

Peer acceptance and individual and class-level teacher-child interactions: A longitudinal study on their relative contribution to kindergartners' behavioral development.

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Abstract: Peer acceptance and teacher-child interactions: Relative contribution to kindergartners' development

The present longitudinal study examined the joint effects of peer acceptance and individual and class-level teacher-child interactions on the development of externalizing and internalizing behaviors in kindergarten. A sample of 237 children (49% boys, Mage = 5.19 years) from 36 classrooms was followed during three waves in kindergarten. Individual and class-level teacher-child interactions were observed, while peer ratings were used to assess peer acceptance, and teacher ratings to assess child behavior. Multilevel modelling showed that children who were better accepted by peers at the start of kindergarten had lower levels of externalizing and internalizing behavior over time. Children who had more negative individual interactions with their teachers displayed higher levels of externalizing behavior throughout kindergarten, and children whose teacher displayed more sensitive interactions at class-level had lower levels of internalizing problems over time. Our study has several implications for further research and practice. Regarding research, it provides strong evidence for the inclusion of both individual and class-level teacher-child interactions, given the different associations of these two levels, and for the importance of including several dimensions of teacher-child interactions in future research. Regarding practice, our study underscores the value of involving several social actors in the school context for improving behavioral development of children.