

The effect of individual and class-level teacher-child interactions and peer acceptance on behavior development in kindergarten: A three-wave longitudinal study

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## Abstract

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### INTRODUCTION

The present study examined the effect of individual and class-level teacher-child interactions and peer acceptance on the development of externalizing, internalizing and prosocial behaviors in kindergarten. Research has established the importance of these three interpersonal antecedents in the development of children. However, there is a lack of studies that examine their effects together.

**MATERIAL & METHODS** A sample of 237 children (49% boys, Mage = 5.19 years) from 36 classrooms were followed during three waves in kindergarten. At Wave 1, individual and class-level teacher-child interactions were observed with the CLASS and peer acceptance was measured with peer nominations. Externalizing, internalizing, and prosocial behaviors of children were reported by teachers at every wave.

**RESULTS** Multilevel modelling showed that children who were accepted by peers at the start of kindergarten showed less externalizing and internalizing behavior and more prosocial behavior throughout kindergarten. Children who had negative individual interactions with their teachers displayed more externalizing behavior, and children whose teacher displayed sensitive interactions at class-level showed less internalizing problems over time.

**CONCLUSION** The results stress the importance of several actors in the school context for kindergartners' behavioral development. Thus, both individual and class-level teacher-child interactions and peer relationships form important targets for school psychologists as mental health advocates.