cognitive development while minimizing other aspects of children's development. Because development cannot be neatly separated into parts, failure to attend to all aspects of an individual child's development is often the root cause of a child's failure in school. (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 63)

Developing social competence through positive peer relations is thus viewed as interrelated to every other aspect of the child's development and as providing a necessary condition for successful learning experiences at school.

For supporting children's positive peer interactions, recent early childhood curricula emphasize the provision of environment and opportunities. Based on the premise that young children learn through active exploration and interaction with other people as well as physical objects, early childhood advocates suggest that teachers provide opportunities in which children freely interact with peers and learn to associate with one another (Bredekamp, 1987; Collins & Hatch, 1992; Edwards, 1992). Conflict situations

are considered among the contexts in which children begin to learn about other people and interpersonal relationships. Through repeated experiences of confronting, negotiating, and resolving conflicts, young children begin to become aware of different needs and feelings and learn to use appropriate interpersonal strategies. Early childhood professionals are marking the educational value of conflict situations and advocating teaching practices which promote the development of children's understanding and skills for sustaining positive interactions and relationships with peers.

Violence Prevention Programs and Young Children

Along with the nationwide trend of implementing conflict resolution education in schools, early childhood professionals have been responding to the increasing rate of aggression and violence in children's lives (NAEYC, 1993). Some early childhood professionals are arguing that there is a great need for teaching conflict resolution because virtually all children in the United States are exposed to violence through media, toys and popular culture, if not through direct experience (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992a). NAEYC (1990; 1993) addressed the issue and stated that unnecessary exposure to violence through television programs, movies, and computer games potentially jeopardizes young children's healthy development and contributes to an increase in children's aggressive behaviors. Some researchers point out that the influence of media violence is already evident in early childhood classrooms: In a national survey by Carlsson-Paige and Levin (1991), 91% of the early childhood educators reported children in their classrooms being aggressive and violent in play and conflicts, and 89% observed the negative effect of

violent television programs on children's behavior and interpersonal relationships (also Levin, 1992).

Furthermore, Carlsson-Paige and Levin (1992a) argue that children are surrounded by a set of national values and pervasive culture where war is the chosen option in international conflicts. They write, "This cultural ethos contributes to an overall climate in which children are taught that violence is an acceptable--even exciting--way to resolve differences among people" (p. 4). Early childhood advocates claim that conflict resolution must be taught as a part of violence prevention program in order to help young children control aggression, develop abilities to negotiate and to resolve conflicts "peaceably," and learn certain values such as cooperation and respect for self and others (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1985; Levin, 1994; Slaby, Roedell, Arezzo, & Hendrix, 1995).

As more violence prevention and conflict resolution programs are implemented in schools throughout the nation, a peer mediation program where trained students help other students negotiate and resolve disputes appears to be the most popular and promising approach (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Stomfay-Stitz, 1994; Trevaskis, 1994). The aim of peer mediation programs is to help students, by giving them the responsibility to manage other students' conflicts as well as their own, become more able to monitor and regulate their own behavior, to judge what is appropriate given the situation and the perspective of the other person, and to modify how they behave accordingly instead of relying on authority figures to resolve their conflicts (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Burnett, 1992). After almost a decade of its implementation in schools, researchers are

beginning to report the positive effects of the program (Johnson, Johnson, & Dudley, 1992; Lam, 1989).

While kindergarten and primary grades are usually included in school-wide, K-12, peer mediation programs (Cheatham, 1989), the developmental appropriateness of training young children to be peer mediators has not been questioned. In these programs, children are trained to become mediators who help other students, by taking a third-party, neutral position, to negotiate constructive resolution; that is, "to define their conflict, exchange positions and proposals, view the situation from both perspectives, invent options for mutual gain, and reach a wise agreement" (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Burnett, 1992, p. 11). Although the format of training is modified for younger students (Johnson & Johnson, 1995), becoming a mediator requires advanced social understanding and skills which young children have not yet developed.

Developmental research has clearly indicated that young children are egocentric in nature; that is, they have limited ability to consider other perspectives and are just beginning to coordinate perspectives (Piaget, 1932/1965; Selman, 1980). Young children "tend to see problems in the immediate moment and in physical terms . . . from their own point of view" (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992a, p. 7). Or they have not yet developed sophisticated interpersonal communication competence and strategies necessary for negotiation. Indeed, early childhood educators' long-term goal is for children to resolve conflicts in a positive manner on their own. But young children who are just beginning to encounter other children, socially and cognitively, need careful guidance and prompt

intervention by a teacher who has a theoretical and practical knowledge about the nature and process of young children's development and who facilitates optimal learning opportunities for them. Thus, along with a school-wide program, early childhood educators must integrate violence prevention and conflict resolution education for young children in the classroom curricula to foster the gradual process of young children's development of conflict resolution abilities.

Research on Young Children's Conflicts and Teacher Intervention

In the traditional view, conflict is considered a negative phenomenon that results in destructive outcomes and is to be avoided (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991). In recent research, however, conflict is viewed as a social process that can be managed constructively and has potentially productive consequences (Deutsch, 1994). In child development studies, in particular, researchers are recognizing conflict as a central force in human development (e.g., Shantz & Hartup, 1992). In the last two decades, many empirical studies on young children's conflicts have been conducted and have provided important educational implications for early childhood professionals.

Definition of conflict. In recent developmental research, conflict is commonly defined as a state of resistance or opposition between two or more individuals or groups (e.g., Shantz, 1987). Researchers have also used the operational definition by Hay (1984): "when one person does something to which a second person objects" (p. 2). To clarify the definition, some researchers have made an effort to distinguish conflict from an individual's aggressive behavior (Shantz, 1987; Shantz & Hobart, 1989). Aggression is

defined as behavior aimed at hurting another person, verbally or physically (Parke & Slaby, 1983) but is "neither necessary nor sufficient to define a conflict state" (Shantz & Hobart, 1989, p. 74). That is, aggressive behavior of an individual child often triggers a conflict but does not always constitute a conflict. For example, if a child aggresses against another child and the second child ignores or yields and does not oppose, the state of conflict does not occur. Moreover, since some empirical studies indicate that young children's conflict rarely involves aggression (Caplan, Vespo, Pederson, & Hay, 1991; Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981; Hay & Ross, 1982), the child's aggressive behavior "must be viewed as but one among many tactics for winning a disagreement" (Shantz & Hartup, 1992, p. 4).

Developmental differences in young children's conflict. While many researchers are exploring structural features of conflict events, namely issues, strategies and outcomes, some of their findings reveal age differences in young children's conflicts. Shantz (1987), in a review of research, summarizes some developmental trends found in young children's conflict. Younger children, toddlers and preschoolers, are more often involved in conflicts about possession and use of objects and physical space (e.g., Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982; Hay, 1984). As children get older, they argue more about control of the "social environment," including conflicts over ideas, facts, or beliefs (e.g., Shantz & Shantz, 1985).

Some researchers have investigated verbal patterns of children's conflicts and differentiated simple and complex structures of argument (Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981;

Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982). By their definition, a simple argument is repetitious because

speakers add no new information to the argument. A complex argument, on the other

hand, involves elaborated moves such as acceptance, compromise, and supporting

argument that shows the speaker has some understanding of the other. Their studies

indicate that many of younger children's conflicts are a sequence of simple insistence

between the participants that tends to escalate and is less likely to lead to resolution.

Older children's conflicts are more complex and often conciliatory in that they elaborate

their arguments by reasoning and attempting to compromise.

Researchers also have identified age differences in strategies young children use to

pursue their goals. Ross and Conant (1992), in their research review, commented on a

developmental trend, stating that "the children's emerging abilities to converse and

negotiate . . . with age, become predominant in conflict and allow for a broad array of new

conflict strategies" (p. 163). Laursen and Hartup (1989), in their study of nursery school

children ages three to five, found that the younger children used disengagement and

conciliatory strategies in nonaggressive conflicts while the older children tended to

continue these arguments by insistence. Nevertheless, the findings are not consistent

because the researchers' conceptualizations of strategies are "limitless" (Shantz, 1987),

and the use of strategies is related to other components of conflict, such as the intensity of

the conflict (Laursen & Hartup, 1989).

While strategies in most research have been characterized by their manifest content

or their linguistic form (Shantz, 1987), Selman and his colleagues have constructed a

model based on research which identifies developmental levels of interpersonal strategies in conflict situations (Selman, 1981; Selman & Demorest, 1984; Selman & Schultz, 1988). In this model, interpersonal negotiation strategies, the means by which a child tries to meet personal needs in a conflict situation, are categorized into four levels that reflect the developmental capacity of the child's social understanding in the specific context. Selman (1980) conceptualized the development of social understanding as structural progress in social-perspective coordination ability, that is, "the child's capacity to differentiate and integrate the self's and other's points of view through an understanding of the relation between the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of each person" (Selman & Schultz, 1990, p. 6). The child's use of interpersonal negotiation strategies in a conflict situation fundamentally depends on his or her developmental ability to differentiate the perspective of self and others and to coordinate those different perspectives.

At Level 0, the perspectives of self and other are not differentiated, and the other person is viewed as an object. Because of lack of ability to take the other's perspective, a child uses impulsive and physical strategies to get what he or she wants.

At Level 1, the self's perspective is recognized as separate from the other's but those different perspectives are not considered simultaneously. Thus, a child uses unilateral negotiation strategies such as one-way commands or orders to get what he or she wants. Conversely, a child may also show automatic submission or obedience to the perceived demands of the other person.

At Level 2, a person takes a self-reflective perspective and coordinates the perspectives of both self and other. Being able to reflect upon the negotiation from a second-person perspective, negotiation strategies at this level involve psychologically based reciprocal, but self-interested, exchange such as verbal persuasion and making deals.

At Level 3, a person takes a third-person perspective and sees the needs and interests of both participants as a mutual goal. Since it is recognized that mutual understanding is necessary to maintain the relationship, negotiation strategies at this level involve collaborative processes that lead to mutually satisfactory resolutions.

This model provides a useful tool for early childhood educators for assessing children's interpersonal understanding in classrooms (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992a; Ramsey, 1991). Selman and his colleagues elaborated the developmental levels of social-perspective coordination, which were used to assess the cognitive competence in understanding social relations through reflective interviews, and developed a model for interpreting children's social understanding when it is manifested in a real situation. They argue that developmental levels of social reasoning fluctuate when a person is dealing with a real-life problem in a naturalistic setting because of the affective and motivational factors that are involved: "noncognitive factors have more potential to depress social performance by constraining the ability to use one's full social-cognitive capacities" (Selman & Schultz, 1990, p. 23). Thus, the levels of interpersonal negotiation strategies are not for assessing the child's highest competence level but can be used to understand young children's actual interpersonal actions in conflict situations that are "not only determined by the child's level

of cognitive capacity but also influenced by affective and situational factors" (DeVries &

Zan, 1994, p. 33).

Research on teacher intervention in children's conflicts. In early childhood

classrooms, seeking teacher intervention is one of the strategies young children use to

meet their goal in the conflict. Genishi and DiPaolo (1982) state that "in the classroom

situation where children and teacher share a small space, it is natural for the teacher to

attend to children's arguments" and children's "appealing to the teacher seems the sensible

and intelligent behavior" (p. 66). Bakeman and Brownlee (1982), in their study of object

conflicts among toddlers and preschoolers, found that 20% of conflicts in a toddler class

and 11% in a preschool class were intervened by the adults in the room. Killen (1989)

observed children of age three to five and found that the adults intervened in 38% of

conflicts in free-play settings.

The nature of teacher intervention in children's conflicts in a classroom, however,

has not been investigated systematically. Because many researchers are interested in

young children's abilities to manage conflicts themselves, they have observed children in

play settings where adults are absent (e.g., Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981; Hay & Ross,

1982). Some researchers examined the differences in children's conflicts with or without

an adult presence and concluded that children's conflicts are more aggressive when an

adult is present, and children take more responsibility for their interactions when an adult

is absent (Besevegis & Lore, 1983; Laursen & Hartup, 1989). Genishi and DiPaolo

(1982) made a similar conclusion about the relation between the teacher's availability and

the structure of children's arguments. They argued that the children in their study who had access to the teacher in the room showed more simple insistence in their conflicts while the children in the study by Eisenberg and Garvey (1981) who were in a dyadic laboratory setting without any adults were more likely to elaborate their arguments with the use of reasons. On the basis of the findings, some researchers have concluded that young children have the capability to resolve conflicts themselves (Hay, 1984; Killen & Turiel, 1991; Shantz, 1987) and recommended that teachers intervene as little as possible (Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982; Katz & McClellan, 1991).

A few naturalistic studies in classrooms examined teacher intervention in more detail. Killen (1989) and Killen and Turiel (1991) conducted an observational study in three different nursery schools and found that adults intervened most in children's conflict in free-play settings when physical harm was involved. More than half of the resolutions were adult-generated, especially for conflicts over social order and rules and acts of physical harm. They also found some differences in teacher interventions across the three nursery schools. Because the examination of the school differences was not the major purpose of the study, they only suggested that the smaller number of teacher interventions in one of the schools might have been related to the higher number of daily structured activities in the school.

In their comparison of three different kindergarten classrooms, DeVries, Haney, et al. (1991) and DeVries, Reese-Learned, et al. (1991) suggested that the teacher's approach to children's conflicts differed depending on the theoretical foundation of the

program and thus had impact on the children's development of conflict resolution abilities. They found that children from the constructivist classroom demonstrated greater interpersonal skill by resolving significantly more of their conflicts than children from the direct-instruction classroom and the eclectic classroom. Without adult help, the children in the constructivist classroom resolved 70% of their conflicts, the children in the eclectic classroom resolved 33%, and the children in the direct-instruction classroom resolved 40%. Although the sociomoral atmospheres, or the interpersonal relations that constitute a child's experience, of the three classrooms were compared through analysis of the teachers' interpersonal understanding throughout the school day, the study did not provide analysis of the teachers' interventions in children's conflict situations. More detailed research, using naturalistic observations in the classroom, is needed to study how constructivist teachers actually intervene in children's conflicts, how they promote the children's conflict resolution abilities, and how they guide the children to manage their conflicts by themselves.

<u>Early Childhood Programs and Curricula for Promoting Conflict Resolution:</u>

<u>The Theoretical Foundations</u>

While a myriad of materials, manuals, training programs, and curricular suggestions for teaching conflict resolution in early childhood classrooms have been introduced, the differences in their underlying theoretical bases are rarely examined and contrasted. Conceptions about conflict resolution in various programs and curricula are rooted in general theoretical orientations of programs that may be derived from very

different views of young children's development and of teaching. Programs for early education radically differ in educational objectives, teaching methods, and evaluation of educational experiences, which reflect their contrasting assumptions about the nature of the child and of development and learning (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990). Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) distinguished three educational paradigms that reflect different epistemological positions and psychological theories of development; romantic, cultural-transmission, and cognitive-developmental worldviews. They argued that it is crucial for educators to set goals and make educational decisions in light of awareness of those fundamental differences: "Without clear and rational educational goals, it becomes impossible to decide which educational programs achieve objectives of general import and which teach incidental facts and attitudes of dubious worth" (p. 449).

Over the years, the field of early childhood education has experienced transitions in the curriculum: Its theoretical orientation shifted from one educational paradigm to another (Jipson, 1991). During the 1960s, early childhood programs placed a great emphasis on teaching academic skills through direct instruction based on the cultural-transmission view of knowledge and learning. The advocacy of developmentally appropriate practices in 1987 by NAEYC was an effort to redefine early childhood curriculum from the cognitive-developmental view of teaching young children (Caruso et al., 1992; Jipson, 1991). This particular theoretical orientation has inspired some distinct approaches to promoting young children's conflict resolution in contrast to the traditional approaches that are supported by the cultural-transmission view.

Cultural-Transmission View

Programs that are theoretically in line with social skill training and behavioral modification assess children's social competence in behavioral terms and provide training sessions in which children are directly taught to master certain skills. These programs are based on the cultural-transmission view in which children are seen as passive learners who receive information coming from the outside. Early childhood programs and curricula reflecting this view often identify social skills that are necessary for young children to interact with others positively. Children are taught certain prosocial skills, such as listening to others, using nice talk, sharing, and waiting one's turn, in order to be able to manage interpersonal conflicts (e.g., McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984, 1990). According to Kohlberg and Mayer (1972), the cultural-transmission view, based on the empiricist philosophical position, defines the aim of education as the transmission of the knowledge, skills and social and moral rules that are fixed and given in the culture. In order to become a member of the society, children must learn a set of behaviors and internalize rules that are socially accepted. In this view, thus, "social growth is defined by the conformity of behavior to particular cultural standards such as honesty and industriousness" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 460).

Educational outcomes, in the cultural-transmission view, are evaluated by children's performances alone. Underlying this view is the associationistic-learning or environmental psychological theory of development which assumes that learning occurs as the result of the association of discrete stimuli with the child's responses, or when an

educator transmits knowledge, skills and rules, through the sense, to the child and the child in turn emits "correct" responses. To evaluate this learning process, programs reflecting this view require "a careful statement of desirable behavior patterns described in terms of specific responses" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 456). Thus, in cultural-transmission conflict resolution programs, the educational objective is narrowly defined in terms of observable behaviors that are determined by educators as representing desirable abilities, skills, values, and knowledge that are necessary to manage interpersonal conflicts.

In cultural-transmission programs, the educator's job is to instruct children to master and maintain desirable behaviors and skills and, at the same time, to decrease undesirable behaviors. Conflict resolution programs and curricula from the cultural-transmission view often provide training sessions or other educational experiences in which children can practice behaviors and skills. These are based on the assumption that the child's behavior can be "shaped by immediate repetition and elaboration of the correct response" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 456). For example, social skill training is designed to teach children to acquire new behaviors or skills by observing and copying a model, which can be a person or a puppet (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1990). Other classroom activities such as role play, dramatic play, and puppet play are also used to provide a context in which individual children can acquire or strengthen behaviors by imitating and rehearsing them.

Furthermore, the cultural-transmission view emphasizes the systematic use of reinforcement for teaching children to maintain newly learned skills and to transfer them to

other situations (Goldstein, 1988). The basic assumption is that the child's behavior can be shaped "by association with feedback and reward" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 456), that is, children will continue to display behaviors for which they get acknowledgment or attention. Early childhood programs and curricula reflecting this view recommend the use of external rewards, from stickers to effective praise, for eliciting desirable behaviors. At the same time, the use of punishment, such as time-out, and removing positive reinforcement, such as ignoring, are also recommended to eliminate undesirable behaviors (Essa, 1992).

Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) described the cultural-transmission view by using the metaphor of a machine: Children are seen as machines where transmitted knowledge and skills are "stored, retrieved, and recombined" (p. 456). The "input" from the environment is manipulated so that the child properly accumulates the information and emits "output" correctly. The following recommendation for teaching conflict resolution reflects this pervasive view of teaching and children's learning: "Problem and conflict resolution skills are not automatically part of the child's repertoire; they are skills that must be taught and practiced, just as counting or reading skills must be taught and practiced before they become automatic" (Crossor, 1992, p. 28).

Cognitive-Developmental View

While the cultural-transmission view reduces educational experiences to observable responses in reaction to observable stimuli or situations, the cognitive-developmental view "attempts to functionally coordinate the external meaning of the

child's experiences as behavior with its internal meaning as it appears to the observer" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 460). On the basis of the epistemological position of constructivist and interactionist theory, this view emphasizes that children actively organize events in their experiences through their modes of thinking rather than being passive learners. Kohlberg and Mayer use the metaphor that children are philosophers or scientist-poets who compose or invent meaning out of their experiences through discourse with the environment. In the social world, children are not merely internalizing given social knowledge and skills but actively constructing knowledge and competence "based upon the meaning children make of their own personal experiences and social interactions" (Selman & Schultz, 1990, p. 8).

