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Educating collaborative skills for 3-4-year-olds through construction play in some preschools in Yen Son District, Tuyen Quang Province

Dinh Thi Luong

Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam

* Corresponding Author: **Dinh Thi Luong**

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Abstract

Play is the predominant activity of preschool children, strongly influencing their holistic development in psychological and personality aspects. Children's play activities often involve a rich and diverse array of games, including construction games. Construction games are considered one of the most effective means to educate collaborative skills for children. Educating collaborative skills for 3-4-year-olds has been a topic of interest for many preschool teachers. However, preschool teachers have not been proficient in applying effective methods to teach children collaboration skills through construction games, resulting in relatively low levels of collaborative skills among 3-4-year-olds. This article focuses on analyzing the current situation of organizing construction games to educate collaborative skills for 3-4 year-olds.

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1. Introduction

Collaboration is a fundamental characteristic in human activities, an essential need of life. In recent years, collaborative skills have been integrated into educational content at all levels of schooling and are one of the quality assessment standards for learners, aligned with the trends of modern teaching and the development of dynamic, creative individuals. According to the Dictionary of Psychology by author Vu Dung, "*Collaboration is when two or more parts of a group work together in the same way to produce a common result.*" Collaborative skills help individuals efficiently solve problems that arise in life. These skills need to be cultivated from an early age. Children who know how to collaborate will create opportunities for learning, expressing opinions, and learning how to listen to achieve the highest effectiveness in everything they do. Even at the age of three, children demonstrate collaborative skills but lack autonomy in coordinating actions. This is also a favorable time for teachers to guide, stimulate, gradually shape, and develop collaborative skills for children.

In Unified Document No. 01/VBHN – BGĐT dated April 13, 2021, the Regulation on the Implementation of Preschool Education Programs states clearly, "The goal of preschool education is to help children develop physically, emotionally, intellectually, and to form the initial factors of personality, preparing children for grade one; to develop and foster in children the psychosocial functions, capacities, and foundational qualities, necessary life skills suitable for their age, awaken and maximize latent abilities, lay the foundation for learning in subsequent grades and for lifelong learning." Thus, the goal of the Preschool Education Program aims to maximize the potential and capabilities of children, emphasizing the formation of values, essential life skills for individuals, families, and communities such as confidence, courage, self-reliance, flexibility, creativity, sharing, collaboration, compassion, and integration. Educating collaborative skills for children is one of the tasks that the preschool education sector must carry out today.

Construction play is considered one of the most effective means to educate collaborative skills for children. When engaging in construction play, to create a reasonable structure, children must plan actions with the group, discuss plans, assign tasks, and coordinate actions while playing. Therefore, awareness of teamwork and collaborative spirit is formed and developed. In reality, in some preschools in Yen Son District, Tuyen Quang Province, preschool teachers have been interested in educating

collaborative skills for 3-4-year-olds through construction play; however, the methods employed by teachers have not yielded high educational effectiveness. Therefore, teachers need to capitalize on the advantages of construction play to implement suitable educational methods to develop children's collaborative skills.

2. Objectives and Research Methods

2.1. Research Subjects

The study surveyed 146 preschool teachers at 9 schools: Trung Mon Preschool, Thang Quan Preschool, Tu Quan Preschool, Chan Son Preschool, Lang Quan Preschool, Phuc Ninh Preschool, Hoang Khai Preschool, Phuc Ninh Preschool, Kien Thiet Preschool, and 150 children from 4 preschools in Yen Son District, Tuyen Quang Province.

2.2. Research Methods

The research methods used included pedagogical observation, questionnaire surveys, and in-depth interviews. The results obtained from these methods were processed using SPSS 16.0 software.

3. Research Results

3.1. The Current Perception of Preschool Teachers Regarding Educating Collaborative Skills for 3-4-Year-Olds through Construction Play in Preschools

We used 146 survey forms for 146 teachers, and after a period of investigation, we summarized:

- Through 146 survey forms and discussions with teachers, 95.2% of surveyed teachers highly assessed the necessity of educating collaborative skills for 3-4-year-olds through construction play (of which 41.1% of teachers rated it as necessary and 54.1% rated it as highly necessary).

- Teachers at the surveyed schools also highly evaluated the advantages of construction play in educating collaborative skills for 3-4-year-olds: 80.8% agreed that "construction play is an environment for collaborative actions." Most teachers believed that when organizing construction play, children collaborate, share ideas, and allocate tasks, making construction play the best environment for cooperative actions; 76.7% agreed that "construction play helps children realize their desires, find ways to implement ideas, and share ideas with others"; 60.9% agreed that "children adjust their behavior and solve problems naturally." Therefore, most teachers recognized the role and significance of construction play in educating collaborative skills for children.

