

# Japanese Kindergarten and Nursery School Teachers' Understanding and Support Strategies for Children's Aggressive and Shy Behaviors

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## 1. Introduction

Process quality—social, emotional, physical, and instructional interactions of children, particularly with teachers—is crucial for children's development and learning in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings (OECD, 2018). High-quality teaching supports children's social and cognitive development (Mashburn et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2002). Accordingly, it is important to consider how teachers understand children's behavior and how they support children's experiences based on it.

Teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and reactions to children's behavior depend on behavioral characteristics. For example, teachers may have a more positive attitude toward withdrawn children than toward their aggressive counterparts (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007; Nelson & Evans-Stout, 2019); moreover, teachers issue more commands to children whom they perceive as demonstrating greater disruptive behaviors than to those whom they perceive as demonstrating fewer problem behaviors (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). Most studies on teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about children's behaviors have been conducted in Western countries, with only a few from Asia (Li et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018). Further research is warranted to explore teachers' understanding of and attitudes toward children's behavior that may reflect cultural values and judgments.

## 2. Research aims

In this study, we used hypothetical vignettes to explore the understanding and support strategies employed by Japanese kindergarten and nursery school teachers toward children's aggressive and shy behaviors. In this study, teachers' understanding of children's behavioral characteristics included beliefs and knowledge, whereas support strategies indicated the teachers' attitudes and reactions.

## 3. Methods

**Participants:** We enrolled 33 preschool and nursery teachers (31 women and 2 men) from the Chugoku region of western Japan. They had experience in teaching children aged  $\geq 3$  years, with the years of teaching experience ranging widely from  $<2$  to 34 years (mean: 11.03, standard deviation: 8.86).

**Measures:** Teachers were asked to read hypothetical vignettes describing boys exhibiting aggressive behavior and girls displaying shy behavior (Sugimura & Kiriya, 1991). These vignettes were used with slight modifications to alter the child's behavioral tendencies, relationships with others, and the content of today's play. After each vignette, the teachers were asked two questions: 1) How would you support the child in this situation? and 2) Why would you support the child in that way?

## 4. Results

Teachers' understanding of children's behavior was aggregated for each of the three categories classified by Ueyama & Sugimura (2020). The results revealed that (a) the perspectives on children's personal information were aggressive (number of responses = 51, 51%) and shy (number of responses = 79, 77.5%); (b) the perspectives on children's developmental level were aggressive (number of responses = 29, 28.4%) and shy (number of responses = 20, 19.6%); and (c) the expectations for children's development were aggressive (number of responses = 22,

21.6%) and shy (number of responses = 12, 11.8%). Table 1 presents the teachers' support strategies employed by the teachers, which were grouped into three categories: strategy targeting the activity (activity-related strategy), strategy targeting the child's emotions in the situation (emotion-related strategy) (see Kurki et al., 2016), and strategy targeting relationships (relationship-related strategy). The most common type of strategy employed for supporting aggressive behavior was activity-based strategy (77.5%), and that for shy behavior was relationship-based strategy (57.1%).

Table 1. Aggressive behavior

Strategy	Amount of coding	Perspective (targets of strategies)	
Confirms the situation and cause	18	A	
Explain, confirm, or change the rules of play	17	A	
Participate in the play	13	A	
Physical and activity restraints	4	A	70.5%
Encourage discussion among parties	19	A	
Consult with other children	13	A	
Observe and waiting for a solution	12	A	
Accepting feelings	10	E	
Representing feelings/needs	18	E	22.7%
Acknowledging and praising	3	E	
Building a relationship with teacher	3	R	
Communicate the child's strengths to other children	2	R	
Work with the family	3	R	6.6%
Ask another teachers to respond	1	R	
Total	136		

Table 2. Shy behavior

Strategy	Amount of coding	Perspective (targets of strategies)	
Playing the same games next to each other or entering into play	17	A	
Provide space and equipment for play	8	A	
Incorporate whole-class and group play	3	A	40.6%
Observe play	6	A	
Discover together what they are interested in and enjoy playing	3	A	
Provide skin-to-skin contact to make them feel comfortable	2	E	2.1%
Create opportunities to play with other children by inviting them to play	25	R	
Teacher actively talks to and gets involved with the children.	17	R	
Work with the family	5	R	57.1%
Obtain advice from fellow teachers and ask them to support	4	R	
Cooperate with professional organizations.	1	R	
Total	91		

## 5. Conclusions, implications, and future directions

We explored Japanese ECEC teachers' understanding of and support strategies for children's shy and aggressive behaviors. We observed that the teachers understood the children's aggressive behavior in relation to their developmental level compared with shy behavior, implying that the teachers assumed age-appropriate desirable behaviors. In addition, most teachers employed activity-related linkage strategies with direct involvement in aggressive behaviors, consistent with the finding of a previous study that teachers take more proactive intervention actions (Nelson & Evans-Stout, 2019). On the other hand, when dealing with children exhibiting shy behavior, the teachers seem to understand whether the child had a good relationship with the teacher and other children and undertake appropriate relationship-based strategies.

## References

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