The cognitive-developmental view recognizes that children's abilities to organize experiences, however, are limited because of their developmental capacities. This view, based on Piaget's theory (e.g., Piaget, 1970), emphasizes that young children experience the social world differently from older children and adults because their modes of thinking through which they connect the events in their experiences are qualitatively different. The basic assumption is that modes of thinking, or cognitive structures, form an invariant sequence of developmental stages, each being qualitatively different, and that an individual, in the course of development, progresses through the sequence to the higher stage. In the cognitive-developmental view, social competence of young children must be assessed in terms of their developmental capacities to understand events and relations in the social world, not by their demonstrations of adult-defined appropriate behaviors.

Conflict resolution education reflecting this view requires educators to grasp the underlying developmental levels in how the child responds to a conflict situation rather than pointing out the discrete, observable behaviors and skills. Selman's model of interpersonal negotiation strategies provides a framework for assessing structural differences in the child's developmental capacity to understand interpersonal relations as manifested in conflict situations.

In programs and curricula reflecting the cognitive-developmental view, thus, the educational objective is development, or progression through the sequential stages, from the egocentric stage where the perspectives of self and other are undifferentiated to the stage where the child is able to take the perspective of the other and coordinate it with his or her own. In this view, interpersonal conflict and its resolution play a vital role not only in children's social development but their intellectual development as well.

DeVries (1986) discussed the role of conflict in the child's development based on the distinction Piaget made between two forms of conflict, interindividual and intraindividual. To Piaget (1975/1985), intraindividual conflict is synonymous with disequilibrium in the process of development. While recognizing other important factors in development such as physical experiences and maturation, Piaget claimed that equilibration is one key factor to explain sequential development. Equilibration is an internal self-regulatory process in which thought-organization is differentiated and coordinated into a coherent whole and which "always tends toward increasing adaptation" (Kamii & DeVries, 1975, p. 374). When there is external perturbation involving negation

and contradiction, it creates disequilibrium that, in turn, results in reestablishment of equilibrium within the cognitive system. "Progress is produced by reequlibration that leads to new forms that are better than previous ones" (Piaget, 1975/1985, p. 11).

While his arguments focused on the role of intraindividual conflict, Piaget (1932/1965) also emphasized the importance of interindividual conflict in intellectual and sociomoral development. A group of researchers elaborated Piaget's theory and showed in their studies that a confrontation with another person's idea can be a source of progress in the child's cognitive development (Doise & Mugny, 1984; Perret-Clermont, 1980). DeVries (1986) argues that to the degree that interindividual conflict leads to intraindividual conflict and efforts to resolve the contradiction, conflict can provide a context for new intellectual adaptation.

While conflict resolution education from the cultural-transmission view aims at the child's accumulation of the desirable behaviors and elimination of the undesirable behaviors, the goal of guiding children in conflict situations, from the cognitive-developmental view, is to develop a mature thinker who is able to manage interpersonal conflicts with higher-level understanding and reasoning. In this sense, the cognitive-developmental approach "discards the traditional dichotomy of social versus intellectual development," and views cognitive and social development as "parallel aspects of the structural transformations that take place in development" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 457). Conflict and its resolution thus are placed at the core of curriculum that aims to

promote the development of self-regulation in both cognitive and sociomoral domains

(DeVries & Zan, 1994).

Furthermore, while the cultural-transmission view assumes the child's compliance

with the existing rules and values of the society, the cognitive-developmental view of

education, based on progressivism, emphasizes the importance of educating the child to

become a problem-solver who contributes to the development of the society. According

to Kohlberg and Mayer (1972), citing Dewey and McLellan (1895), education in this view

is "the work of supplying the conditions which will enable the psychical functions, as they

successively arise, to mature and pass into higher functions in the freest and fullest

manner" (p. 207). While the cultural-transmission view focuses on immediate change in

observable behaviors, the cognitive-developmental view is concerned with long-term

educational consequences for the child's development, that is, the eventual attainment of a

higher level of development. Thus, programs and curricula from this view emphasize the

long-term goal of guiding children in interpersonal conflict situations, that is, to promote

the gradual developmental process to higher-stage understanding of interpersonal relations

by providing an optimal learning environment.

Practical Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Constructivist Early Childhood Programs

While early childhood curricula during the last decade have moved theoretically in

the direction of the cognitive-developmental approach, there is tremendous variation in

educational practices that interpret and implement this theoretical perspective (Kostelnik,

1992). With their understanding of this new perspective on "What is knowledge?" and

"How does knowledge develop?," researchers and curriculum developers as well as

practitioners in early childhood education have tackled the question of "How do we

facilitate the development of knowledge?" Walsh (1991) points out that the theoretical

position is often misinterpreted in either a simplified or a biased version: Many

practitioners apply the notion of development as occurring in sequential stages into their

practices while neglecting the equilibration process as the primary mechanism for

developmental change, or with little attention to the constructivist view of children as

active learners. He also argues that numerous early childhood programs and curricula, all

inspired by Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory, have been developed through very

different translations of the theory and thus provide various educational practices,

including ones that are deeply embedded in the cultural-transmission tradition. (See also

DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990, for comparison of different translations of Piaget's

theory)

A constructivist program for early education was developed by Kamii and DeVries

(1975/1977) and DeVries and Zan (1994) with their efforts to bridge the gap between the

theory and educational practices. The program emphasizes the significance and the

necessity of defining educational practices with their precise link to the research-based

theory instead of describing them in abstract, general terms. The authors also have

conceptualized the broader educational implications derived from the cognitive-

developmental view as a whole instead of just translating parts of the theory and research

into practice. Their intention was to provide a coherent framework for defining

educational practices that are consistent with the psychological as well as the philosophical emphases of the cognitive-developmental view of development and learning. DeVries and Zan (1994) further provided the rationale for teaching practices that promote young children's conflict resolution abilities in the classrooms. In the following sections, practical approaches to conflict resolution recommended by the constructivist program are examined in comparison with other approaches that are also inspired by the cognitive-developmental theory and research. Three aspects of teaching practices are discussed: Teacher interventions in conflict situations, group activities for promoting children's conflict resolution abilities, and the classroom atmosphere that provides the necessary context.

Teacher Interventions in Children's Conflict Situations

When conflicts among children occur in a classroom, the educators' primary concern is how to intervene and what to promote in the situation. In some early childhood curricula, teacher intervention in conflict situations often involves teaching social problem-solving skills (Dinwiddie, 1994). The concept of social problem-solving skills is based on a body of research and training programs developed by Spivack and Shure (1974, 1976) and their colleagues. They conceptualized the cognitive processes that are involved in negotiating interpersonal problems and categorized them into social problem-solving skills including the ability to identify the problem, to generate alternative resolution strategies, and to anticipate and to evaluate the consequences of one's action. Based on their early research findings that indicated that children's social adjustment problems were related to

deficits in these skills, they further designed an intervention program to develop young children's social problem-solving skills, consisting of games and dialogues between adults and children.

This concept and the teaching approach have been widely accepted and elaborated by early childhood professionals to be implemented in the classroom (e.g., Crary, 1984; Muhlstein, 1990). In children's conflict situations, many curricula suggest that the teacher use step-by-step interventions which focus on developing the child's social problem-solving skills. For example, Crary (1984) describes five basic steps for intervention: (a) gather data, (b) define the problem, (c) encourage children to generate ideas, (d) help children evaluate ideas, and (e) ask for a decision and help plan implementation.

Limitations of the social problem-solving skills approach. Although the concept of social problem-solving skills has provided a useful guideline to understand children's abilities to manage conflicts, some researchers argue that this intervention approach has conceptual and educational shortcomings in assessing and developing children's social competence. The mixed findings from a number of follow-up studies indicate that training of social problem-solving skills may produce changes in those skills but does not consistently contribute to significant improvement in social adjustment (Rubin & Krasnor, 1986; Urbain & Kendall, 1980). Some researchers argue that the concept of social problem-solving skills does not reflect the qualitative changes in children's ability to solve interpersonal problems. Social competence is determined in terms of quantitative aspects of problem solving such as the number of strategies generated rather than by the ability to

respond to conflicts by taking both or all perspectives (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, Solomon, & Schaps, 1989; Yeates & Selman, 1989). Other researchers also point out that social competence cannot be assessed only by the strategies one uses to achieve personal goals but also by the ability to see the personal goal in conflict with the interests of others (Dodge, Asher, & Parkhurst, 1989).

Some researchers further argue that in order to promote social competence that includes the development of ability to take and coordinate different perspectives, an alternative intervention approach to narrowly and exclusively focusing on the development of cognitive skills is necessary. Battistich, Solomon, et al. (1989) argue:

> . . . If social competence is reflected in the use of prosocial and cooperative approaches to resolving problems, training in cognitive problem-solving skills should be accompanied by other procedures that increase children's motivation to consider the problem situation from the other person's perspective as well as their own, and to arrive at a *mutually acceptable* solution. Social problems are inherently moral and ethical problems, and effective problem solving requires both possession of requisite cognitive skills and a concern for the rights and needs of the other party or parties, as well as one's own. (p. 149)

The aim of teacher intervention from this view is development from the stage where the child uses unilateral strategies to attain his or her goal to the stage where the child chooses strategies and solutions that are satisfactory to both parties, rather than the simple improvement in the number of effective strategies used to achieve personal goals. Interpersonal conflict situations should not be viewed as individualistic experiences where the teacher guides the child's learning but in a context in which all children who are involved in the problem benefit from each other.

Constructivist early education (DeVries & Zan, 1994) and the Child Development

Project (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, & Solomon, 1989) are examples of

comprehensive programs which aim to develop young children's social competence in the

broader sense by providing learning opportunities where children begin to view conflicts in

relation with other people. Other early childhood professionals, using the model

developed by Fisher, Ury and Patton (1991), also suggest the importance of the teacher's

role in helping children come up with a "win/win" solution that both participants can agree

on (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992b). Battistich, Solomon, et al. (1989) found that

children in their program not only scored higher on measures of cognitive problem-solving

skills but also used resolution strategies that are more prosocial than the children in the

comparison group. DeVries, Reese-Learned, et al. (1991) found that the children in a

constructivist kindergarten demonstrated more advanced interpersonal understanding and

resolved more conflicts.

Comparison of teacher interventions in action. Using the concept of social

problem-solving skills, Shure (1992a, 1992b) elaborated programs for young children at

preschool, kindergarten, and primary grade levels. In these programs, along with training

lessons, Shure suggests that the teacher intervene when actual problems arise in the

classroom. She emphasizes that when the teacher intervenes, it is important to focus on

how a particular child thinks and to help him or her to think through the problem. In

addition, the teacher should engage in a process of dialoguing with one child at a time and

help him or her to apply social problem-solving skills to the problem: The teacher should

ask the child questions step-by-step to define the problem, to elicit feelings, to encourage the child to think of alternative solutions, and to encourage evaluation of the solution.

In a constructivist program, based on Selman's developmental model of interpersonal negotiation strategies, the focus of the teacher intervention in children's conflict situations is to help both children become aware of different feelings and needs of self and other and learn to come to an agreement by taking account of both perspectives. DeVries and Zan (1994) identified 14 teaching principles in conflict situations. They suggest that the teacher facilitate mutual communication by helping children verbalize their feelings and desires to each other and listen to each other. In clarifying the problem, the teacher should also help children understand what the other sees as the problem. By maintaining the children's ownership of the conflict, the teacher can guide children gradually to accept their responsibility in a conflict situation and the importance of coming to a mutual agreement.

The following examples of teacher interventions portray the differences between the two approaches.

Shure (1993) describes the following episode from her program where the teacher (T) intervenes in the conflict between Robert and Erik.

Teacher : Robert, what happened when you snatched those magnets from Erik?

Robert : He hit me.

Teacher : How did that make you feel?

Robert : Mad.

Teacher : You wanted to play with those magnets, right?

Robert : Right.

Teacher : Snatching is one way to get him to give them to you. Can you think of a different way?

Robert : I can ask him.

Teacher : (calls Erik over) Robert, you thought of asking Erik for the magnets. Go ahead and ask him.

Robert : (To Erik) Can I hold the magnets?

Erik : No!

Teacher : Oh, Robert, he said no. Can you think of a different way?

Robert : (starts to cry).

Teacher : I know you're feeling sad now, but I bet if you think very hard, you'll find a different way. You could ask or____?

Robert : (After several seconds) I'll give them back when I'm finished.

Erik : OK.

Teacher : Very good, Robert. You thought of a different way to get Erik to let you play with those magnets. How do you feel now?

Robert : (smiles) Happy!

Teacher : I'm glad, and you thought of that all by yourself. (p. 55)

In this intervention, the focus of the teacher is on dialoguing with Robert, helping him to recognize his feeling in the situation and to think about alternative ways to achieve his personal goal. The teacher, however, does not make an effort to help Robert recognize Erik's feeling as a reaction to what he did. Thus, the teacher does not view the situation

in terms of a conflict between both participants' needs, and there is no emphasis on

helping the children achieve a mutual agreement.

DeVries and Zan (1994) describe an example from their program where the

teacher (T) approaches a similar conflict situation differently.

(Hector has placed a small ladder across the hole of the beanbag target. Marcel does not want the ladder there.)

Teacher : I'm sorry. I can't hear your words. Can you tell me again?

Hector : (inaudible)

Teacher : Oh, then to make it more exciting, you put that there? Is it harder to throw in there, or easier?

Hector : (inaudible)

Teacher : Well, Marcel, do you think that would be a fun way to play with it?

Marcel : (inaudible)

Teacher : Oh, H says it makes it fun for him.

Marcel : It makes it bad.

Teacher : Well, why don't you tell Hector about that. What would you like to tell him about it?

Marcel : I don't know.

Teacher : Well, what do you think we should do, because Hector likes to play with it that way?

Marcel : (shrugs shoulders, says something inaudible)

Teacher : Hector, Hector, you know what? (Sits on floor beside Hector) I see that we have a problem. You know what the problem is? (Hector continues to play with ladder and does not seem to be listening.) Hector, can you hear my words? I see that you would like to play with this (takes ladder). Marcel says that he would not like to play with this. So what should you guys do?

Hector : I want him to play (inaudible).

Teacher : Marcel, can you hear his idea? What is your idea, Hector?

Hector : (inaudible)

Teacher : Did you hear his idea?

Marcel : Um hmm. After we put it away (inaudible).

Teacher : Can you hear Marcel's idea?

Hector : Yeah.

Teacher : Let's listen to it. What is your idea, Marcel?

Marcel : I said--

Hector : (Throws bean bag, seems not to be listening)

Teacher : Hector, let's listen to Marcel's idea because I heard that he had an idea. (Teacher takes bean bag) Hector, we'll take just a minute out from playing with the bean bags so that we can hear the other idea. What was that other idea, Marcel?

Marcel : After you put it away, then you could get it out again.

Teacher : Oh, does that sound like a good idea?

Hector : No, I want to do it right now.

Marcel : Well, he may play for two more seconds with that red thing (points to ladder) and then I'll (points to hole and ladder). Well, maybe we could share, I don't know.

Teacher : Maybe you could share? Do you think you could share, Hector? Marcel said that would work.

Hector : (inaudible)

Teacher : Okay! You know what, when you guys give it a try, let me know if you need any help, but I'll bet you can figure it out. (Upon observing a cooperative attitude and, feeling the boys can work it out, she leaves.)

(Hector and Marcel succeed in playing together, tossing the bean bag at the hole.)
(pp. 87-89)

In this episode, the teacher upholds the value of mutual agreement by constantly

encouraging the children to interact and listen to each other's ideas and desires, and trying

to help them realize that both are responsible for the problem. The teacher also expresses

her attitude that the conflict belongs to the children and plays the role of mediator who

provides a help when the children feel it is needed in order to solve their own problem.

Group Activities for Promoting Conflict Resolution Abilities

In addition to direct interventions in children's conflict situations, early childhood

teachers can create other learning opportunities to promote children's conflict resolution

abilities. Many early childhood curricula recommend planning various activities, including

role play, puppet play, and class discussion, to solicit children's thinking about a

hypothetical or a real-life social problem specific to their particular classroom and to

develop knowledge and skills that enable them to manage interpersonal problems.

Some early childhood professionals recommend group activities for developing

social problem-solving skills, adapting the notion of training program of Spivack and

Shure (Crary, 1984; Ramsey, 1991). For example, Edwards (1986) suggests a planned

activity called "thinking games on social problems" for encouraging children to generate

multiple alternatives and consider their causal consequences. In an activity, the teacher

first enacts a story-situation in which two puppets argue over their possession of toys.

The teacher then asks the children a set of probing questions to solicit different solutions

to the problem. When a number of suggestions are made, the teacher asks each child to

use the puppets and to act out the consequences of his or her solution. Edwards also recommends other thinking games each focusing on a thinking skill necessary for conflict resolution, such as a thinking game for identifying facial expressions reflecting different emotional states.

Other early childhood professionals define the purpose of group activities in more general terms. For example, Carlsson-Paige and Levin (1992a) and Levin (1994) recommend the use of puppet play because "a child who is trying to master social skills needs to try them out in many different situations--to approximate, practice, test, and revise" (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992a, p. 11). By enacting previous experiences in puppet play, children "deepen their understanding, skill, and the sense of control and mastery" (Levin, 1994, p. 139).

Despite the variations in implementation, all these activities have the same focus, that is, to provide educational opportunities in which children acquire and strengthen necessary skills so that they can transfer and apply them in an actual conflict situation. Ramsey (1991) recommends that the teacher work with a group of children with particular instructions and teach techniques necessary for conflict resolution: "Teachers can prepare children to use this technique by demonstrating it with puppets, flannel board stories, and role plays so that the children have some ideas of how to proceed before they are confronted with a specific conflict" (p. 166). Furthermore, these activities are often based on the assumption that children acquire new skills by repeatedly practicing them as well as observing others' behaviors. Levin (1994) recommends class meetings in which children

share their experiences of conflict resolution and "display" what worked so that other children can use those skills in other situations. Although recent curricula emphasize the developmental nature and process of young children's interpersonal understanding, educational practices often fall back upon the cultural-transmission view of teaching which consists of telling or presenting knowledge and of learning which takes place by the internalization of what is taught. Kamii (1988) argues that educators without precise links between developmental theory and practices take an "intuitive leap" between the two and use commonsense notions of instruction which is "buttressed by behaviorism and associationism" (p. 202).

The constructivist program, in contrast, emphasizes that group activities, like naturally occurring conflicts, provide a learning context "to think about interpersonal issues in more differentiated ways, becoming better able to think beyond their own perspective to see and consider multiple perspectives in issues" (DeVries & Zan, p. 168). To promote children's eventual progress to a higher stage of interpersonal understanding, the constructivist program provides a wide range of educational experiences in which children try to resolve felt conflict, interpersonal and possibly intraindividual disequilibrium, in interactions with others. Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) state that a program reflecting the cognitive-developmental view requires "an educational environment that actively stimulates development through the presentation of resolvable but genuine problems" (p. 454). Group activities stimulate children's minds rather than focusing on teaching discrete skills and predefined knowledge.

DeVries and Zan (1994) specifically point out the value of group discussion. They argue that naturally arising problems can provide an opportunity for a discussion that allows a whole group to listen to one another's ideas about an issue with which children are intimately familiar, feel genuine concern about the outcome, and recognize and evaluate the consequences easily. It is essential for promoting development to provide many opportunities through which the children gradually recognize that there are opposing points of view in the situation, and to "help them to think about resolving the issue in ways fair to everyone involved, to generate and evaluate possible solutions in terms of all participants" (DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 168).

Creating a Classroom Atmosphere to Promote Children's Conflict Resolution

While promoting children's abilities to manage conflicts at higher levels of understanding, constructivist early education also fosters the attitude of generally wanting to resolve interpersonal problems. DeVries and Zan (1994) argue that creating a specific sociomoral atmosphere in the classroom is crucial for nurturing the children's internal feelings of necessity to resolve conflicts with others. Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, and Delucchi (1992) in the Child Development Project similarly stress the necessity of creating a "caring community" in the classroom to promote the development of children's prosocial characteristics, including their motives and attitudes which reflect concern for the welfare of others, and the inclination to balance one's own needs with those of others.