- We presented three content areas to investigate the implementation level of preschool teachers. The results obtained were as follows:

+ Regarding the content "Children understand the tasks assigned by the group": 99.3% of teachers stated that this content is frequently taught to children; only 0.7% of teachers said they occasionally implement this content. Through discussions with teachers at schools in Yen Son District, they shared: "Understanding the group's tasks is the first collaborative factor. During construction play, children must create a specific product, so children must understand the group's tasks and allocate tasks according to smaller groups or individuals."

+ For the content "Carrying out the assigned tasks to completion": 44.5% of teachers stated that this content is frequently implemented, 32.2% of teachers said it is occasionally implemented, and 23.3% of teachers said it is

rarely implemented. According to the investigation at our school, teachers often encourage children to make efforts to complete assigned tasks, but not on a regular basis.

+ Regarding the content "Checking the results of the work, taking responsibility for the products created by the group," only 31.5% of teachers stated that this content is frequently implemented, 35.6% of teachers said it is occasionally implemented, and 32.8% of teachers said it is rarely implemented. This indicates that teaching children to check the results of their work and take responsibility for the products created by the group is not often implemented and needs more attention during implementation.

With the aim of understanding teachers' perceptions of characteristic expressions of collaborative skills in 3-4-year-olds, after analyzing the results, we found that the majority of teachers have recognized characteristic expressions of collaborative skills, specifically:

+ 92.5% of teachers stated that the most evident expression of collaborative skills in construction play is: Children share play experiences, ideas, and toys with their peers.

+ 82.2% of teachers agreed that children establish relationships while playing. However, this expression is not sustainable, and children's groups are prone to breaking up due to external factors, leading to difficulties in coordinating actions.

+ Survey data also showed that teachers' evaluations of different collaborative skill expressions were uneven. Many expressions of collaborative skills were not highly rated by teachers: 54.1% agreed with the expression "Accepting the group's task assignment," 46.6% agreed with the expression "Accepting negotiation, compromise in case of conflicts or disagreements," and 46.6% of teachers agreed with the expression "Expressing appropriate attitudes towards group members." Only 1.4% of teachers stated that children listen and wait for their turn to speak, and children also evaluate and respond to play results in construction play.

- The responses of teachers regarding factors influencing the education of cooperation skills for 3-4-year-old preschool children indicate the following: 94.5% of teachers believe that children's cooperative skills depend on their own maturity. 84.9% of opinions suggest that children's interest in collaborative work will determine the education of cooperation skills. However, only 56.2% of teachers believe that cooperative skills depend on the organizational capacity of teachers, and 46.6% consider the educational environment to influence the formation of children's cooperation skills. This indicates that teachers have not fully recognized the significant role of teachers' organizational capacity and the educational environment in the education of children's cooperation skills.

3.2. The Current State of Teaching Strategies Employed by Teachers to Educate Cooperative Skills for 3-4-Year-Olds Through Construction Play in Some Preschools in Yen Son District, Tuyen Quang Province

The empirical investigation process of teaching strategies for fostering cooperative skills among 3-4-year-old children through construction play by preschool teachers in various preschools within the Yen Son district yielded the following results:

Table 1: Current Status of the Utilization Level of Teaching Strategies for Educating Cooperative Skills for 3-4-Year-Olds Through Construction Play

No.	Contents	Level					
		regularly		occasionally		Never	
		quantity	Rate (%)	quantity	Rate (%)	quantity	Rate (%)
1	Planning to organize construction games aimed at developing cooperation skills for children.	6	4.1	94	64.4	46	31.5
2	Creating a diverse, engaging, and age-appropriate play environment for children.	56	38.4	90	61.6	0	0
3	Encouraging children to share experiences, play ideas together.	67	45.9	76	52.1	3	67.8
4	Allowing children to choose their favorite play corner, role to play.	142	97.3	3	2.1	0	0
5	Creating situations during play.	24	16.3	122	83.6	0	0
6	Instructing children to coordinate actions while playing.	68	46.6	76	52.1	2	1.4
7	Guiding children to calmly handle conflicts, disagreements.	50	34.2	57	39.0	39	26.7
8	Commenting, evaluating the results of children's play.	124	84.9	22	15.1	0	0

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, we observe the following: The majority of strategies are employed by preschool teachers, albeit each strategy is utilized to varying degrees. Some strategies are frequently used by teachers, notably Strategy 4 and 8. Strategies employed moderately include Strategies 2, 3, 6, and 7. Conversely, Strategies 1 and 5 are infrequently utilized. Specifically:

The strategy of planning cooperative play activities aimed at fostering children's collaborative skills.