Promoting close relationships among children. While children develop their abilities to identify and negotiate differences with others through experiences of having interpersonal conflicts, they also learn to establish and maintain positive relationships with others. Researchers have conceptualized the development of children's social understanding as a dual process: a process of becoming individuated from others, delineating the needs of self and other as separate and distinct; while, simultaneously, becoming connected to others, establishing and maintaining satisfactory relationships with peers (Selman & Schultz, 1990; Shantz & Hobart, 1989). In conflict situations, children are becoming aware of the difference between self and the other and, at the same time, recognizing the significance of another's behavior in the relationship. They are also learning the interdependence of the self and the other as well as the incompatibility of each other's needs. Through repeated experiences of confronting, negotiating, and resolving interpersonal conflicts, children gradually develop intimacy, interpersonal sensitivity, and mutual understanding(Shantz & Hobart, 1989; Youniss, 1980). Close relationships with peers also motivate children to accommodate their needs with others' needs with, what Sullivan (1953) called, "a real sensitivity to what matters to another person . . . not . . . 'what should I do to get what I want' but instead 'what should I do to contribute to the happiness or to support the prestige and feeling of worthwhileness of my chum'" (p. 245). In the classroom, a constructivist teacher provides different experiences and learning contexts that foster closeness and connectivity among children.

Promoting cooperative relationships in the classroom. According to Piaget's

theory of sociomoral development, young children perceive social rules and social norms

as given and absolute. It is their developmental nature to submit to a set of rules about

how to treat each other and to accept the rules imposed by the teacher. To liberate them

from these egocentric limitations, the constructivist program emphasizes the necessity of

providing the context of cooperative social relations in which children operate in terms of

one another's desires and ideas, as opposed to the relation of constraint in which children

blindly follow the given rules. Piaget (1932/1965) made a distinction between these two

types of social relationships which serve different functions in children's social

development:

> In all spheres, two types of social relations must be distinguished: constraint and
> cooperation. The first implies an element of unilateral respect, of authority and
> prestige; the second is simply the intercourse between two individuals on an equal
> footing. Now egocentrism is contradictory only to cooperation, for the latter
> alone is really able to socialize the individual. Constraint, on the other hand, is
> always the ally of childish egocentrism. Indeed it is because the child cannot
> establish a genuinely mutual contact with the adult that he remains shut up in his
> own ego. (p. 61)

Peer relations in which children see themselves as more or less equal naturally provide the

optimal context for development (e.g., Hartup, 1983). Unlike adult-child relations that are

usually characterized by unilateral respect, or the child's submission to or compliance with

external authority, child-child relations that are based on mutual respect offer special

possibilities for children to exercise their will and construct their convictions about how to

treat each other. In particular, cooperative activities with peers provide children with

opportunities to begin to believe that rules must be negotiated and decided based on

mutual consent. Through these reciprocal interactions based on mutual respect, the

children begin to develop an autonomous attitude or feeling of internal necessity to treat

others in respectful ways, not out of compliance.

While many researchers and early childhood professionals focus primarily on peer

interactions, constructivist early education further emphasizes the importance of

developing cooperative social relations between children and the teacher. DeVries and

Kohlberg (1987/1990) write:

> . . . So long as adults keep the child preoccupied with learning what adults want
> him to do and with obeying their rules, he will not be motivated to question,
> analyze, or examine his own convictions and construct his own reasons for
> following rules. (p. 31)

The constructivist teacher establishes a cooperative relationship with children by refraining

from exercising unnecessary authority and by respecting children's ideas and feelings.

More specifically, the teacher is a "collaborator" with children who invites the children to

make decisions about rules in the classroom and who provides other opportunities for

them to exercise and regulate their own will and behaviors in relation to others.

Above all the teaching approaches, constructivist early education emphasizes the

importance of creating this particular sociomoral atmosphere in the classroom. Helping

children become able to manage conflicts at a higher level of understanding with attitudes

of wanting to solve interpersonal problems is necessarily a part of the global educational

goal of the constructivist program, that is, to develop intellectually and sociomorally

autonomous children who are able to consider the possible options and make their

decisions based on their convictions. Every learning experience in the constructivist

classroom is built upon the interpersonal network characterized by the cooperative

relationships based on mutual respect not only among children but also between the

children and the teacher. This particular interpersonal relationship is fundamental to every

aspect of the child's development and learning in the constructivist classroom.

In this section and the previous section, a number of recent recommendations for

promoting children's conflict resolution in early childhood classrooms are reviewed.

While there are some similarities in various approaches, fundamental differences exist in

their paradigmatic assumptions about children's development and learning, namely the

differences between the cultural-transmission and the cognitive-developmental views. The

review of literature also indicates that similar classroom practices are recommended from

the cognitive-developmental approach, but with different theoretical rationales.

For implementing the cognitive-developmental, constructivist approach to conflict

resolution in the classroom, teachers must be able to examine these differences in

underlying assumptions and make decisions about classroom practices based on a coherent

theoretical rationale. Without understanding of the theoretical foundation, as Brooks and

Brooks (1993) argue, those recommendations for classroom practices will be trivialized

into "cookbook" procedures.

In the next section, by reviewing recent research, the issue of teachers' beliefs and

practices in a process of implementing the constructivist approach to conflict resolution is

discussed.

Research on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices: Implementation of Constructivist Education

In recent research on teaching, researchers are claiming that teachers' educational decisions in classrooms are guided by their personally held systems of beliefs, values and principles (see Clark & Peterson, 1986; Isenberg, 1990, for reviews). When teachers are involved in implementing a new approach in classrooms, the approach may not be compatible with their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning (Johnston, 1988). However, as long as teachers are unaware of the incompatibility, they intuitively make decisions based on their implicit beliefs that have been developed through their prior experiences (Richardson & Anders, 1990). Some researchers and teacher educators are arguing that teachers need to become aware of their implicit beliefs about teaching and examine what they believe about classroom practices in relation to the particular theoretical approach (Calderhead, 1988; Fenstermacher, 1986; Richardson, 1990).

According to constructivist curriculum developers and researchers, implementing constructivist education often requires fundamental shifts in teachers' thinking about teaching: teachers must give up the cultural-transmission tradition and reconstruct their beliefs about teaching with a new set of assumptions about children's development and learning (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990; O'Loughlin, 1989; Prawat, 1992). DeVries and Kohlberg (1987/1990) write:

> Constructivism is not just a process for children's development. Teachers, too, construct their conception of what constructivist teaching means and their convictions about it. (p. 378)

Ammon and Hutcheson (1989) and DeVries and Kohlberg (1987/1990) further

conceptualized the process in which teachers shift their thinking about teaching from the cultural-transmission or behaviorist view to the constructivist view. In the process, teachers gradually become able to make autonomous decisions about classroom practices based on the theoretical rationale of the constructivist approach. However, empirical research that investigates teachers' thinking processes, in which teachers define their classroom practices in relation to theory, is limited.

Some studies have explored how teachers, in the process of implementing a particular theoretical approach in practice, effectively link theory and practice in their thinking (Anning, 1988; Bussis et al., 1976; Johnston, 1988; Kroll & Black, 1993; Richardson & Anders, 1990). In those studies, using in-depth interviews or a method of stimulated recall, the researchers asked teachers to explain the purposes or intentions underlying their teaching practices. Bussis et al., in their study of open education teachers, found a small group of teachers who could formulate their own rationales for classroom practices that were consistent with the philosophy of open education. Those teachers showed the ability to move back and forth with consistency between specific classroom activities and the broader theoretical framework. Similarly, Kroll and Black, in their study of a teacher education program which emphasizes the application of cognitive-developmental theory and research in constructivist educational practice, found the teachers who were trained in the program expressed confidence in their abilities to plan and teach appropriate curriculum by connecting theory with practice.

Teachers who implement the constructivist approach to conflict resolution in the classroom also need to give up the traditional ways of teaching children social behaviors

and skills and to redefine their classroom practices in the light of the new theoretical rationale. By studying what effective constructivist teachers do in their classrooms to promote children's conflict resolution and how they link theory and practice in their thinking, we can acquire empirical data which will advance our understanding of effective classroom practices that will be beneficial for facilitating the future development of constructivist teachers.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to investigate effective teaching practices related to promoting children's conflict resolution in constructivist classrooms. The selection of qualitative research methodology was essential in attaining the purpose of the study, which was to capture teaching practices in the complex and dynamic contexts of the classroom. The concept of teaching in this study was guided by the broader understanding of classroom experiences as an integrated whole, using a metaphor of "weaving" (Meltzoff, 1994). In the positivistic tradition of educational research, teaching has been described by a "conduit" metaphor where the teacher delivers curriculum content and has a linear, unidirectional effect on the students (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Clark & Peterson, 1986). In this study, in contrast, the researcher attempted to portray teaching practices as the teacher's creating patterns in classroom experiences that are constituted by interactions among children, between children and the teacher, and between children and the curriculum. To understand how the teacher promotes children's conflict resolution abilities, the researcher tried to extricate some strands from the integrated whole of learning experiences in the constructivist classrooms.

This study is also based on the assumption that teaching practices are complex processes that involve teachers' decision making guided by their beliefs. It further assumes that constructivist teachers are engaging in a continuous process of reconstructing their beliefs about teaching and learning by reflecting on their practices in

relation to the theory. Educational research on teaching has been dominated by the process-product approach which evaluates the effectiveness of teaching practice in terms of correlation between the teacher's specific behavior and the student performances (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1986). This approach, also from the positivistic tradition, reduces the phenomenon of teaching into generic and measurable variables and ignores the complexity of human behavior that is purposive and situation-specific (Fenstermacher, 1986; Shulman, 1987). In this study, the researcher emphasized the importance of understanding the teaching practices from what the teacher intended to do in the specific situations as well as observing the overt teaching behaviors. It was crucial to examine how the teacher's thinking about promoting children's conflict resolution was related to the constructivist theory.

Considering these assumptions, the inquiry was possible only by using a qualitative method, in a natural setting, with purposive rather than random sampling, and analyzing data inductively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study required teachers as participants who are making an effort to connect their practices with the theory and who would contribute to the advancement of our knowledge about constructivist teaching. To fully understand the complexity of life in the classroom, this study also required the researcher's immersion in the field and gathering data through multiple strategies, namely classroom observation and in-depth interviewing.

<u>Participants</u>

One kindergarten teacher and one first grade teacher who are involved in an on-going process of implementing constructivist education participated in this study. Both teachers are female and currently teaching in a public school in Missouri where "Project Construct," a statewide effort to develop and to disseminate a constructivist framework for curriculum and assessment for children ages three to seven, is carried out. The Project Construct curriculum and assessment framework (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1992) was developed based on Piaget's developmental theory with an emphasis on its constructivist and interactionist view. It has been piloted and implemented in school districts across the state since 1988. The participants in this study have been actively participating in this project as leading teachers to implement the curriculum framework in the classroom and also as teacher trainers in Project Construct workshops and summer institutes. These teachers were selected for this study for their abilities to demonstrate effective constructivist teaching through recommendations by researchers who are involved in Project Construct as consultants.

The kindergarten class consisted of 21 children (9 boys and 12 girls) ranging from 5 to 6 years old. The first grade class consisted of 24 children (13 boys and 11 girls) ranging from 6 to 7 years old. In the kindergarten class, none of the 21 children had had previous experiences in a public school setting. Twenty of 24 children in the first grade class came from all-day or half-day constructivist kindergartens in the same school and four came from non-constructivist kindergartens. The purpose of selecting one

kindergarten classroom and one first grade classroom was to obtain rich descriptions of teacher-child interactions that consist of a range of teachers' interventions dealing with different age groups of children and thus different types and levels of children's conflicts.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

Two methods were used for data collection: classroom observation and in-depth interviewing.

Classroom Observation

To examine teachers' interventions in conflict situations, the classrooms of the participating teachers were observed and videotaped during entire school days over a period of the first six weeks of school. Both teachers agreed to be videotaped and to wear a wireless microphone during the taping (see Appendix A for the informed consent letter). The use of the wireless microphone allowed the videocamera to be placed in an unobtrusive part of the classroom, thus minimizing disruption of the regular classroom routine, yet obtaining clear audio of the teachers' interactions with children.

Since the focus of the study was to examine how the teachers promote children's conflict resolution in their classrooms, it was crucial to observe at the beginning of the school year when the teachers learn about the children, begin to guide children's social interactions, and make an effort to create a certain classroom environment. Both classrooms were videotaped every day during the first week of the school year of 1995-1996. Subsequently, each classroom was observed and videotaped two to three days a week for five additional weeks. The researcher also took field notes during the classroom

observations. During the classroom observations, the researcher remained an observer without engaging in ongoing classroom activities or interacting with the children. The researcher obtained the parents' permission for videotaping in the classroom (see Appendix B for the informed consent letter).

Teacher Interview

To examine teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution, in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews consisted of three phases: before, during, and after the classroom observation period.

The initial interview with each teacher was conducted either before the school year started or during the first week of school for the purpose of obtaining background information about the teachers' professional careers, professional development as constructivist teachers, and overall beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution. Guiding questions for the interview are shown in Appendix C.

During the six weeks of classroom observations, an interview with each teacher was conducted once a week. To probe for their implicit beliefs and how they link theory and practice, the teachers were asked to explain their rationales for specific interventions and other related teaching practices for promoting children's conflict resolution (see guiding questions in Appendix D). The researcher also engaged in informal conversations with the teachers about teaching practices related to conflict resolution.

The final interviews were conducted after six weeks of classroom observations. The teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching practices during the first six weeks

with their particular groups of children, and to discuss their goals and plans with regard to promoting conflict resolution abilities of the children (see guiding questions in Appendix E).

All teacher interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Informal conversations with the teachers about their classroom practices were recorded in the field notes.

Data Analysis

Data collected through different methods were organized and analyzed according to the two major purposes of the study: (a) to analyze the teachers' interventions in children's peer conflicts and (b) to analyze their beliefs related to promoting children's conflict resolution in the classroom.

Analysis of Teacher Interventions

For the first purpose of the study, videotape segments that included children's conflicts were identified and transcribed. Conflict was defined as: Child A does something to Child B → Child B opposes or resists Child A. Child B's oppositions can be expressed nonverbally, verbally, or both. Physical oppositions include resisting and preventing the other's action. Verbal oppositions include protesting, refusing, denying, prohibiting, disagreeing, and threatening (see Appendix F for descriptions and examples). Some researchers argue that initial opposition is not a sufficient condition to classify the event as conflict. They claim that conflict must involve mutual opposition where the Child B's opposition is in turn challenged by Child A whose action was first protested (Maynard, 1985; Shantz, 1987). In this study, however, the manifestation of initial

opposition was sufficient to identify the situation as a conflict. In these classrooms, there were many instances where the conflict appeared to continue without the first child's opposition to the second child's initial opposition. For example, when Child B opposes Child A, Child A's response to the opposition may be ignoring Child B or complying with Child B's protest. In some such cases, the conflict seemed to proceed when Child B was not satisfied with Child A's response and continued to protest. In other cases, the conflict continued as a third party, either the teacher or other children, became involved in the situation and activated the discussion or the problem-solving process. Furthermore, the definition of conflict in this study was not limited to dyadic situations: Conflicts could also involve more than two children or two groups of children. For example, an episode where four children were arguing about who goes first in a game was identified as a conflict.

Because of the way the videocamera was set to focus on the teacher, the beginnings of the conflicts were not always recorded. Situations where a child was apparently exhibiting his or her opposition to what another child or children did, and cases where the opposition became evident by the child's solicitation for teacher intervention were included for analysis as conflict episodes.

After all episodes were identified and transcribed, the issue and the participants in each conflict were identified. The issues of the conflicts were coded according to the following categories: (a) object possession, (b) property, (c) physical harm, (d) intrusion, (e) group entry, (f) game rules, (g) class rules, (h) ideas or facts, (i) space, (j) rude

behavior, (k) unfair distribution, (l) verbal intimidation (see Appendix G for descriptions and examples).

Then the teacher's actions in each situation were analyzed. First, each episode was coded as to whether the teacher intervened or did not intervene. The definition of teacher intervention in this study was broader than the teacher mediating a problem-solving process. An episode was coded "intervention" when the teacher facilitated the problem-solving process in some way, including encouraging children to go to the peace chairs and solve the conflict by themselves, whereas a situation was coded "non-intervention" when the teacher was completely uninvolved in the process. For example, when a child came to the teacher and solicited intervention but the teacher told the child that she was too busy to deal with the problem, the episode was coded non-intervention.

All "intervention" episodes were further coded according to the condition of intervention and the type of intervention using the following categories.

1. The condition of intervention: whether the teacher intervened voluntarily or by child's solicitation for intervention.

2. The type of intervention: whether the teacher intervened in such a way that she (a) encouraged the child or children to solve the conflict by themselves, (b) mediated the problem-solving process by involving both or all parties, (c) facilitated the problem-solving process by focusing on one party, (d) solved the problem, or (e) raised the issue to the whole class.

All "non-intervention" episodes were also coded according to the teacher's awareness of the conflict: whether the teacher was aware of the conflict but chose not to intervene or was unaware of the conflict.

To understand the teacher interventions in an organized manner, the researcher developed a model which maps the teacher's actions in the context of children's conflicts (Figure 1). In this model, the rectangles represent the teacher's action involving decisions about whether to intervene or not to intervene and about how to intervene, and the arrows indicate the temporal order of the actions. The model also includes other factors, presented in ovals, namely the child or children's solicitation for intervention and intervention by other adults that affect the teacher's decision about whether to intervene.

Furthermore, for identifying characteristics of the teachers' mediations, 14 constructivist teaching principles in children's conflict situations developed by DeVries and Zan (1994) were used as coding categories and guided the analysis.

1. Take responsibility for children's physical safety.

2. Use nonverbal methods to calm children.

3. Acknowledge/accept/validate all children's feelings and perceptions of the conflict.

4. Help children verbalize feelings and desires to each other and to listen to each other.

5. Clarify and state the problem.

6. Give children the opportunity to suggest solutions.
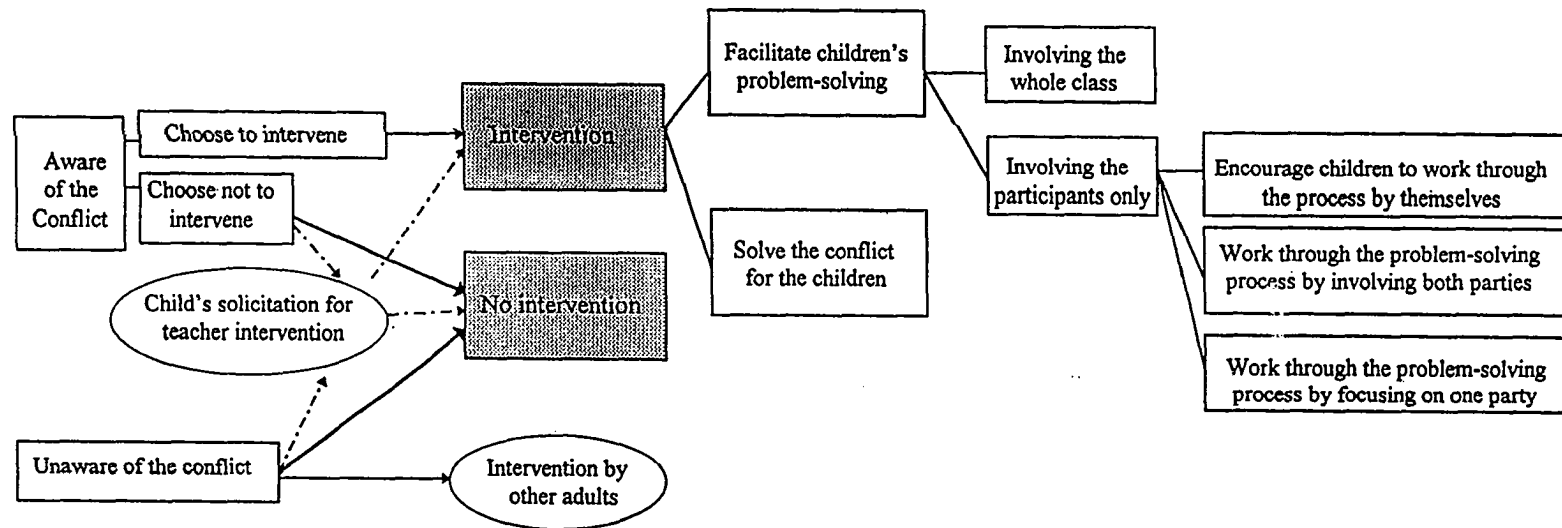
<u>Figure 1.</u> Model of teachers' actions in children's conflict situations.

7. Propose solutions when children do not have ideas.

8. Uphold the value of mutual agreement, and give children the opportunity to reject proposed solutions.

9. Teach impartial procedures for settling disputes where decision is arbitrary.

10. When both children lose interest in a conflict, do not pursue.

11. Help children recognize their responsibility in a conflict situation.

12. Offer opportunity for restitution if appropriate.

13. Help children repair the relationships, but do not force children to be insincere.

14. Encourage children to resolve their conflicts by themselves.

Analysis of Teachers' Beliefs

Segments from transcripts of in-depth interviews with each teacher that reflect the teacher's beliefs about the following categories were coded and selected.

1. Beliefs about the developmental nature and process of children's conflict resolution abilities.

2. Beliefs about children's learning in conflict situations (for example, what the teacher wants to promote in children through experiences of resolving conflicts).

3. Beliefs about the role of the teacher in guiding children to resolve their own conflicts (for example, how the teacher encourages children to resolve conflicts by themselves).

4. Beliefs about creating shared experiences.

5. Beliefs about creating a classroom environment to promote children's conflict resolution abilities.

6. Beliefs about children's development and learning in general.

7. Thoughts about the process of becoming a constructivist teacher.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The results of the data collection and the interpretations of their implications are presented according to four research questions. First, general characteristics of teacher interventions in children's peer conflict situations are described. In particular, the differences between teacher-initiated and solicited interventions and the interpretations of each type of intervention are discussed. Second, the characteristics of teachers' mediations are presented. In the analysis of how the teachers mediated and worked through the problem-solving processes with the children, major aims of promoting the children's conflict resolution are identified. Third, the teachers' beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution in the classroom are analyzed in parallel with their practices. The final section presents the descriptions and the interpretations of the constructivist teachers' approaches to creating the classroom environment for promoting children's conflict resolution.

The four sections represent the major strands that constitute the two constructivist teachers' whole approaches to promoting children's conflict resolution in the classrooms. In each section, transcripts from the interviews and observations are used to portray the teachers' actual teaching practices as well as the beliefs that guided their educational decisions. In the transcripts, the teachers and children are identified by pseudonyms to protect their identity.

General Characteristics of Teacher Interventions in Children's Peer Conflict Situations

A total of 159 conflicts (95 in kindergarten, 64 in first grade) were identified. The

teachers intervened in 122 conflicts (75 in kindergarten, 47 in first grade). They did not

intervene in 34 conflicts (17 in kindergarten, 17 in first grade). Another adult in the room

intervened in 3 conflicts (3 in kindergarten) (see Figure 2). The percentage of each type

of teacher intervention is presented in Table 1. Both teachers intervened to encourage

children to solve problems by themselves (25.4%) or mediated conflicts by involving both

parties (41.0%) more frequently than they focused on one child (18.0%) or solved the
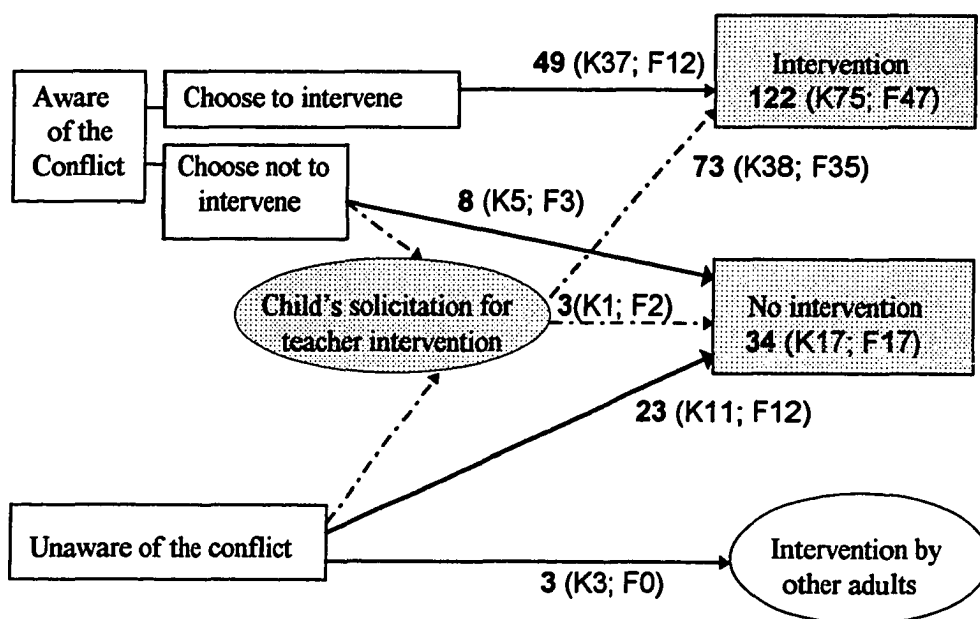
Figure 2. Frequency of teachers' actions in children's conflict situations. (The numbers

following K in parentheses indicate the total number in kindergarten classroom. The ones

following F indicate the total number in first grade classroom.)

Table 1

<u>Types of Teacher Interventions: Total</u>

Type of intervention	Total n (%)	Kindergarten n (%)	First grade n (%)
Encourage to work through the process by themselves	31 (25.4)	12 (16.0)	19 (40.4)
Work through the process by involving both parties	50 (41.0)	34 (45.3)	16 (34.0)
Work through the process by focusing on one child	22 (18.0)	18 (24.0)	4 (8.5)
Problem solved by the teacher	15 (12.3)	11 (14.7)	4 (8.5)
Raise the issue to the group	3 (2.5)	0 (0)	3 (6.4)
Unidentified	1 (0.8)	0 (0)	1 (2.1)
Total	122	75	47

problem for the children (12.3%). Percentages of types of intervention for each teacher

were also calculated. The first grade teacher mostly intervened in children's conflicts to

encourage them to solve the problem by themselves (40.4%) or facilitated the resolution

process by involving both or all parties (34.0%). The kindergarten teacher mostly

mediated and facilitated the mutual problem-solving process (45.3%), but she also focused

on one child (24.0%) and encouraged children's problem-solving by themselves (16%).

More interventions (60%) in both classrooms were solicited by the children than

were initiated by the teacher (40%). The kindergarten teacher initiated intervention 49.3

% of the time and 50.7% of her interventions were solicited. For the first grade teacher,

74.5% of the interventions were solicited while she initiated intervention only 25.5% of

the time. Teacher-initiated and solicited interventions of both teachers resulted in different

types of interventions (see Tables 2, 3). When the teachers chose to intervene voluntarily,

they more often initiated the problem-solving process by assuming the role of a mediator

focusing on both parties (40.8%) or on one child (34.7%) than by encouraging the

children to try problem-solving by themselves (8.2%). On the other hand, when the

Table 2

Types of Teacher Interventions: Teacher-Initiated Interventions

Type of intervention	Total n (%)	Kindergarten n (%)	First grade n (%)
Encourage to work through the process by themselves	4 (8.2)	0 (0)	4 (33.3)
Work through the process by involving both parties	20 (40.8)	16 (43.2)	4 (33.3)
Work through the process by focusing on one child	17 (34.7)	14 (37.8)	3 (25.0)
Problem solved by the teacher	7 (14.3)	7 (18.9)	0 (0)
Raise the issue to the group	0 (0.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Unidentified	1 (2.0)	0 (0)	1 (8.3)
Total	49	37	12

Table 3

Types of Teacher Interventions: Solicited Interventions

Type of intervention	Total n (%)	Kindergarten n (%)	First grade n (%)
Encourage to work through the problem by themselves	27 (35.5)	12 (30.8)	15 (40.5)
Work through the process by involving both parties	30 (39.5)	18 (46.1)	12 (32.4)
Work through the process by focusing on one child	5 (6.6)	4 (10.3)	1 (2.7)
Problem solved by the teacher	8 (10.5)	4 (10.3)	4 (10.8)
Raise the issue to the group	3 (3.9)	0 (0)	3 (8.1)
No intervention	3 (3.9)	1 (2.6)	2 (5.4)
Total	76	39	37

children solicited the intervention, the teachers more often encouraged them to solve the problem by themselves (35.5%) or facilitated a problem-solving process by involving both parties (39.5%) and rarely focused on one child (6.6%).

Teacher-Initiated Intervention

During a school day, children in both constructivist classrooms had ample opportunities to interact with peers. Except for group time in which all children and the teacher were attending to one activity, the children were scattered in the room, carrying out their activities either individually or in cooperation with others. During most of the work time and choice time in both classrooms and during the game time in kindergarten, the children were to choose what to do, to find a place to work or play, and to find partners if necessary (see Appendix H for organizations and descriptions of daily activities). Therefore, children's interpersonal conflicts could occur virtually anywhere in the classroom. Often times the teacher did not observe the beginning of the conflict, but became aware of it either because she was in close proximity to the conflict scene and her attention was drawn by the intensity of the conflict, or children reported the incident. Then, both teachers generally appeared to be observing the children in the conflict and deciding whether intervention was necessary, except when the conflict involved physical danger, in which case they intervened immediately (4 out of 159 conflicts).

Three conditions under which both teachers were more likely to initiate the intervention were found. First, the teacher initiated intervention when the child in the conflict was showing Level 0 negotiation strategies, that is, impulsive ways of expressing

his or her feelings and desires without awareness of the other's perspective, including whining and using physical force. For example, the kindergarten teacher chose to intervene when one child was claiming, in a squealing voice, that the chair was his to another child who was covering his ears. Second, when the event of conflict was disrupting the on-going activity in which the other child or the whole class was engaging, the teacher intervened to let the children settle the conflict and subsequently shift their focus back to the activity. For example, during morning meeting the first grade teacher stopped the group discussion when she noticed one child was continually whispering to the other child who turned his face and eventually covered his ear. She pointed out that the child was bothering the other child and helped the other child tell him to stop. Third, when the conflict involved more than three children and they appeared to be at an impasse, the teachers initiated the intervention. For example, the kindergarten teacher suggested making a sign-up sheet when she observed the four children arguing over turns to use a calculator in the dramatic play area.

The higher frequency of teacher-initiated interventions by the kindergarten teacher was possibly related both to her greater general mobility in the room and to the general lower developmental level of the kindergartners. The kindergarten teacher tended to circulate in the classroom and thus to be in a position to observe more children in more activities; she was therefore likely to notice children's conflicts. The first grade teacher, on the other hand, was rather stationary, working with a small group of children,

especially during work time; she thus had fewer chances of recognizing children's conflicts

in the room.

The kindergartners' lower developmental abilities to negotiate with peers also

required the kindergarten teacher to intervene more frequently. During group time, in the

kindergarten classroom, 40% of teacher-initiated interventions involved conflicts over

physical space. The kindergartners were having difficulties finding places to sit without

colliding with somebody else or seeing the picture in the teacher's story book without

having another child blocking their views. The teacher thus had to intervene in order to

proceed with the group activity. The first graders, in contrast, were more aware of the

existence of others and more capable as far as sharing physical space with one another:

Only 1.6% of all the first graders' conflicts, compared with 12.6% of the kindergartners'

conflicts, involved issues of physical space (see Table 4).

Table 4

Issues of Conflict

Issues	Total n (%)	Kindergarten n (%)	First grade n (%)
Object possession	16 (10.1)	10 (10.5)	6 (9.4)
Property	10 (6.3)	7 (7.4)	3 (4.7)
Physical harm	14 (8.8)	7 (7.4)	7 (10.9)
Intrusion	23 (14.5)	16 (16.8)	7 (10.9)
Space	13 (8.2)	12 (12.6)	1 (1.6)
Rules			
Game	27 (17.0)	15 (15.8)	12 (18.8)
Class	13 (8.2)	3 (3.1)	10 (15.6)
Verbal intimidation	7 (4.4)	5 (5.3)	2 (3.1)
Group entry	12 (7.5)	6 (6.3)	6 (9.4)
Unfair distribution	3 (1.9)	2 (2.1)	1 (1.6)
Ideas/facts	7 (4.4)	6 (6.3)	1 (1.6)
Rude behavior	6 (3.8)	5 (5.3)	1 (1.6)
Unidentified	8 (5.0)	1 (1.0)	7 (10.9)
Total	159	95	64

Furthermore, the first graders appeared to have better cognizance of other's behaviors and used more conciliatory strategies to manage conflicts. While kindergartners' negotiation strategies were predominantly unilateral and, as a consequence, their arguments tended to intensify, first graders were likely to listen to each other, to explain the reason, and even to propose compromise or offer restitution. The following episodes from each classroom illustrate the general nature of kindergartners' and first graders' interpersonal negotiations. Children in both episodes express their discontent but use negotiation strategies at different levels to meet their needs.

> (In the kindergarten classroom, during choice time, five children are playing with blocks. As Sammy puts two blocks on the top of the construction, Debbie stops Sammy.)
>
> Debbie: No, this is ours (removes the blocks Sammy had added and drops them on the floor).
>
> Sammy: This is mine too.
>
> Andrea: Sammy!
>
> Debbie: This is ours. This is ours. Sammy, stop it.
>
> (Few minutes later, as Sammy tries to stack blocks, Andrea takes them away)
>
> Sammy: No! (screaming voice) Don't take it away! (kicks Michael who was sitting next to Sammy).
>
> Helen: (To teacher) Sammy was hitting. Sammy was hitting.
>
> Sammy: No, he was hitting me (looking at Michael).
>
> Michael: No, you hit me first.
>
> Sammy: No, you hit me first.

Michael: Huh-uh, you kicked me first.

Andrea: I saw it. Sammy hit him first.

Helen: Sammy hit him.

Sammy: (To Michael) You hit me first.

Teacher: Does that matter?

Sammy: (To Michael) You hit me first.

Michael: I saw you kicked me.

Sammy: You hit me first.

Michael: Huh-uh.

Sammy: Uh-huh.

In this episode, Sammy was not only unable to tell other children successfully that the

exclusion was making him unhappy and he wanted to play with the blocks, but he also

created another problem by kicking Michael. The repeated insistence by both Sammy and

Michael necessarily led the teacher to intervene in the situation. In the following episode,

on the contrary, three first graders negotiate and resolve the conflict.

(During choice time, Albert and Bobby are making airplanes with legos on the
table; Derek is also making a lego airplane on the floor; Bobby leaves with his
airplane; As Derek stood up and came close to Albert, he appeared to break the
airplane Albert had.)

Albert: (To Derek) I'll tell her (teacher).

(As Albert walks by, he pushes Derek out of the way; Derek fell on the floor.)

Derek: Ow. Don't push me. Don't you push me (crying voice).

Albert: I didn't push you.

Derek: You did.

Albert: No, I didn't.

Derek: And you broke my plane.

Bobby: (Comes back and watches Derek) It's just some legos.

Albert: (To Bobby) Come here. I'll show you (takes Bobby to the table and shows him the broken airplane).

Albert: (To Bobby) Let's go tell her.

Bobby: (Goes back to Derek) That was not his. It was mine.

Derek: No, mine (inaudible).

Bobby: Fix mine. Right now. I mean it. Before I'll tell her.

Derek: Mine! You're gonna have to fix mine.

Bobby: (Inaudible)

Derek: Can't you fix your own?

(Albert and Bobby try to leave.)

Derek: Wait, you guys are gonna have to fix mine!

Albert: (Comes back) Tell me how it was.

Derek: You're gonna have to fix it just right.

Albert: (Sits next to Derek) Tell me how you fix it (tries to fix Derek's airplane).

Derek: (Takes the airplane from Albert) Wrong, wrong, wrong. This goes here.

(Albert watches and helps Derek by picking up the pieces of the airplane.)

Although this conflict was intense at the beginning, the children dealt with it by paying attention to the other's feelings. Moreover, Derek not only told Albert what was making

him angry but also clearly stated what he wanted Albert to do to repair the situation. And Albert willingly offered restitution. In this case, both Derek and Albert, without teacher intervention, contributed and succeeded in resolving the problem. In the first grade classroom, the children's higher abilities to manage their conflicts required less for the teacher to initiate interventions.

Teacher's Responses to Children's Solicitations for Intervention

While the children sometimes elicited teacher intervention by whining, calling the teacher's name, or even with a worrisome look at the teacher, the children in both classrooms mostly solicited intervention with a verbal protest or tattle, specifying the other person's action to which they objected. When children solicited intervention, the teachers responded and intervened 96% of time (73 out of 76 solicitations). However, as shown in Table 3, the conflicts were rarely solved for the children by the teacher (10.5%).

In their responses to the solicitations, the teachers intentionally avoided solving the problem for the children, especially when the children tattled. Children's tattling, for example, "Bobby took my pen" or "Sonya keeps bothering me," was their way of asking the teacher to help them get what they wanted, to get the pen back from Bobby or to make Sonya stop what she was doing. When a child protested to the teacher about someone's behavior, the teachers most frequently responded by questioning the child as to whether he or she had verbalized the opposition to the other child. For example, in the first grade classroom, during class meeting:

Scott: Mrs. F.

Teacher: Yes, Scott.

Scott: Stanley's talking and I want to listen.

Teacher: Okay. Did you use your words and tell him that he needed to be quiet? By asking the children in return whether they have attempted to protest to the other child, the teacher could let them recognize that she would not solve the problem for them but that they were the ones who had to deal with the situation. Moreover, by asking "What did you say?" or "What do you want to say to him?," the teacher also facilitated the communication among the children. In the interview, after five weeks of observation, the first grade teacher made a remark on her responses to the solicitations and the children's reactions:

> I think they kind of expect by now when they come up to me the first thing I'm going to say is, "What did you say? What did you tell him?" So . . . when I start to say something it's almost like they remember they need to go back and use their words sometimes.

In their responses to the children's solicitations, the teachers further encouraged the children to go back to the other child and to work through the problem-solving by themselves (35.5% of solicited interventions). Some children, especially in kindergarten at the beginning of the school year, were not able to communicate their objections to other children effectively. In those cases, the teacher helped the child verbalize the opposition to the other child, sometimes by giving them a phrase to use, or sometimes by encouraging them to go back and tell it again with "strong feelings." For example, in the kindergarten classroom, during clean-up time:

> Cindy: (Comes to teacher) Katy keeps calling me 'stupid' and she thinks that's my name.
>
> Teacher: She does? Did you say to her, "Stop that. That's not my name?"
> Cindy: (Nods)
>
> Teacher: Go tell her that and say it with strong feelings, "I don't want you to call me stupid." Tell her. Strong feelings.

In similar situations, the first grade teacher also suggested that the child take the other child to the peace chairs. For example,

> Albert: Mrs. F., Mrs. F., Stanley was over there and he hit me.
>
> Teacher: Did you use your words and ask him to stop?
>
> Albert: I did.
>
> Teacher: Do you want to take him to the peace chairs? You can if you want.