4.1% of teachers regularly employ the strategy of planning cooperative play activities aimed at fostering children's collaborative skills, while 64.4% of teachers use this strategy occasionally. Upon scrutinizing the lesson plans of teachers in the surveyed preschools, it was noted that the majority of teachers plan on a weekly basis, with play activities being broadly outlined and lacking specificity. The educational objectives pertaining to the development of children's collaborative skills are not adequately emphasized. Specifically, in the general activity plans, there is a predominant focus on children playing together, fostering unity, and encouraging sharing of toys and materials. Additionally, a significant 31.5% of teachers do not incorporate planning for cooperative play activities aimed at fostering collaborative skills. Instead, they allow children to engage in free play or continue activities from previous sessions without specific planning.

The strategy of creating a rich, diverse, engaging, and age-appropriate play environment.

According to the survey results, only 38.4% of teachers regularly create a play environment that is rich, diverse, engaging, and suitable for children, while 61.4% of teachers occasionally do so. Observations from reality indicate that most preschools are concerned with providing a play environment for children with a variety of toys and materials. However, the construction play corner lacks diversity in materials, primarily consisting of wooden and industrial plastic blocks, with limited availability of toys made from natural materials.

The strategy of encouraging children to share their experiences and play ideas together.

45.9% of teachers regularly employ this strategy, while 52.0% use it occasionally, and 2.1% of teachers do not use it.

This indicates that teachers may not consistently prioritize encouraging children to share their own experiences and ideas while playing. Some teachers tend to focus more on individual responsibility, expecting children to fulfill tasks without much emphasis on guiding them to collaborate, share ideas, and experiences during play.

The strategy of allowing children to freely choose play areas and roles they enjoy.

In the preschools we surveyed, teachers demonstrate a strong adherence to the "child-centered" teaching principle. Therefore, the strategy of allowing children to freely choose play areas and roles they enjoy is more frequently used when organizing constructive play activities. Specifically, 97.3% of teachers regularly employ this strategy. This indicates that teachers recognize the importance of focusing on children's needs and interests in effective childcare and education practices.

The strategy of creating situations during play.

Creating situations during play has a significant impact on fostering cooperative skills in preschool children. Through constructive play, children learn to connect and coordinate actions with each other to accomplish play tasks, thereby enhancing relationships both within and outside of play. However, only 16.3% of teachers regularly employ this strategy, while 83.6% occasionally use situational setups during constructive play. This suggests that teachers only occasionally create situations to help children develop play content and establish connections within and between play groups, as children often engage in play based on existing themes and actions.

The strategy of guiding children to coordinate actions during play.

The demonstration of cooperative skills is most evident through children's coordination of actions with each other. When investigating the strategy of guiding children to coordinate actions during play, we found that 46.6% of teachers regularly use this approach, while 52.1% occasionally use it, and 1.4% do not use it when organizing constructive play activities for children. These figures indicate that teachers' attention to the ability of children to coordinate actions with each other is still limited. Particularly at this age, children are often dominated by individual

actions, and without guidance from teachers, they may encounter difficulties in cooperating with peers during group play.

The strategy of guiding children to calmly handle conflicts and disagreements.

Conflicts and disagreements among children during play are inevitable. To ensure that children can engage in play happily and enthusiastically, teachers need to observe, supervise, and guide children in calmly resolving conflicts and disputes in a fair and reasonable manner.

Based on the survey results, 34.2% of teachers regularly employ this strategy, 39.0% use it occasionally, and 26.7% do not use it during children's play. This reality suggests that teachers have not placed sufficient emphasis on or evaluated this strategy highly.

The strategy of commenting on and evaluating children's play outcomes.

Commenting on and evaluating children's play outcomes is a commonly used strategy among teachers, with 84.9% of teachers regularly employing it and only 15.1% using it occasionally. According to the overall assessment of preschool teachers, this strategy is considered classical, convenient, and easy to use. The construction play corner is often the focal point for children to receive comments and evaluations because the products of constructive play are tangible constructions that demonstrate the collaborative efforts of children.

The current situation in preschools reveals both positive aspects and limitations as follows:

- *Positive aspects:* Teachers have developed and implemented educational strategies for fostering cooperative skills in 3-4-year-old preschool children through constructive

play. Some of these strategies are relatively suitable for children, and teachers have utilized a combination of strategies to contribute to the effectiveness of cooperative skill education.

- *Limitations:* Preschool teachers do not frequently employ various strategies. The strategies are often individualistic and lack systematic organization. Creating a rich, engaging, and age-appropriate play environment has not been adequately emphasized. Monotonous and repetitive situations without linkage affect the coordination of roles during play. Teachers have not provided necessary guidance and assistance to children, resulting in reduced interest and participation in play, limited flexibility in children, and hindrance in the development of cooperative skills.