"Peace chairs" is a teaching tool adopted by both teachers to help children focus on and learn about the problem-solving process in interpersonal conflicts. Both teachers introduced when and how to use the peace chairs to the children during the first two weeks of school. (More detailed descriptions and analysis of the teachers' use of peach chairs are presented in a later section.) The first graders who were in the constructivist kindergarten had some experiences of using the peace chairs. The teachers always arranged two chairs between the learning centers that defined a special area in the classroom where children can take their interpersonal problems.

In the first grade classroom, as the teacher frequently encouraged the children to use the peace chairs, they began to take the initiative in solving their problems by asking other children to go to the peace chairs. As this occurred, children's solicitation

consequently became different in its quality. The children became less likely to tattle and more likely to try to solve the problem by themselves, then to request the teacher's help if their attempts failed. For example, Steve came to the teacher during math time and explained the situation at the peace chairs:

> Steve: Alex was bugging me and I said go to the peace chairs and he didn't go. And then he finally did and now he's not listening to me.
>
> Teacher: . . . So do you feel like you need to take him to the peace chairs again?
>
> Steve: No, he's still at there but he's not gonna listen to me. Because when I talk to him, he turns his face.
>
> Teacher: So what do you think you need to do? Do you want me to come over with you?
>
> Steve: (Nods)

Then the teacher went to the peace chairs with Steve and helped Alex and Steve to listen to each other. As in this case, the teacher mediated and facilitated the problem-solving process when she learned that the child's attempt to communicate to the other child had failed (see the next section for the characteristics of teachers' mediations). In the final interview, the first grade teacher described the changes in children's solicitations and defined her role in guiding the children in conflict situations:

> I don't think I have as much tattling so they are handling themselves. So they are used to the fact that I don't want to be involved unless it's something they need help with. And I try to make sure they always know that if something isn't working, if their words aren't working, or they won't go to the peace chairs, or they get to the peace chairs and the person won't follow the rules there, then they can always come and get me after that.

While conveying to the children that she was not going to solve the problem for them, the teacher remained as a facilitator who was always available to help children develop their abilities to work through the problem-solving process on their own.

In sum, in their responses to the children's solicitation, the teachers mostly facilitated the children's problem-solving processes by encouraging communication among the children. By helping them express their opposition with "strong feelings" or with specific phrases, the teacher often "empowered" the children and helped them find ways to deal with the situation more effectively. Moreover, by suggesting they go to the peace chairs, the teachers guided the children to take initiative in solving their conflicts. While they avoided solving the problem for the children, the teachers were ready to mediate the problem-solving processes whenever the children's attempts to manage the conflicts failed.

The Characteristics of Teachers' Mediations

When the teachers mediated conflicts and worked through the problem-solving processes with the children, they demonstrated various ways to promote children's abilities and attitudes necessary for conflict resolution. In this section, transcripts of children's conflict episodes illustrate characteristics of the constructivist teachers' mediations. Transcripts of teacher interviews also reveal their beliefs that support their practices as well as their aims in facilitating the children's problem-solving processes.

Mediations Involving Both Parties: Facilitating Mutual Problem-Solving Processes

Among all the interventions, the teachers mediated children's conflicts by involving both parties more frequently (41.0%) than intervening in other ways. While the two

teachers' mediations were generally congruent with the constructivist teaching principles developed by DeVries and Zan (1994), other teaching approaches were also found. In the analysis, the two teachers' most prominent characteristics and underlying aims of mediations involving both parties were identified. By carefully working through the problem-solving processes with both parties involved, the teachers were trying to promote practical strategies and positive attitudes that are necessary for the children to manage and resolve conflicts mutually. They were also facilitating the problem-solving processes to foster the development of children's interpersonal understanding.

Help children verbalize feelings and desires. When the teachers intervened and mediated the problem-solving process, one of the most prominent constructivist teaching principles they demonstrated was to guide the children to verbalize their feelings and desires. Some of the children had difficulties articulating their discontent or needs in the specific conflict situations. The teachers helped these children by providing words.

> (In kindergarten, Sammy and Michael are playing a board game "eentsy weentsy spider.")
>
> Michael: (Rolls the die and moves Sammy's spider)
>
> Sammy: Give me that spider back (reaches his hand). You are green.
>
> Michael: (Puts Sammy's spider on the board and begins to move his spider)
>
> Sammy: (Starts to cry)
>
> Teacher: Sammy.
>
> Sammy: I forgot where my spider was and I don't know . . .
>
> Teacher: Then what could you do? You can say, "Michael, do you remember where my spider was?"

In the interview, the first grade teacher explained her efforts in helping children with their problem-solving process:

> Several times I'll try to say how a child is feeling to another child because the child seems to be having trouble with words or I'll try to give them words. And I think one of the kids came up and they were really frustrated and I said something like, "Put your hands on your hip and say this, 'I didn't like that.'" And you know, even just giving them that gives them some way of showing, instead of hitting or something, that they were really really displeased. But this, "I didn't like that." It helps some. So you know, I even do that sometimes.

When children responded to conflict situations with Level 0 strategies, including whining and yelling, the teachers encouraged their use of words as the alternative strategy for solving the problem positively. For example, in the kindergarten classroom, some children tended to raise their voices in a conflict where both parties continued insisting. The teacher intervened to calm them down and told them to use their words because "yelling does not solve the problem."

Communicate that the use of physical force is unacceptable. Conflicts, especially in the kindergarten classroom, also often involved pushing, grabbing, or kicking. Both teachers were particularly concerned with the children's use of physical force, and their approaches reflected one of the constructivist teaching principles, that is, to take responsibility for children's physical safety. Although conflicts in both classrooms rarely involved physical aggression, the teachers addressed the issue of physical harm seriously and communicated the idea, in a quite direct manner, that the use of physical force was an unacceptable way to solve a problem. When they mediated a conflict, the teachers took time to remind the child who caused the physical harm that they as a teacher would not let

the children hurt each other for any reasons in the classroom or in the school. In the

following episode which happened in the first grade classroom during clean-up time,

Derek almost bit Stanley's arm as he was trying to warn that it was time for clean-up and

Stanley did not listen. The teacher approached Derek who quickly said "Sorry" and tried

to get back to his cleaning the room.

> Teacher: No, Derek, I need to say something first. We, people are not for hitting
> and biting. People are not for that. This is not enough just say you are sorry.
> You need to know that you can't do that in this room. We are not for that. It's
> not enough for you to go and bite somebody or hurt somebody and hit somebody
> and say you are sorry and then just do it again and again and again. You can't do
> that at this school. I won't let you hurt anybody again. I am here to keep you safe
> and keep Stanley safe and everybody in this room safe. Now I needed to say that
> to you so that you know that you can't do that again. I won't let you do that
> again.

Subsequently, the teacher discussed the initial issue of clean-up by involving both Stanley

and Derek.

Facilitate reciprocal exchange among children. For the two constructivist teachers,

"use your words" did not mean putting words in the children's mouths. At the same time,

it meant more than an alternative to physical violence. Both teachers viewed that helping

the children verbalize their feelings and desires to others was an important part of enabling

them to recognize the reciprocity of a conflict situation. While guiding individual children

to use their words, the teachers always created the context of reciprocal exchanges among

the children. The kindergarten teacher pointed out that the children who had preschool

experiences come to her kindergarten knowing the phrase, "Use your words." The

children, she explained, have learned how to say, "I don't like it when you do that" and

"Sorry" in return and "It's over with."

> It's like this mechanical thing that they go through. Well, I'm trying to get beyond that. "Are you listening?" "Did you really hear what she said?" "Say it again." And I want to get beyond the mechanical business.

The teachers were promoting the children's interpersonal understanding in the situations

which was more than learning to use certain phrases. In problem-solving processes, the

teachers emphasized that the children communicate with each other while promoting

individual children's practical strategies to manage the situation, namely, to verbalize their

feelings and needs. In the following episode, the kindergarten teacher guides the children

to use their words instead of yelling or grabbing and, at the same time, demonstrates her

efforts in helping children recognize the reciprocity of the situation by facilitating their

communications.

> (In the kindergarten classroom, Sammy and Andy were playing "sneaky snake game" and were beginning to clean up. As they were putting their own cards in separate boxes, Sammy reached his hand and tried to take one of the Andy's cards and Andy refused and said, "No, I wanna do it." Sammy kept taking Andy's cards and Andy tried to stop Sammy by grabbing his body and arms. Andy then tried to get the cards back from Sammy and they began kicking each other. The teacher then intervened.)

Andy: (Tries to grab the card from S)

Teacher: (To Andy) Just wait.

Sammy: He took one of mine.

Andy: I didn't take one of yours!

Teacher: Okay, now listen. Listen.

Andy: He took mine and I didn't want him to (screams and sits on the chair).

Teacher: Andy. Well, you look sad.

Andy: (Strikes the box with his hand)

(The teacher decides to take them to the peace chairs as Andy kept striking the box and Sammy denied by saying, "I only did it once.")

Teacher: All right, let's go over here and solve this problem first and then we'll put it away. Come here.

(As the teacher is setting two chairs facing each other, Sammy tries to take the card away from Andy; Andy refuses; Sammy hits Andy; Teacher comes and stops Sammy by holding his arms)

Teacher: Go in the peace chairs. Go in the peace chairs right there. Sammy, right here.

(Sammy and Andy sit on the chairs facing each other)

Teacher: Now, in this class we are here to help each other. We are not here to . . . (the other child interrupts) I have to talk to them right now. (To Andy and Sammy) We are not here to hurt each other. So when something is wrong, when there's something that's bothering you, you need to say it to the other person.

Andy: I did!

Teacher: Okay, now, all right, say to him what was making you angry. Use your words and say it to him. You don't have to scream it. Just say it. I was angry because . . .

Andy: You took my snake and I didn't want you to.

Sammy: No, I only did it once.

Teacher: Now, did you hear what he said?

Andy: No, you did it two times.

Teacher: (To Sammy) Did you hear what he said? He said he was angry because you took his snake and he didn't want you to. Now, what do you want to say to him? I was angry because . . .

Sammy: I let you . . . I let you . . . I let you only . . . I let you do it to me but I didn't do more time. I only did it once.

Andy: I didn't do it to you. I did nothing to you. I did nothing to his snake.

Sammy: Oh, sure you did.

Teacher: Wait, wait. Wait, wait. We are not yelling. We are just telling. (Sammy and Andy continue to insist by saying, "Did not," "Did too.")

Teacher: Okay, what's the important thing here? What's the important thing? The important thing is . . . that each person . . .

Andy: . . . picks up their own mess.

Teacher: Well, that's . . . That would be a good rule. (To Sammy) Would that be okay with you?

In this episode, the teacher demonstrated a number of constructivist teaching principles. First, the teacher acknowledged, accepted, and validated both children's feelings and perceptions of the conflicts. Second, while both children were seeing the problem only from their perspectives, the teacher clarified the problem by asking and rephrasing what was making each child angry and also helped them listen to the other's understanding of the situation. Third, at the end, when Andy proposed his idea, the teacher upheld the value of mutual agreement by asking Sammy's opinion, and gave Sammy the opportunity to reject the solution. Because Sammy questioned "What if they had too much stuff . . . and needed help?," the teacher suggested that the rule be "every person cleans up their own mess except if they need help and then they ask somebody." Finally, both Andy and Sammy agreed with the idea.

However, young children, as Andy and Sammy in the episode, are just beginning to learn how to communicate their desires unilaterally to the others and cannot yet consider what they want and the other person wants simultaneously. Thus, the teacher's attempt to guide children to come to a mutually agreed solution can sometimes be fruitless. The teachers recognize that it is a long and gradual process in which young children become able to coordinate both perspectives and come up with a solution both can be satisfied. The first grade teacher described her belief that children's beginning to express their own feelings and desires in a conflict situation is a small but significant step in the process:

> I guess my focus right now would be both of them getting their concerns and feelings out on the table. I think more than anything just learning how to say that. And it seems that for children in the beginning that's enough for them. They seem to kind of lose focus on solving the problem but if they both can get feelings out on the table that seems to be good enough. And . . . many of them can do some problem solving. But it seems to be at first the major focus for them is just getting their feelings out and saying it. And once they can say it then that seems to make them feel better.
>
> Just some help in after you get your feelings out on the table "What are you going to do about it?" But that's a long process.

In sum, by facilitating reciprocal exchange among children, they create the context which stimulates children's thinking and will eventually help them recognize different needs and feelings involved in the situation and begin to coordinate them in their thinking. With the understanding of the long and gradual process of the development, the constructivist teachers, at the beginning of the school year, focused on promoting the children's

progression from the unilateral stage of interpersonal understanding to the reciprocal stage.

Help children recognize their role in a conflict. Almost half of the teacher interventions in the kindergarten and about one third of the teacher interventions in the first grade classroom involved children's unilateral opposition, where one child opposed the other child and the other child did not respond. In the classroom, a conflict became apparent when one child objected or resisted the other child's action. Often, the instigator of the action simply was not aware of the opposition. Both teachers interpreted the behavior with understanding of young children's development in peer interactions. The first grade teacher explained:

> I think it's probably very developmental and at this age they probably are not able to take that other person's perspective to realize that they hurt someone's feeling or that they've done something that bothers another person. And so they genuinely are surprised I think.

When a child is objected by the other child or asked to go to the peace chairs for what he or she has done, the child is often not aware of the influence of his or her behavior on the others. The teacher in these cases often helped get the attention of the child by saying, for example, "Beth, Rose needs to talk to you," and facilitated their interaction.

The teachers viewed these experiences in listening to another person's objection as an important learning opportunity which helps children to move forward in becoming able to take other perspectives. The first grade teacher explained what she was trying to promote in her interventions:

. . . it would be not only being able to state their feelings in a clear, meaningful way but being able to begin to realize that there is another point of view. And that point of view is equally as important as theirs.

So I think that would be the biggest thing besides learning to use your words and learning to express your feelings but having to listen to take another person's perspective is so important. And I guess that's a big thing that they are learning at this point.

For helping them to recognize the reciprocity of the conflict situations, the teacher

emphasized the educational value of helping the instigator recognize the other's protest

and the responsible part he or she plays in the situation.

Guide children in generating solutions. While the two constructivist teachers

helped the children to communicate reciprocally, they also demonstrated other

constructivist teaching principles in that they guided the children in generating solutions to

the conflict. In the following episode, while the kindergarten teacher watches the children

and supports their ideas, she also proposes a solution and helps them to move forward in

the problem-solving process.

(In kindergarten, four children are trying to decide who goes first in "sneaky snake game." The teacher notices the children's discussion and watches them.)

Sammy: Go like do, do, do, or do, do, do (pointing each child including him).

Katy: No, go like this, do, do, do, do (points Sammy → Donald → Andy → Katy).

Andy: Whoever got it out . . .

Donald: Let me show you, guys. It goes you and him and . . .

Andy: I'm gonna put this away.

Donald: (Inaudible) . . . just talking. That's all.

Sammy: No, you . . .

Andy: (To Sammy) You put the hand on . . .

Sammy: No, even though you started the game, it doesn't mean . . .

Teacher: (Sits behind Andy and watches the children)

Katy: (To teacher) Don't he get a turn first?

Teacher: No.

Andy: Because I got the game out.

Teacher: Who goes first?

Sammy: I do.

Andy: I got the game out.

Teacher: Okay, how would be a fair way that we can decide who goes first?

Sammy: Maybe we could like . . . First we go me, him, Donald, and then him, and then her. And then we are going back this way, and then, then . . .

Donald: We are going that way, then we are going this way.

Sammy: Maybe we can just go do, do, do, and we are starting over, and then we can go do, do, do (pointing).

Teacher: Uh-huh.

Sammy: That will make us . . .

Donald: No, wait a minute. I'll show you how we can go. We go you, and we can go him, and we can go me, and we can go her, and me, and him, and then you (S → A → D → K → D → A → S). Like that.

Sammy: No, no, maybe we can just go like . . . Okay, me, and you, then you, and then Andy (S → D → K → A). Okay, let's do it this way. First go do, do, do, and then do, do, do (S → A → D → K → S → A → D → K). How about that?

Teacher: Can I show you a way that some of the kids did last year? An idea that they had? Okay, they rolled the dice and they said . . . First they said "Okay, should the highest number go first or the lowest number go first?"

Andy: The highest go . . .

Teacher: Okay, so . . .

Andy: Donald was the highest.

Teacher: Did you . . . ? Donald was the highest number?

Andy: Yeah, he gets to go first.

Teacher: Okay, so he should go first. Who had the next highest number?

Sammy: I did.

Andy: Huh-uh, because you didn't roll the dice.

Teacher: Who had the next highest number? What was your number?

Andy: Mine was . . .

Donald: Mine was, um, five.

Teacher: Five.

Sammy: Mine was five and a half.

Andy: No, you did not roll five and a half.

Teacher: Did you roll the dice? Andy, did you roll the dice?

Andy: Yeah.

Teacher: What number did you get?

Andy: I got it one.

Teacher: Oh, so . . .

Donald: I'm five and a half.

Teacher: (To Andy) Sorry about that. Yours is last. Okay, Donald is first.

Sammy: How old are you?

Teacher: (To Donald) What number did they . . . ?

Katy: (Leaves)

Sammy: I'm five and a half years old.

Teacher: We are not talking about how old you are. We are talking about what number you got on the dice.

Andy: How about we count our ages?

Teacher: Well, that's hard to do because everybody is five.

Andy: I'm not five. I'm six.

Teacher: I know. (To Donald) Okay, you got a five, right? (To Andy) You roll the dice.

Andy: (Rolls the die) Um, one.

Teacher: One, okay.

Donald: That means you get ahead.

Teacher: Sammy, you roll the dice. No, this is just to see who goes first.

Sammy: (Counts dots on the die) Six.

Teacher: Okay, so who goes first?

Andy: Sammy.

Teacher: Okay, Sammy goes first. Who's second?

Sammy: Um, um, he . . . Andy.

Donald: And then I'm third.

Sammy: Right.

Teacher: Okay, everybody agreed?

Andy: No, I'm the lowest. I'm the lowest. . . . I should be last.

Teacher: You should be last. That's right.

Andy: Yeah, because I'm the lowest.

Teacher: Right, so how should we do this?

Sammy: Um, me and . . .

Teacher: So then you, then you, then you. Then you, then you, then you.

Sammy: Okay.

Teacher: Wait, who's first?

Sammy: I am.

Teacher: Okay. Roll it.

Andy: Roll it here.

Teacher: And that way it won't go on the floor. Okay (leaves).

In this episode, the teacher, at first, listened to the children's ideas and encouraged them

to generate their own solution by asking, "What would be a fair way to decide . . . ?"

Since the children insisted on their own ideas with no attempts to reconcile, the teacher

proposed a new idea without imposing it on the children. Subsequently, the teacher

continued to guide the children, and made sure that everyone understood and agreed on

the solution.

Offer opportunity for restitution and help them repair the relationship without

forcing them to be insincere. When a conflict involved a child or children whose feelings

were hurt, the teachers mediated the situation with sensitivity and helped the children

repair the situation. The following episode illustrates the first grade teacher's efforts that

reflect the consturctivist teaching principles: The teacher offers opportunities for

restitution and for repairing the relationship without forcing them to be insincere.

> (In first grade classroom, during quiet reading time, the children are reading a book individually at different places. One child comes to the teacher and tells her that Albert was calling Greg a name. When the teacher observes the situation and learns that Albert has used a belittling word to Greg, she approaches the two children and asks them to have a talk with her.)

> Teacher: Albert, would you come with me please? Okay, you come with me.

> Greg: (Sits on the floor and hides his face with his shirt.)

> Teacher: Greg. (Sits on the floor) Albert, have a seat. I want you to look at Greg. (To Greg) Tell Albert how you feel about what he said.

> Greg: (Hides his face with his hands)

> Teacher: Do you want to tell him how you feel?

> Albert: Sorry.

> Teacher: Can you tell him how you feel? Can you see how he feels, Albert? When you call people names, it makes them feel really bad. And that's how Greg's feeling. (To Greg) Albert said he was sorry. Albert, can you think of something that you could do that might make him feel better?