3.3. The current situation of cooperative skill expression among 3-4-year-old children in construction play in some preschools in Yen Son district, Tuyen Quang province.

To assess the current situation regarding the development of cooperative skills among 3-4-year-old children in construction play, we established specific criteria and evaluation scales as follows:

Criterion 1: Children accept group task assignments.

Criterion 2: Children share experiences, ideas, and toys with peers.

Criterion 3: Children engage in negotiation and compromise during conflicts.

Criterion 4: Children interact with peers and cooperate to solve group play tasks.

Each criterion has three evaluation levels: High (3 points), Medium (2 points), Low (1 point).

After investigating and evaluating 150 3-4-year-old preschool children from Trung Mon, Thang Quan, Tu Quan, and Chan Son preschools, the survey results are as follows:

Table 2: Current situation of cooperative skill expression among 3-4-year-old preschool children through construction play.

No.	Criteria Content:	The level of manifestation						\bar{X}
		High		Medium		Low		
		SL	%	SL	%	SL	%	
1	Children accept the assignment of tasks within the group.	5	3.3	82	54.7	63	42.0	1.6
2	Sharing experiences, ideas, and toys with friends.	10	6.6	78	52.0	62	41.3	1.7
3	Accepting negotiation and compromise when conflicts arise.	11	7.3	75	50	64	42.7	1.6
4	Children interact with peers and collaborate to accomplish group play tasks.	4	2.6	105	70.0	41	27.3	1.8
	Aggregate of 150 children.		5.0 %		56.7%		38.3%	1.67

The survey results in Table 2 indicate that the manifestation of cooperative skill development among 3-4-year-old children through construction play only reaches moderate and low levels, with an average score of 1.67.

Children exhibiting high levels of cooperative skills across all four criteria only account for 5%.

Children displaying moderate levels of cooperative skills across all four criteria represent a high percentage of 56.7%.

Children exhibiting high levels of cooperative skills across all four criteria amount to 38.3%.

The clearest manifestation of cooperative skills among children is evident in the criterion where children interact with peers and collaborate to solve group play tasks ($= 1.8$). Through actual observation, only 2.6% of children achieve a high level of expression in this criterion, while 70% achieve a high-medium level and 27.3% achieve a low level. Children consistently seek playmates, enjoy playing with peers, and actively establish relationships with playmates. However, the

relationships between roles and playgroups are not sustainable and require teacher support. This illustrates that establishing relationships during play is a crucial factor in developing cooperative skills among preschool children.

Another important factor in fostering cooperative skills is children sharing experiences, ideas, and toys with peers during play. For this criterion, the moderate and low levels represent 52.0% and 41.3%, respectively. Only 6.6% of children achieve a high level.

For the remaining two criteria: children accepting group task assignments and negotiating and compromising during conflicts, both have $= 1.6$. The percentage of children achieving high levels is low (3.2% and 2.6%, respectively), while the percentage of children achieving low levels is relatively high (42% and 42.7%). Although children have a high desire to cooperate with peers, cooperation often leads to conflicts. Sustaining cooperation requires children to quickly resolve these conflicts with appropriate solutions.

However, observation shows that this percentage is not high, and most children are still unsure how to resolve conflicts. Overall, the level of cooperative skill development among 3-4-year-old children in construction play in some preschools in Yen Son district, Tuyen Quang province, is not high. While children demonstrate initial signs of cooperative skills, specific manifestations remain at moderate and low levels. Most children only know how to coordinate with peers in a rudimentary manner, with unclear and unsustainable expressions, relying heavily on teacher support.

The reasons behind these realities include:

- Teachers' methods of organizing construction play have not positively impacted the development of cooperative skills in 3-4-year-old children.
- Teachers have not genuinely cared about and invested efforts into organizing construction play for children in an engaging manner, resulting in low effectiveness.
- There is a lack of diverse and standardized toys and materials.

All these factors have affected children's play sessions and have not fully utilized the role of construction play in educating cooperative skills for 3-4-year-old preschool children.

4. Conclusion

Cooperation is an essential personality trait of human beings. It is a deeply significant social issue, especially for preschool children. Construction play is an effective means for children to experience and demonstrate their cooperative skills. In reality, at some preschools in Yen Son district, Tuyen Quang province, preschool teachers have recognized the necessity of developing cooperative skills through organizing construction play. However, teachers have not consistently used methods to organize construction play, leading to a relatively low level of cooperative skill development among 3-4-year-old children. Preschool teachers need to capitalize on the advantages of construction play to implement appropriate measures for more effectively educating cooperative skills in children.

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