> Albert: (Shakes his head)

> Teacher: Um, I've got an idea. You want me to whisper it to you?

> Albert: (Shakes his head)

> Teacher: No? Okay, well, if you think you want to do something to make him feel better, that would be good because I think that might make Greg feel better. (Interrupted by another child) (To Albert) . . . I had to talk to you two or three times [about sitting by yourself during quiet reading time], Albert. And one of those times you hurt your friend's feelings. Now I know you said you are sorry, and maybe you can think of something that you can do that'll help him feel better. Maybe you can just ask him to play a game or play with you at choice time today. You think about it.

In this episode, while the first grade teacher encouraged the children to find their own

ways of restoring the relationship, she also showed concern for Greg's feelings and his

dealing with such situations, and later talked to Greg about the incident.

Teacher: Are you feeling better?

Greg: Yeah.

Teacher: I like that smile on your face. You know what? Sometimes they all get called names. Like sometime in my life I got called a name. Probably Steve might get called a name someday. Probably Stanley might get called a name. It happens to all of us.

Greg: (Shrugs his shoulder)

Teacher: Sometimes all we can do is to say, "I don't like that. Don't call me that anymore." And just walk away. You think you can remember that?

Greg: Just to walk away.

Teacher: Sure. You don't have to say anything. You can just walk away.

Steve: Yesterday, on the playground, it was really silly eating lunch, I guess, and someone called me a "dweeb."

Teacher: Did you just walk away?

Steve: Yeah.

Greg: I heard that in the lunch room.

Teacher: See, it happens to all of us.

Greg: (Smiles and leaves)

Foster positive attitudes toward solving conflicts. While teaching children

practical strategies to manage conflicts and promoting the development of children's

interpersonal understanding by facilitating reciprocal exchange, the teachers also helped

the children experience dealing with a conflict in a positive manner. In the following

episode, although it is apparent that one child was the perpetrator, the kindergarten

teacher plays a neutral mediator without being judgmental:

> (In the kindergarten classroom, Stacey is playing with a puzzle and Barbara
> reaches and touches the puzzle as she walks by Stacey.)
>
> Stacey: (To Barbara) Stop it.
>
> Barbara: (makes a mean face and leaves)
>
> Stacey: (To teacher) Mrs. K., I said "Stop" to Barbara and Barbara kept doing it.
> And I said "Stop" to her then she went . . . (imitates Barbara's mean face).
>
> Teacher: And you told her with strong feelings?
>
> Stacey: (Nods)
>
> Teacher: Barbara, come here. Okay, come here. Stacey is trying to give you a
> really important message. And she said you are not listening. Do you know what
> the message is?
>
> Barbara: What?
>
> Teacher: (To Stacey) Tell her one more time. She wants to hear the message.
>
> Stacey: Barbara, you can't do that to me because that makes me mad.
>
> Teacher: (Looking at Barbara) What does she mean when she says you can't do
> that? You can't do what?
>
> Barbara: Don't do.
>
> Teacher: Don't do what?
>
> Barbara: Don't do . . . (points the puzzle)
>
> Teacher: Mess up the puzzle?
>
> Barbara: (Nods)

Teacher: How would you feel if we messed up your puzzle?

Barbara: Mad.

Teacher: Yeah. And so she's saying please don't mess up my puzzle. Okay, you got the message now?

Barbara: (Nods)

Teacher: Okay. Thank you.

The teacher, without reproaching Barbara's behavior, focused on helping the children communicate to each other. By emphasizing the importance of listening to the other person as well as of being heard by the other, the teacher guided both children to deal with the situation positively.

Major Aims of Promoting Children's Conflict Resolution Through Mediations

In mediations, the two constructivist teachers paid attention to how the children were interacting with each other in the conflict situations and facilitated reciprocal exchange between the children while helping them with their practical strategies. These practices were supported by their beliefs that the process is a significant beginning toward the gradual progress that will eventually lead to the higher developmental stage where children become able to solve problems on their own by considering all perspectives involved and coming to mutual agreement. Furthermore, by facilitating the problem-solving processes as a neutral mediator, the teachers fostered children's positive attitudes in dealing with conflict situations.

In essence, the teachers, in mediating children's conflicts, were trying to attain three aims: To teach children practical strategies to manage conflicts, to foster positive

attitudes toward solving interpersonal conflicts in children, and to promote the

development of children's interpersonal understanding (see Figure 3).
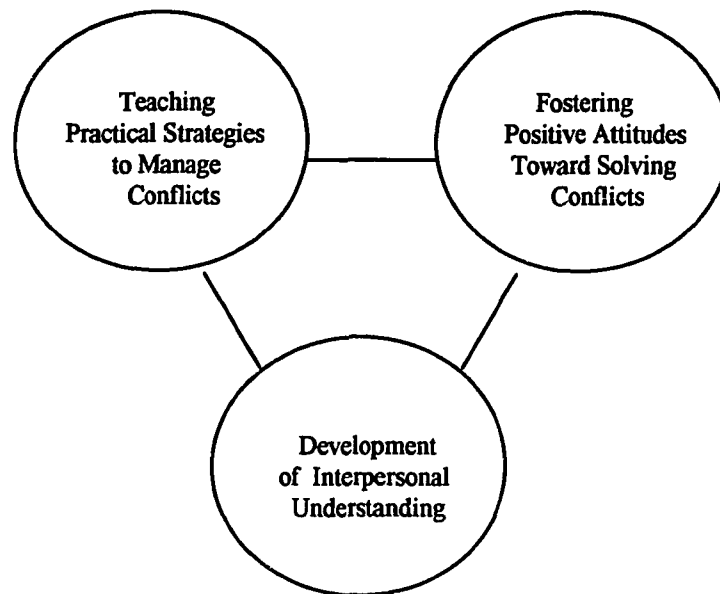
Figure 3. Major aims of promoting children's conflict resolution.

The triad represents the totality of the constructivist approach to promoting children's

conflict resolution through mediations. As the kindergarten teacher pointed out, if a

teacher only focuses on teaching children practical strategies to manage conflicts, the

effort of guiding children to use their words would result in mechanical exchanges of

phrases among children. In order for the children to manage their conflicts on their own,

it is crucial to develop their higher-level understanding as well as positive attitudes. While

teachers' mediations vary depending on the individual differences of the children and the

situational factors, accomplishing the three aims was the underlying rationale for their interventions in children's conflict situations.

Interventions Focusing on One Child

At an early stage of classroom observation, it became apparent that some children were more prone to interpersonal conflicts than the others in each classroom. With those children, the teachers often began the mediation process by directly speaking to the particular child rather than immediately getting him or her to talk with the other child in the conflict.

In the kindergarten classroom, one child repeatedly instigated conflicts and caught the teacher's attention because of the impulsiveness of his reactions. He tended to express his demand or discontent by crying, whining, shouting and seldom yielded to the other's request. His interpersonal strategies in conflicts that became increasingly forceful, verbally or physically, reflected his Level 0 understanding of the situation. The teacher often chose to intervene and speak to him directly. In the interview, she categorized his behaviors as "egocentric" and tried to distinguish his responses from other children's responses to conflicts.

> It's not that he was in disagreement with someone over something. It was that he wanted his way, his idea. . . . So I think those are two different teaching situations. . . . How to help him reconcile a situation seems to me yet a different thing.

While both teachers believed that young children begin to recognize the different and conflicting needs in the situation through their experiences of interacting with the others, seeing the other's reaction, and realizing the effect of their actions, they felt that those

particular children needed different learning opportunities. Before they facilitated the reciprocal communication between the children, the teachers took time to talk to the particular child and directly pointed out to him or her the other's needs and feelings in the situation, and the effect of his or her action on the other person. The following episode demonstrates the first grade teacher's efforts:

(During choice time, Derek finds out that someone stepped on his clay airplane. Stanley who was at the scene tells Derek that Greg had done it.)

Derek: (Goes to Greg, looking very angry) You squashed my plane.

Greg: No, I didn't.

Derek: Yes, it was. Right here. Squashed.

Greg: What airplane? (Goes over to see it)

Derek: Look at your foot (tries to grab Greg's foot to see the bottom of his shoe). I know you squashed it.

(As Derek tries to explain to the teacher what happened, the teacher decides to talk to Derek)

Teacher: Derek (sits facing Derek). You know, sometimes you get really angry and then you don't think about things. But do you think if you grab Greg when he was walking, if you grab his foot, what could have happened?

Derek: (Inaudible)

Teacher: Yeah, like if you are walking and I grab your foot . . . Now, what you wanted to do was to look at the bottom of his foot. So what's another way you could have done that?

Derek: I could have asked him.

Teacher: Yeah, because if you just grab his foot like that, he's probably going to fall down and then cry, and we're going to have a big problem. We're going to have a bigger problem.

Derek: (Nods)

Teacher: So if you thought that he had stepped on it, then you need to say, "I need to see the bottom of your foot." But don't grab his foot.

Derek: Okay.

Teacher: Because you know what would happen?

Derek: (Nods)

Teacher: Okay.

The two teachers' primary goal was to facilitate the problem solving process by involving both parties because they generally believed in "the importance of the children to each other" and that the child's decentering is prompted by listening to the other child's desire and needs and by being heard by the other. However, with those children whose egocentric tendencies were extreme, the teachers took a more active role in pointing out the other's needs in the situation, what influence their behavior had on other people, and, sometimes, why the behavior was inappropriate. The first grade teacher explained in the following way:

> Sometimes I put into words what happened with the child. "Did you notice that when you did this such and such happened?" "What could you do differently?" Or "If you make noises in the group, it's hard for all of us to hear." . . . When I ask them to stop doing it, I try to tell them why I'm asking them to stop doing it . . . "So these are the things that happen when to you such and such." . . . And they are all so egocentric that it's not a natural thing for them so . . . I try to tell them why.

> Some children also tended to get extremely upset when their ideas were not

accepted by the other children. In one case in first grade classroom, one child who had tendency to react to conflict impulsively began crying when the other children rejected his

idea for making the ship "Titanic" in their project. The teacher approached and spoke to

him. In the interview, the teacher explained the incident and what she was trying to

achieve:

> I think [he] really thought about that when I said I don't think they don't like your ideas but they are so excited about their ideas or they like their ideas so much that they really don't want to consider your ideas or whatever I said. And I think it really made him . . . stop and think that, "Oh, yeah, maybe so." So he was able to step out of his own misery for a minute and consider that, which is I think a step in a right direction. And it is for these children who are so egocentric, as you know, . . . a real process. And it's a real . . . sometimes painful thing for them to do, and it's a struggle, and some of them still can't do it. But we keep trying.

The teachers felt that these children who were extremely egocentric and whose responses

reflect their Level 0 understanding needed additional guidance before they could engage in

reciprocal exchange with the other children. Although those children's behaviors were

impulsive and sometimes seemed irrational, the teachers did not attempt to suppress them.

Rather, they provided the children with the opportunities in which they can reflect on their

own behavior and begin to recognize the other side in the situation.

Teachers' Beliefs About Promoting Children's Conflict Resolution in the Classroom

During interviews, both teachers revealed their beliefs about promoting children's

conflict resolution that were consistent with the theoretical approach of constructivist

education. They believe that children learn how to manage conflicts through numerous

experiences of interacting with others, not through direct instruction of behaviors and

skills. They also acknowledged the significance of interpersonal conflict and its resolution

in children's whole development. Those beliefs were reflected in their classroom

practices. Furthermore, teacher interviews reflected the view that it is essential for a

constructivist teacher to have a firm belief and knowledge about promoting children's

development of interpersonal understanding in order to make day-to-day decisions about

intervening children's conflicts.

Guiding Children's Learning Through Various Experiences

During interviews, both teachers rejected the idea that children's abilities to

manage conflicts be viewed in terms of social skills. The first grade teacher expressed her

view as follows:

> I think "social skills" is a kind of a nebulous phrase. For one teacher it means
> "saying please and thank you" and "answering the phone in a certain way." For
> another teacher that means considering another person's feelings. If I would think
> of social skills, I guess I look at it more as . . . how a child reacts to situations. . . .
> I look at it more as a way of life, a way a child is, a way of being instead of a skill
> that you practice and master.

The kindergarten teacher also described her view by making an analogy between how

children learn to speak and how they learn to manage interpersonal conflicts:

> We as a society do a really good job of teaching our babies to talk because we do
> certain things. We immerse our babies in the language of our culture. We provide
> proficient demonstrations of . . . how you talk, when you talk, I talk, you talk. We
> let them talk whenever they want. We give them feedback. That "goo-goo, ga-
> ga" we pretend like that's talk. We respond to the meaning that they are making.
> And I feel like that applies to everything. You know, whether it's problem
> solving, we immerse in a problem, we give them demonstrations, we give them
> time to do it, we respond to their approximations.

Both teachers viewed the children's abilities to manage conflicts in terms of what meaning

the child makes out of the interpersonal situations and not in terms of social skills or

knowledge the child internalizes. Furthermore, they believed that children develop their

abilities through their own experiences of interacting with others and not through direct

instructions of behaviors and skills. In both classrooms, there were no curricular activities

specifically planned for teaching conflict resolution. Rather, the teachers primarily relied

on naturally occurring interpersonal conflicts in the classroom as teaching opportunities to

promote children's conflict resolution. The kindergarten expressed her beliefs as follows:

> I have always felt like it's more important to capitalize on the moment. And when the moment arises teach those kids that are involved. . . . I've just always felt like it was important to be meaningful and relevant and be the teachable moment.

> I've always felt successful enough with kids that I've not felt the need to have a "what-to-do-if-there-is-a-fight" lesson.

The teachers also found other opportunities to discuss interpersonal conflicts across

different curricular activities. For example, the first grade teacher was reading a chapter

from "Mrs. Piggle Wiggle" every afternoon after lunch. When they were on the chapter in

which Mrs. Piggle Wiggle cures a bully, "Nicholas," the teacher stopped the reading for a

moment and asked the group, "What would you do if Nicholas was in our class?"

> The first grade teacher explained her beliefs about guiding the children's learning

through various occasions:

> Okay, what do you do for a certain reading stage? Well, you give them more chances to read. What do you do for a certain sociomoral stage? Well, you give them more chances to interact. And at the moment when they are interacting if something comes up you try to get them to take all the perspectives considered and then you try to get them . . . after taking perspectives . . . to consider in making a decision about it.

> You know what you want the kids eventually to be like and you just try to do a little more and a little more and a little more each time it comes up or something comes up.

Instead of creating a curriculum for conflict resolution, naturally occurring interpersonal situations in the classroom provided abundant opportunities for developing children's abilities to manage conflicts. Various experiences in which children learn about conflict resolution in the two classrooms thus were interwoven with curricular activities rather than prepared and delivered as a lesson by the teachers.

Conflict Resolution as an Important Part of the Curriculum

As the children in the constructivist classrooms began to play an active role in planning and carrying out their curricular activities in cooperation with peers, various interpersonal conflicts occurred. Even when a conflict arose in the midst of the activity, the teachers generally perceived it as a learning opportunity and invested considerable time to facilitate the children's problem-solving. Their teaching approaches demonstrated that they valued conflict resolution as an integral part of the curricular activities.

In one episode in the first grade classroom, four children argued over the possession of a cardboard box. Two of the children were working on their project of making the ship "Titanic" and two other children were making a report on bugs, and both groups needed to use the box. When the "Titanic" pair went to the teacher for a help, the teacher told them to go back and tell the other group that she brought the box for the "Titanic" project. However, Derek, one of the "bug" pair, who had explained how much they needed the box did not give up. Finally, the teacher walked over to the scene.

> Teacher: Derek, they have a problem. So what do you need to do if there is a problem here? What do you all need to do?
>
> Derek: Peace chairs.

Teacher: Okay, It sounds like you are not able to solve it. So it sounds like you need to go to the peace chairs. And stop what you are doing right now until you can solve your problem.

The four children went to the peace chairs. The "Titanic" pair explained they had been working on the project over a week and needed the box to construct the ship which had more than two stories. Finally, Marie in the "bug" pair decided to compromise and said, "We'll just use another box. . . . You guys need it a lot more badder than we do." The teacher observed the whole process and stepped in at the end of their discussion to make sure everybody agreed with the solution.

The first grade teacher could have suggested that Derek and Marie find another box when the problem occurred so that each group could continue working on their project. Instead, she disengaged them from their work and guided them to concentrate on solving the problem. Consequently, the children had a chance to listen to the other group's needs and were able to come to the solution which enabled both pairs to go back to their project. Her intervention reflected her belief that promoting children's conflict resolution is as important as other objectives of curricular activities which include academics. She later explained:

> I think they are learning to take another person's point of view, another person's perspective which will help them in a long run in the intellectual realm. So I do feel that learning to take another person's perspective is so important to constructivist teaching that that's much more important and overrides any other things that we are trying to do at the moment.

The kindergarten teacher also described what she was trying achieve in guiding children's conflict resolution and how she believed the children's experiences in resolving interpersonal conflicts were necessary and beneficial to their development and learning.

> I want them to get better at identifying their own conflicts and better at negotiating ideas with other people. I don't want them to be compliant. I don't want them to give in just because there is a conflict. . . . I want them to be able to express their ideas, to debate with someone else, exchanging points of view. . . . I want their learning about conflicts with other people to somehow eventually maybe in high school or maybe in fifth grade affect their conflicts in learning about intellectual things. I want them to not accept everything that they are told. I want them to question. I want them to value their own point of view and try to weigh things and negotiate information in their head. I think that that is equally as important--the social part of solving conflicts and getting along with other people--as the intellectual conflicts and handling them in a more organized fashion.

Because both teachers held the firm belief that the process of resolving the conflicts between different ideas and needs is crucial for children's intellectual and social development, they integrated conflict resolution as an essential part of everyday curricular activities.

Promoting the Development of Children's Understanding

In the interview, the first grade teacher commented that because progress in children's interpersonal understanding occurs slowly over time without immediate observable results of learning, guiding young children through this gradual process in the classroom could be challenging if the teacher does not have a clear vision of what she or he is trying to achieve:

> Beginning to teach children how to learn and how to solve their problems and so on . . . with some groups it's not easy. And it's not a pretty sight. . . . I guess it's rewarding later but it's not immediately rewarding. You don't immediately see a lot of results. And so it can be very discouraging for a lot of teachers who may be new, who may not see the end results. So teachers who are beginning

constructivist teachers need so much support from other teachers who can say, "Just stick with it. You'll love what you end up with. But right now you've got to keep over and over doing whatever it takes to help them be more independent and more autonomous."

For those teachers who are accustomed to teaching children "correct" behaviors and ways to solve the problem, it is not an easy task to respect young children's responses and solutions to conflict situations which may appear inappropriate by adults' definitions. Without immediate results of children's learning, it is difficult to determine and believe that the children are making progress. Furthermore, it is difficult to make decisions about how to intervene and promote children's development of interpersonal understanding in day-to-day conflict situations without firm beliefs and knowledge about how the children's development progresses. In the process of constructing the conviction and knowledge base, a teacher, as the first grade teacher suggested, needs to have continuous and collaborative support from other teachers who have the same beliefs and who have successfully implemented effective teaching practices in the classrooms.

Teachers' Approaches to Creating the Classroom Environment

In addition to working on an individual basis with children in the context of actual conflicts, the two constructivist teachers also utilized some other strategies related to promoting conflict resolution. In the two constructivist classrooms, the teachers made efforts to create the classroom environment that were closely related to fostering children's social understanding as well as their positive and autonomous attitudes toward solving interpersonal conflicts. Three features were identified and analyzed: (a) the teachers' use of the peace chairs in the classroom, (b) their efforts to involve the children

in making classroom decisions and rules, and (c) their approaches to establishing interpersonal relations in the classroom in which the children and the teacher are strongly connecting with one another and, at the same time, freely exchanging their points of view and respecting different ideas.

The Use of Peace Chairs in the Classroom

The teachers acknowledged that the use of peace chairs had several functions in promoting children's conflict resolution. When the children are engrossed in on-going activity, going to the peace chairs helps them "separate" the conflict from other activities and focus on the problem-solving process. When the conflict is intensifying, the children can "cool down" as they walk to the chairs. The peace chairs also provide the place for the children to initiate problem-solving on their own without having the teacher making "the judgment call." The peace chairs also help children recognize that there is a problem they need to solve. Especially for the children who are not aware of the conflict, being taken to the chairs and listening to the other child help them recognize their role in the situation.

The first grade teacher also discussed a possible negative side of having the peace chairs. That is, the child who is taken to the peace chairs may look at it as a punishment:

> You know, we have some kids who . . . Because they are young and unable to take another perspective they don't want to stop what they are doing to go over to do that. So they look at it in a negative way rather than positive way. But when they begin to take someone themselves then they realize the benefit.

Incidentally, after the interview, the teacher and I noticed that one of the first graders did view it that way. One afternoon, Albert and Marie began arguing as the whole class was

getting ready to leave the room for the art class. The teacher, as she had always done in similar situations, suggested that they go to the peace chairs and settle the problem. After the other children left the room, the teacher recognized that Albert at the peace chairs was crying and thinking he was in "trouble." The teacher at the scene gently talked to Albert and explained to him that the peace chairs were a chance for him to talk out how he felt. Later, when I asked her what she was going to do, whether she was going to talk to Albert, she told me:

> I don't know if we'll do it in a class meeting or . . . But sometimes soon I think we need to go back to the talking about the peace chairs and what it's for and so on. Just make sure that they all understand.

> . . . we talk about what if someone wants you to go to the peace chairs and you just don't want to go or you don't really feel you've done anything. And it may be that they'll just say, "Well, they just need to go because another person is upset so they need to listen to that other person." At least listen to how the other person feels. Usually they come up with something like that. Whether or not they can empathize with the other person or can see that person's perspective is another story but at least that person who had the problem feels that they have been taken seriously or that they have been listened to in some way.

After the incident, the first grade teacher never mentioned the incident to Albert individually or to the group and responded to him the same way as to other children. When Albert came to the teacher about the problem with somebody else, the teacher suggested that he take the other person to the peace chairs. One day, Albert was asked to go to the peace chairs by two children who claimed Albert was cheating on the game. Albert refused by saying "I don't wanna go there." The teacher stated "That's where they want to take you and that's what they want to do. So you need to go with them now and get it settled so you can get back to the game." Albert and two other children went to the

peace chairs, each person took a turn to speak, and they finally came out of the peace

chairs after shaking hands with each other.

Three weeks later, during a class meeting, the first grade teacher asked two

children to tell the group about their conflict which had happened that morning. Beth and

Derek had argued over who gets to read journals to the group and settled it by themselves

even though their argument was intense and Beth had poked Derek with her pencil. When

I asked her later why she brought up the particular incident during the class meeting, she

explained:

> You know, sometimes if we have a conflict that's a little more serious, that somebody won't go to the peace chairs or . . . either they don't want to go to the peace chairs or they'll think it's a negative thing to go to the peace chairs. Or they'll act like they have the impression that they are being chastised because they caused something to happen. This was one of the first times that two people agreed that there was a conflict and that they need to go get it settled and they took care of it. . . . But the thing that I liked was not so much Derek but Beth who was really I think . . . more the perpetrator than Derek at the time. . . . So I really liked the way Beth handled it. Number one . . . she knew right away that she needed to go over. But she also knew that she could be a part of the solution and . . . I think . . . she felt bad after she'd done it. And so it was a way that she could feel better about things and make restitution. So I wanted the group to know that Beth felt good about that. . . . It doesn't have to be for the person who does the "bad act" . . . a terrible thing to go back there. So I wanted to bring that up to the group in a positive way without making a big deal about what Beth actually had done which really didn't even come up, I don't think.

She further explained:

> And [the incident with Albert] was one of the reasons why I had brought that up. And I think with Albert there was some time between when he was upset and I think he had witnessed a number of people going to the peace chairs and it wasn't such a big deal. I think he had to see all that happen first before he actually knew that. He had to experience that himself.

The intention of the teacher's approach here was clear. By making the peace chairs a part of the classroom rules, she created a structure in the social environment that enabled the children to relate to each other positively and reciprocally when conflict occurred. The children understood and consented, at least at the practical level, that they must come to the peace chairs and work out the problem together while, as the teacher pointed out, they did not yet necessarily take the other person's perspective. The teacher believed that the children's higher understanding and positive attitude about interpersonal conflict slowly grow as they experience for themselves that all participants in the conflicts can benefit from solving the problem, whether they are taking someone or being taken by someone to the peace chairs.

Class Meeting and Decision Making

Several conflicts in both classrooms involved the issue of classroom rules. In these cases, the issue of conflict was not personal but affected everyone in the classroom. The issues included how to use the listening center, what to do with people who do not clean up, and how to decide who will be the readers during journal time. When conflict around the classroom rules arose, the first grade teacher usually brought it up in the class meeting. Because the children were actively involved in making the classroom rules, they took ownership of the problem. A feeling of necessity to solve the problem was also evident as they proposed different ideas during the discussion. The following example demonstrates the first grade teacher's approach of including the children in making classroom decisions.

Because different ideas and desires were involved in the process, several conflicts

inevitably occurred.

In the first grade classroom, during every morning meeting, some children read

their journals to the group. At the beginning of the year, the first grade teacher simply

assigned a few children to read, but soon she began including the children in the process of

making the decision. The teacher wrote down on the board the names of the children who

raised their hands and alphabetized them with the children by asking, "Do we have any 'A'

names?" After two days, the children took initiative in signing their names on the board

and some children began to alphabetize them. A few days later a problem occurred.

Because many people signed up, the task became difficult for the child who volunteered to

alphabetize the names. Then, as she was trying to number the names, more people came

to sign up which made the process even more complex. Some children began complaining

as they waited. After quietly observing the children, the teacher finally intervened and

asked, "What could we do?"

After expressing different ideas, the children and the teacher decided to try the idea

of having a list of all children on the board every morning and the first five people who put

a check mark beside their name to read their journals. The following week, a conflict

occurred as children were checking their names. Derek and Ellen decided to put numerals

instead of check marks and erased the check mark Joan had previously written. After

arguing with Derek, Joan came to the teacher crying. The teacher talked to the group.

> Teacher: Now, Joan's feelings are really hurt. And I don't know quite why.
> Because she's so upset, it's hard for her to talk. So can somebody fill me in on
> what's happened here?

Derek: Um, Joan's idea was . . . We switched sort of the idea. We don't count check marks. We just put numbers.

Teacher: Uh-huh.

Derek: She put a check mark and Ellen erased it because we don't count them.

Teacher: Okay. So she erased it, not meaning to hurt Joan's feelings, just because we had a different system.

Derek: Yeah.
Teacher: Okay.

Derek: And when we finished the line . . .
Teacher: And then she didn't have a number then?

Derek: Yeah.

Teacher: Okay. So what should we do today?

Derek: Oh, we could have six.

Teacher: What do you think? Would that be okay with everybody?

Derek: Yeah. Yeah.

Teacher: Because she didn't know the system? And she's feeling really bad and she really . . . I think she had something she really wanted to say. Is that okay with you? Okay. You feel better? Okay. See? We can solve things together. You know that?

Derek: (To Joan) Me and Ellen are sorry, Joan.

(The teacher and the children began journal reading.)

The next day, other children argued about whether they used numerical order or

alphabetical order. These conflicts necessarily led the class to have another meeting to

reconsider the system.

These experiences were significant for fostering not only the development of children's interpersonal understanding but also their social understanding about how a number of people function as a group. Seeing that Joan's feelings were hurt provided an impetus for the children to recognize different and conflicting ideas and desires involved in the process of making decisions about journal reading. By trying out different systems to choose the journal readers, the children were exploring ways to balance different ideas and regulate social behaviors as a group. Furthermore, because they were creating their own systems of running the journal time, the children felt strong needs and their own purposes to solve those conflicts and to come to a solution that everyone could agree on.

Building a Community in the Classroom

While the constructivist teachers provided the organizational features in the classroom to promote children's development of social understanding and their autonomous attitude toward resolving conflicts, they also emphasized the importance of establishing specific interpersonal relations in their classrooms. They described their efforts and beliefs about building a community of individuals who have developed close connections with other members through shared experiences, and, at the same time, who have the abilities to recognize and respect different points of view.

Sharing common experiences. For both kindergarten and first grade teachers, having the children help each other was one of the important elements of building a community in the classroom. Throughout the school day, both teachers advocated the idea that other children could be resourceful helpers. For example, the teacher would tell

a child, "Did you know that Craig was a puzzle expert? He can probably help you." If a child needed some help in writing, the teacher would refer the child to the other child, "Joan would be a good person to ask." The kindergarten teacher on occasions conveyed the idea that "We are here to help each other" and "We have 21 teachers in this room."

To create common experiences among children, the kindergarten teacher particularly emphasized the use of literature.

> . . . I think [literature] helps them make more connections because it's something in their experiences. Literature gives us common experiences. . . . We all have had the literature experiences therefore we can all use it to draw on. Otherwise Andrea and Jason have had very different experiences so there is no way I can equalize that. But if we use literature as the basis for our experiences then we are all starting from the plain field.

The first grade teacher considered singing as well as literature experiences to be important to create the sense of "togetherness" in the classroom. She sang with the children almost every day. The teacher and the children created their own verses for a song "There is a spider on my chest" by rhyming the words:

> There is a spider on my chest, on my chest.
> There is a spider on my chest, on my chest.
> There is a spider on my chest, and he's being like a pest.
> There is a spider on my chest, on my chest.

During the observations, the first grade teacher also told me that "laughing and being silly" was also very important in her classroom to create a community: "Humor is just so important, being silly, . . . and being able to laugh together." In her classroom, there is always laughter among children and the teacher. For example, she would play the character from children's literature "Viola Swamp," dramatizing the mean teacher who

writes children's names on the board if they have been "bad." The children would play

along and deliberately do "bad" things and say "Put my name on the board." She

emphasized that creating a community in her classroom means not only being together or

engaging in cooperative activities, but also establishing strong connections with each other

as a group through the "powerful" experiences of sharing affect, especially laughter.

Exchanging and respecting different perspectives. The first grade teacher

explained that she believed children become more able to manage conflicts as a community

is established in the classroom:

> I think that the children have more of a stake or more of a personal identification in
> other children. They know other children or . . . [have] more respect for each
> other because they know each other. So that they might be able to be more likely
> to exchange ideas if they have experienced laughing together and playing together.
> So I think [children's effective conflict resolution] just happens naturally when
> community is established.

As the children develop close relationships with one another, they also begin to recognize

that different people have different ideas. While the constructivist teachers made efforts to

create a classroom environment in which children could freely exchange their ideas, the

first grade teacher emphasized that it is important to help them

> . . . realize that just because the person feels different it doesn't mean that they are
> wrong. That this person has a different way or different feeling about this situation
> then . . . not necessarily they may understand it because I think that's really an
> advanced thing. But at least to realize that there is another side to this and it's not
> wrong. It's just a different side.

The kindergarten teacher also stressed the importance of establishing relationships in

which children can respect differences of opinion.

> I think it's important to start laying the ground work for it's okay for people to
> disagree and still like each other. I think there're just a lot of adults that don't.

> Even me. . . . I feel like if I'm really disagreeing with somebody it's the "we" and the "them" camp, you know. That's not the way it should be. But it's because that's the way I was brought up. You're stuck with everybody who was the same and you didn't associate with different points of view. And I understand now how crucial that is for kids. So I need to create a forum for those kinds of things to happen.

For guiding the children to respect different ideas and opinions, they emphasized, the constructivist teacher must also respect children's views and ideas. During class meetings, as the teacher invites children to propose their ideas, she could face various unexpected answers. The first grade teacher explained:

> You know, one thing I've learned as a constructivist teacher is not to have certain expectations as to what they are going to come up with, preconceived ideas, because you never know. . . . I've learned pretty much to kind of blank my mind and not to be surprised with what they come up with.

In one class meeting, the first graders were discussing what to do with people who do not clean up and trying to come up with a warning system. One of the children proposed the idea of throwing lunch if someone does not clean up. The teacher told the group that she was not comfortable with the idea. She later explained:

> . . . you know, I don't feel a bit bad about saying I'm not comfortable with certain things. I'm always ready to do that. But other than that it's something that the group really feels strongly about and it's not going to hurt anybody then I guess I have to go along with it. I've learned that if I'm going to throw it out to the group, I've got to go along with what they decide. If I said I'm going to take your idea and then if I didn't take their ideas, I would be saying one thing and acting another.

The first grade teacher felt that if she was trying to teach children to respect different views, she could not reject the children's ideas because that would be "the opposite to respect." She further commented:

> That's one reason why I try to accept the ideas they come up with even if I don't like [the ideas]. . . . And that's hard. That is really hard. [But] I feel like . . . if I don't accept it they are not going to exchange points of view with me anymore.

In the constructivist classrooms, the teachers are members of the community. The role of

the teacher expands beyond facilitating cooperative relationships among children. The

constructivist teachers take part in the community which consists of people who establish

close connections and feel free to exchange their ideas while respecting different points of

view.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Characteristics of Teacher Interventions in Children's Conflict Situations

While interpersonal conflicts occurred frequently throughout the school day as the

children were actively engaged in self-directed activities, the constructivist teachers

avoided initiating immediate interventions in children's conflict situations. They observed

the children and decided to intervene only under certain circumstances: situations that

involved a child who was interacting at Level 0, situations in which the event of conflict

was disrupting the on-going activity in which the other child or the whole class was

engaged, and situations in which more than three children were involved and they

appeared to be at an impasse. Consequently, more teacher interventions were solicited by

the children than initiated by the teacher. It is probable, as other researchers (Genishi &

DiPaolo, 1982; Laursen & Hartup, 1989) would argue, that the availability of the teacher

might have inhibited the children from taking responsibility and attempting to solve the

problem by themselves. In fact, the children in both classrooms frequently depended on

the teacher for solving the conflicts at the beginning of the school year, and the teacher

mostly responded to their solicitations. However, the constructivist teachers, by

responding to the children's solicitations effectively, gradually enabled the children to

solve interpersonal conflicts by themselves. The teachers let the children recognize that

the teacher was not going to solve the problem for them but they must deal with the

situation. The teachers encouraged the children to work through the problem-solving by

themselves by equipping them with effective ways to communicate their feelings and desires. In their responses to solicitations, the teachers also used teaching tools such as the peace chairs to help the children take initiative in managing their conflicts. And the children were beginning to initiate problem-solving by taking the other person to the peace chairs instead of asking the teacher to solve the conflict. However, the teachers were always available to help the children whenever their attempts to manage conflicts failed.

Some developmental studies examine the influence of the presence of adults on the children's conflicts (Besevegis & Lore, 1983; Killen & Turiel, 1991; Laursen & Hartup, 1989). Some researchers recommend that teachers intervene in children's conflicts as little as possible to let them try to solve their own problems (Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982; Katz & McClellan, 1991). However, this study indicates that, as shown in Figure 1, teachers are making complex educational decisions to guide children in conflict situations. The constructivist teachers in this study were attentive to the nature of children's interactions and promoted the children's conflict resolution abilities by different types of interventions. The teachers were always present and responsive but made themselves available for the children only as a facilitator of the children's own problem-solving processes to encourage their initiative in solving conflicts. Teacher interventions in classrooms thus are manifold and goal-oriented, and the influence on children's conflicts must be examined accordingly.

<u>The Characteristics of Teachers' Mediations</u>

By mediating conflicts and working through the problem-solving processes with the children, the two constructivist teachers demonstrated various ways to promote

children's abilities and attitudes necessary for conflict resolution. While their mediations were generally congruent with the constructivist teaching principles developed by DeVries and Zan (1994), this study identified the two teachers' most prominent characteristics and underlying aims of mediations involving both parties. The teachers helped children verbalize feelings and desires and communicated that the use of physical force was an unacceptable way to solve a problem. They facilitated reciprocal exchange among children to help them recognize the reciprocity of the situation and their role in a conflict. With the understanding of the long and gradual process of the children's development, the teachers were focusing on promoting the progression from the impulsive and unilateral stages of interpersonal understanding to the reciprocal stage. They also fostered children's positive experiences in dealing with conflicts by being a neutral mediator. As a whole, the teachers' mediations were guided by an underlying rationale, that is, to meet three major aims of promoting children's conflict resolution: To teach children practical strategies to manage conflicts, to foster positive attitudes toward solving interpersonal conflicts in children, and to promote development of children's interpersonal understanding.

The teachers considered that the problem-solving process involving both parties to a conflict creates the optimum context for promoting children's conflict resolution abilities. However, with children who were more prone to interpersonal conflicts than the others because of their extreme egocentric tendencies, the teachers provided additional guidance before they could engage in reciprocal exchange with others. Without attempts

to suppress their impulsive behaviors, the teachers helped the children reflect on their own behavior and recognize the other side of the situation.

Teachers' Beliefs About Promoting Children's Conflict Resolution in the Classroom

The constructivist teachers revealed six beliefs about promoting children's conflict resolution in the classrooms that were consistent with the theoretical approach of constructivist education.

1. The teachers viewed the children's abilities to manage conflicts in terms of what meaning the child makes out of the interpersonal situations and not in terms of social skills or behaviors.

2. They believed that the development of children's conflict resolution abilities requires children's own experiences of interacting with others and cannot be taught directly in lessons.

These beliefs were reflected in their practices that capitalize on naturally occurring conflicts as teaching opportunities to promote children's abilities and attitudes necessary for conflict resolution. The teachers also found opportunities across different curricular activities to discuss interpersonal conflicts with the whole class.

3. The teachers held firm beliefs that the process of resolving conflicts is crucial for children's intellectual and social development.

Their teaching practices reflected their beliefs in that they valued conflict resolution as an integral part of the curricular activities.

4. The teacher believed that progress in children's interpersonal understanding occurs slowly over time without immediate observable results of learning.

5. The teacher viewed that it is essential for a constructivist teacher to have a firm belief and knowledge base about the development of children's interpersonal understanding in order to make day-to-day decisions about intervening in children's conflict situations.

6. The teachers also believed that creating a classroom environment is important in promoting children's social understanding as well as their positive and autonomous attitudes toward solving interpersonal conflicts.

The teachers' efforts were analyzed in the following section on creating the classroom environment.

Teachers' Approaches to Creating the Classroom Environment

In addition to mediating children's conflict situations, the constructivist teachers also provided organizational structures, namely the peace chairs, to facilitate children's reciprocal and positive interactions. The constructivist teachers, in the first grade classroom in particular, used the peace chairs effectively to promote the development of children's interpersonal understanding and their positive attitudes toward solving interpersonal conflicts. Because the children understood and consented that they must come to the peace chairs when a conflict occurred, they began interacting and thinking about interpersonal relations at the practical level. The first grade teacher believed that would eventually lead to progress in their socio-cognitive reasoning. She also emphasized

that children must have these experiences to realize that all parties involved in the conflict could benefit from solving the problem.

This study also showed that the children's experiences of participating in making classroom decisions were closely tied to their development of social understanding and autonomous attitudes toward resolving interpersonal conflicts. Conflicts in the constructivist classrooms often involved issues related to classroom rules. Unlike other studies (e.g., Killen & Turiel, 1991) that found that conflicts involving issues of social rules were often solved by adult-generated resolution, the children in the constructivist classrooms were negotiating and generating their own solutions. The classroom rules in the constructivist classrooms were not imposed on the children but made by the children and used as tools for their own purposes. The example of the first graders' making decisions about how to run the journal reading time demonstrated that the teacher, by involving children in making classroom decisions, created opportunities for the children to negotiate, listen to other opinions and ideas, and to experience coming to a mutual agreement. The children were experimenting and creating their social norms about how to treat each other and how to regulate their behavior in relation to others. They were also becoming aware of their responsibilities in contributing their ideas and solving the problem which influences everyone in the classroom. It is probable that, as Kohlberg and Lickona (1987/1990) and Selman (1980) point out, young children still respect rules and authority heteronomously because of their developmental limitations. But those experiences in

conceiving the rules as negotiable are crucial for young children to recognize the purpose of having rules and to develop their own convictions about how to treat each other.

The constructivist teachers' approaches to promoting the development of children's interpersonal understanding, attitudes of wanting to solve interpersonal conflicts and feelings of responsibility were also closely related to their efforts to establish a community in the classroom. The constructivist teachers characterized community as a group of people who build close connections with each other by sharing experiences at cognitive, behavioral as well as affective levels and freely exchanging their points of view while respecting different ideas and opinions. Furthermore, the teachers emphasized the importance of the role of the teacher in creating community in the constructivist classroom: The teacher as a member of the community must exchange her or his points of view with children by respecting their perspectives.

Conclusion

Early childhood professionals are claiming that violence prevention must begin early with young children. While numerous types of programs and curricula for conflict resolution have been introduced, this study suggests that violence prevention and conflict resolution should be framed and implemented within a broader educational approach which determines the whole learning and development of young children. In two constructivist classrooms, the teachers' approaches to promoting children's conflict resolution were necessarily a part of their educational goal of developing intellectually and sociomorally autonomous individuals; that is, to develop children with the reasoning

power to consider and coordinate all possible perspectives and to attain a mutually agreeable solution, and, at the same time, to develop children who work through and resolve conflicts with other people with their own purposes, reasons and convictions. The development of children's conflict resolution abilities and attitudes was fostered not only by the teachers' interventions in conflict situations but also by their efforts to create the learning environment that enables each child to grow as a whole person.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study identified the constructivist teachers' practical approaches and aims of promoting children's conflict resolution at the beginning of a school year. In particular, the teachers were focusing on promoting the progression from the unilateral stage to the reciprocal stage of children's interpersonal understanding. Further research is needed to examine the progress of the children's abilities as well as attitudes through the course of a school year.

This study also suggests that a teacher needs to establish a firm belief and knowledge base about the development of children's interpersonal understanding in order to make day-to-day decisions about intervening in children's conflict situations. As one teacher in this study pointed out, teachers who are making an effort to implement the constructivist approach in the classroom need continuous and collaborative support from other teachers. More research that documents effective teaching practices is also needed to provide useful resources for the practitioners in the process.

Recommendations for Classroom Practice

When a children's interpersonal conflict occurs in a classroom, the teacher must make decisions about whether or not to intervene, when to intervene, and how to intervene in the situation. This study suggests that the teacher avoid intervening immediately or settling the situation for the children, unless the conflict is destructive in that, for example, it involves physical danger or disrupts other children's learning. At the same time, the teacher's attitude and practical approach should not be laissez-faire in that he or she should always be attentive and responsive as a facilitator of the children's problem-solving processes. In early childhood classrooms, children frequently depend on the teacher to deal with conflict situations. This study suggests that the teacher, in his or her responses, empower the children by avoiding to solve the problem for them, by encouraging them to take initiative in the problem-solving process, and by facilitating their reciprocal communications.

The study also recommends that the teacher invest time to work through the problem-solving processes with the children, involving both parties in the conflict situation, by using the 14 constructivist teaching principles as a guideline. Various teaching tools or techniques, such as peace chairs, can also enhance teachers' effort to foster children's abilities and attitudes necessary for conflict resolution. However, this study suggests that the teacher use them with the three long-term goals as an underlying rationale for making educational decisions. That is,

1. To teach children practical strategies with which they will be able to take initiative in managing their own problems and to negotiate with the others who may have a different idea or feelings in the conflict situation.

2. To develop the children's interpersonal understanding which enables them to consider different perspectives involved in the conflict situation and to balance them in order to come up with a mutually agreed solution.

3. To foster children's positive attitudes of wanting to solve interpersonal conflicts by providing experiences in which children learn that every participant in the situation can contribute to and benefit from resolving the problem.

Because the aim of constructivist teachers is to promote gradual progress in the development of children's interpersonal understanding, not to teach them behaviors and skills directly, the teachers cannot expect to observe immediate learning results in children's conflict management skills or dramatic changes in their behaviors. Children develop the necessary abilities and attitudes through numerous experiences in which they become aware of different perspectives, recognize the effect of their behaviors on the others, and feel the need for having a mutually agreed solution. This study recommends that the teacher capitalize on naturally occurring opportunities throughout the day, across different curricular activities to promote children's conflict resolution which are most meaningful to the children and as important as other curricular objectives for their sociomoral and intellectual development.

Finally, young children are learning about how to deal with interpersonal conflicts in a larger context in which they learn how to live with other people as a group. In addition to intervening children's actual conflicts, this study suggests that the teacher's efforts to build a community in the classroom are essential to promoting children's abilities and positive attitudes necessary for conflict resolution. The following are recommendations for creating the environment in the classrooms.

1. Provide various opportunities in which children and the teacher share common experiences, such as singing, sharing stories and laughter, and establish close connections with one another, which will be a foundation for working out the differences with other people.

2. Create an environment in which children feel free to exchange their points of view, and at the same time, foster the attitude of respecting ideas and perspectives that are different from theirs.

3. Invite children to discuss and make decisions about classroom rules, let them experiment various ways of carrying out activities as a group, and provide opportunities to accommodate different ideas and opinions, which develop their own purpose and reasons to follow the rules.

4. Build a community in which the teacher becomes one of the members, exchanges ideas with the children, and respects children's perspectives while ensuring their positive learning experiences.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Letter to the Teacher

Dear (name of the teacher):

I am conducting a research project which examines early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices related to promoting children's conflict resolution in constructivist classrooms. Because you have been identified as an exemplary Project Construct teacher, I am inviting you to participate in the study. The purpose of the study is to investigate what exemplary constructivist teachers believe about children's conflicts and how they promote children's conflict resolution in their classrooms. This project is performed as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the researcher's doctoral degree in education at the University of Northern Iowa.

As a part of this study, you will be observed and videotaped in your classroom by the researcher every day during the first week of the school year of 1995, and 2 to 3 days a week for the following five weeks. I will ask you to wear wireless microphone, so that the videocamera can be placed in an unobtrusive part of the classroom, thus minimizing disruption of the regular classroom routine.

I will also ask you to participate in interviews: one initial interview before the classroom observations, once-a -week interviews during six weeks of classroom observations, and one final interview after the classroom observations.
Your participation in each interview is about 60-90 minutes in length.

Some segments of the videotapes will be transcribed, and all interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher will be also making field notes during the classroom observations. All data from this study are anonymous. You will not be identified by name, but rather as kindergarten teacher or first grade teacher.
Some parts of videotapes may be shown at public presentations of the research project.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you will not suffer any penalty or loss if you decline to participate. You may withdraw your participation at any time with no penalty or loss. In addition, you may at any time during the taping request that the microphone or the camera be turned off. You may also request the return of any of your tapes with no penalty or loss.

Results of this study will benefit teachers, teacher educators, and researchers who are engaging in a continuous effort to implement constructivist education and to improve education in general. Also, I hope that participation in this study will be of value to you as a part of your professional development.

I am working with Dr. Rheta DeVries, director of the Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education and a long-time consultant for the state of Missouri's Project Construct. As my advisor, she and her staff may review some of the tapes, and these tapes may be used by her for educational purposes in workshops, presentations, and publications.

Please sign the attached consent form and return it to me in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

This project has been approved by the University of Northern Iowa, your school district, and your school principal. If you have questions about the study, please feel free to call me collect at (319) 266-8277 or at the Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education, (319) 273-2101. You may also contact the office of the Human Subjects Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, (319) 273-2748 for answers to questions about the research.

Thank you for your cooperative effort in this research project.

Sincerely,

Yuko Hashimoto
Doctoral Student
College of Education
University of Northern Iowa

I hereby agree to participate in a research project conducted by Yuko Hashimoto. I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated in this letter and the possible risks arising from it. I understand that some videotape segments may be shown at public presentations of this research project, where I will not be identified by my name. I further understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time, with no penalty of loss.

I agree to allow videotapes of my classroom to be used by Dr. Rheta DeVries and her staff for educational purposes in workshops, presentations, and publications.

_____   _____
(Signature of participant)   (Date)

_____
(Printed name of participant)

_____
(Signature of investigator)

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter to the Parents

Dear Parents:

I am conducting a doctoral research project which examines classroom practices of Project Construct teachers. Your child's teacher has been selected as an exemplary teacher and has agreed to participate in the study. The purpose of the study is to gather information on how Project Construct teachers promote children's conflict resolution in the classroom.

As part of this study, your child's teacher will be videotaped for six weeks at the beginning of this school year (every day for the first week, and two to three times a week for the following five weeks). During this videotaping, the teacher will be wearing a wireless microphone, and the camera will remain focused on her. The use of a wireless microphone allows us to place the camera in the least obtrusive part of the classroom. Every effort will be made to insure that the taping does not disrupt the normal routine of the class.

Your child may appear in the tapes when he or she is interacting with the teacher. Some tape segments will be transcribed for analysis, and may be shown at public presentations of the research project. When transcripts are used in print, your child will not be identified by name; rather, a first initial or a pseudonym will be used. When viewed on tape, your child will be identified by first name only.

Your child will not be a subject in this research; the teacher is the subject. At no time will your child be singled out for research, and no assessments of your child will be conducted as part of this study. Participation in this research entails no risks to your child, and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw permission for your child to participate at any time, with no loss to yourself or your child. Denial of permission for your child to participate will involve no penalty or loss to you or your child.

Results of this research will benefit the field of education in general, in showcasing exemplary teaching practices. In addition, your child's teacher will benefit in the communication she will have as we review and comment on the tape.

I am working with Dr. Rheta DeVries, director of the Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education and a long-time consultant for the state of Missouri's Project Construct. As my advisor, she and her staff may review some of the tapes, and these tapes may be used by her for educational purposes in workshops, presentations, and publications.

Please sign and return attached consent form to your child's teacher.

This study has been approved by the University of Northern Iowa, your school district, and your child's school principal. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me collect at (319) 266-8277 or at the Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education, (319) 273-2101. You may also contact the office of the Human Subjects Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, (319) 273-2748 for answers to questions about the research.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Yuko Hashimoto
Doctoral Student
College of Education
University of Northern Iowa

I hereby give permission for my child, _____, to appear in videotapes made in his/her classroom as part of a research project conducted by Yuko Hashimoto. I understand that the videotapes and transcripts of the tapes which could contain words spoken by my child will be used for the research purpose and may be shown at public presentations of this research project. I further understand that these tapes may be used by Dr. Rheta DeVries for educational purposes in workshops, presentations, and publications.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child's participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to allow my child to participate in this project.

_____   _____
(Signature of parent or guardian)   (Date)

_____
(Printed name of parent or guardian)

_____
(Signature of investigator)

Appendix C

Guiding Questions for Initial Teacher Interview

(to be conducted before the data collection period)

<u>General Background Information</u>

1. How long have you taught, including the current year?

2. How long have you taught in this school?

3. What grade levels have you taught?

4. To what extent was your preservice education related to early childhood education?

   Have you gone back to school to take courses or to pursue a higher degree?

5. What certification(s) do you hold?

6. How many children do you have in your classroom this year?

7. Do you have other adults (e.g., teacher, aide, parent volunteer) in your classroom to

   work with the children?

<u>Professional Training for Constructivist Education</u>

1. When did you first learn about the constructivist view of young children's development

   and learning? What were the source(s)?

2. What kind of training/education about constructivist education have you received?

   Where? How long?

3. In what manner did the theoretical perspective influence your teaching practice? Did it

   change your teaching practice?

4. In a process of becoming a constructivist teacher, how do you view yourself and your

teaching practice?

5. Have you found any particular aspects of teaching difficult in implementing

constructivist education? If yes, please explain.

6. What are the most helpful resources for improving or supporting your teaching

practice?

Approaches to Children's Conflict Situations

Teacher's belief about the child's development and learning

1. At the beginning of the school year, do you expect to see children's conflicts frequently

in your classroom?

Probe for :

 - Teacher's general attitude toward having children's conflicts in the classroom.

2. How do you generally approach children's conflicts at the beginning of the year? What

are your major concerns?

Probe for :

 - What is the teacher's general view of children's conflicts in terms of their

developmental levels?

 - How does the teacher view her role in guiding children?

3. Do you find your approach to conflict resolution different from the traditional approach

to classroom management/discipline? In what way?

Probe for :

    - To what degree does the teacher articulate her teaching practices in relation to the constructivist perspective?

4. Have you always felt comfortable with dealing with children's conflicts?

5. Has your approach to conflict resolution changed over the years of your teaching career? If so, how?

Approaches to Creating a Classroom Environment

1. You hear about "creating an environment" for promoting children's development in constructivist education. How do you go about creating a classroom environment which promotes children's social development? What are your major concerns at the beginning of the school year?

Probe for :

    - How does she view the importance of interpersonal relationships (cooperative relationships/mutual respect) in the classroom?

Appendix D

Guiding Questions for Middle Teacher Interview

(to be conducted during the data collection period)

Approaches to Children's Conflict Situations:

Teacher's belief about the child's development and learning

(By referring to a specific teacher intervention observed in the classroom, or by viewing a

video segment which includes the teacher's intervention in a children's conflict situation)

1. Can you describe what the situation was?

Probe for :

    - How does the teacher view children's conflicts in terms of their developmental

    levels (e.g., egocentric nature of young children's thinking, Selman's developmental

    levels of interpersonal understanding)?

2. Can you explain what your intention was (to intervene in the certain way)?

Probe for :

    - The teacher's principles for the particular intervention.

3. What do you want the children to learn through the experience of confronting and

    managing conflicts with peers?

Probe for :

    - Does the teacher consider both/either the development of individual skills and

    behaviors and/or the development of mutual understanding/perspective-taking?

- To what extent does the teacher view conflict situations as learning opportunities for children's cognitive as well as social development?

4. (If the teacher includes a discussion of a "difficult child" or children who is/are more prone to interpersonal conflicts) How do you deal with the child or children?

Probe for :

- Does the teacher handle them differently from other children? If so, how?

Approaches to Creating Classroom Environment

1. Do you use group activities for promoting children's ability to deal with conflicts in addition to directly intervening in conflict situations? If yes, what are the activities? How do you conduct them? In what way do you think the activities are important for promoting children's conflict resolution?

2. (If the teacher includes a discussion of other activities that are related to children's conflict resolution) In what way do you think the activities influence children's ability to manage interpersonal conflicts?

3. After spending some time with the children, what are your current concerns for creating a classroom environment for this particular group of children?

Appendix E

Guiding Questions for Final Teacher Interview

(to be conducted after the data collection period)

Approaches to Children's Conflict Situations:

Teacher's belief about the child's development and learning

1. Compared to the beginning of the school year, do you see changes in ways that the children manage their conflicts? If yes, please explain.

2. What do you think the children are learning through repeated experiences of resolving peer conflicts?

3. Where do you want the children to go from here in terms of managing their conflicts? How would you like see them dealing with conflicts at the end of this semester? or at the end of the school year?

4. Do you find your way of approaching this particular group of children to promote conflict resolution any different from other years of your teaching career? If so, in what ways?

Appendix F

Descriptions and Examples of Children's Initial Oppositions

In the following excerpts from transcripts, children's actions which characterize the types of opposition are underlined.

Nonverbally Expressed Oppositions

Resisting: Avoids the other child's intrusive action, for example, by shifting body position.

(Alex and Cody are sitting next to each other during morning meeting.)

Alex: (continuously whispers to Cody's ear)

Cody: (turns his face, and eventually covers his ears with this hands)

Preventing: Stops the other child from doing something. For example,

(Andy, Donald and Sammy are playing card game. Katy sits next to Andy.)

Katy: (stretches her arm in front of Andy and reaches for a card)

Andy: (tries to stop Katy by grabbing her hand)

This category includes a case in which a child prevents the other's possession by taking the object.

Verbally Expressed Oppositions

Protesting: Objects to the other child's action, often by claiming his or her rights or possession, or by stating the other's wrongdoing. For example, "No, I was here first." "Those are mine." "You cheated."

Refusing: Refuses the other child's request. For example,

(Andrea, Debbie and David come to the play area together)

Sammy: Can I play? I'm gonna play too.

Debbie: <u>We want to play ourselves.</u>

Denying: Negates the other's action or assertion. For example, "<u>No, it isn't your turn.</u>"

Prohibiting: Prohibits the other child from doing something. For example, "<u>Stop it.</u>"

"<u>Don't tell what's gonna happen.</u>"

Disagreeing: Disagrees with the other child's idea, often by presenting his or her own.

(Children are getting ready for journal reading. Brad, who is in charge of calling out the names, is standing in front of the group.)

Teacher: Okay, Brad, who's first?

Brad: (goes to the board to check the list) Joan.

<u>Marie: No, Ellen.</u>

Brad: Huh-uh.

Marie: (walks to the board to see the list) She's the first letter. "E."

Threatening: States the negative consequence of the other's action. For example, "<u>I'm not playing.</u>" "<u>I'm telling (the teacher).</u>"

Appendix G

Descriptions and Examples of Issues of Conflicts

Object possession: Two or more children dispute about possession of objects.

Property: A child objects to the other's action which damaged or infringed on his or her property, for example, breaking or touching legos.

Physical harm: A child opposes the other's action which caused physical harm, including hitting, kicking, and pushing. It does not necessarily involve physical danger.

Intrusion: A child objects to the other's action which interferes with his or her on-going play or activity.

Group entry: A group of children resists a child's request to enter their on-going play or activity.

Game rules: A child objects to the other's violating rules in games, or children disagree about game rules.

Class rules: A child objects to the other's violating class rules, or children disagree about class rules.

Ideas or facts: Two or more children dispute over ideas or fact. For example, two kindergartners argued whether Saturday was a school day.

Space: Two or more children dispute over physical space.

Rude behavior: A child objects to the other's rude behavior such as spitting, sticking tongue out and using bad words.

Unfair distribution: A child objects to the other's action which violates the fair

distribution of resources. For example,

> (Children are getting ready for rest time. Cindy tries to find a place to lie down in the house which the children had made with blocks)
>
> Helen: (To Cindy) You can't lay in there. It's not fair. (looks at teacher) It's not fair if people get to lay in houses and other people don't.

Verbal intimidation: A child objects to the other's utterance which affronted him or her,

including name calling and teasing.

Appendix H

Organization and Descriptions of Daily Activities

<u>Kindergarten</u>

<u>Morning</u>

Group time: Children discuss the weather, read the morning message on the board; some children choose to write and read journals; teacher reads a story; and teacher introduces the choices for work time.

Work time: Children choose from the choices of work that mainly involve reading and writing and art.

Special activities: Children leave the classroom for art, music or physical education.

Lunch and recess

<u>Afternoon</u>

Rest time

Story time: Teacher reads a story.

Game time: Children choose any game from the game shelf, including board games, card games, puzzles.

Choice time: Children are free to choose any activities.

<u>First grade</u>

<u>Morning</u>

Journal writing: Children write in their own journal.

Journal time: Some children read their journal to the group.

Morning meeting: Children read the morning message on the board; teacher introduces the "invitations" (choices for work time).

Work time: Children choose from the choices of work, that mainly involve reading and writing and art; children must finish some "have-to" s by certain time, for example, by the end of the week.

Lunch and recess

<u>Afternoon</u>

Story time

Special activities: Children leave the classroom for art, music or physical education.

Math time: Children play games in pairs or a small group. (At the beginning of the school year, teacher introduced the game and assigned the pairs to play.) Occasionally, teacher plays a game involving the whole class.

Choice time: Children are free to choose any activities.