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Teaching Emotions in Early Childhood

Vanessa Anaya

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

Teaching Emotions in Early Childhood

Introduction

Many preschoolers may not yet be able to identify how they feel and be able to regulate their emotions. These children can experience a hard time expressing their feelings and engage in emotional outbursts that are detrimental to their goals, which also challenge their caregivers. To address this problem among preschoolers, I have created a three-day lesson plan on emotion regulation for children at the Marina Child Development Center in Marina, California.

Needs Statement

Preschool may be an ideal time for preschoolers to learn emotional regulation skills, given that they may experience many emotions at school while being in a different environment and building social relationships. According to Maggio, Pace, and Zappulla (2016), emotional knowledge is the ability to recognize and label the basic expressions and by understanding the causes of those emotions. In early childhood, emotional knowledge shows age-related progress in recognizing emotional expressions and understanding the situations that elicit emotions (Denham, Basset, Way, Mincic, Zinsser, and Graling, 2012). Emotional knowledge applies to my project as the participants will be recognizing, identifying and understanding the causes of emotions. As well as emotional regulation, which is defined as the ability to manage and control one's emotional reactions (Maggio, Pace, and Zappulla, 2016). Emotion knowledge and

emotional regulation are usually combined in situations that children are experiencing. At times, a child may feel anger and have no control. The child then becomes aggressive towards another peer or caregiver, creating a challenging situation. Some challenges that preschoolers are unaware of are emotional knowledge, emotional regulation, and self-regulation, and this could be due to not having emotion coaching or living in low-income socioeconomics.

Emotion coaching involves acknowledging and validating children's feelings and guiding children on how to manage their feelings and emotions (Ellis, Alisic, Reiss, Dishion, Fisher, 2013). When a parent or caregiver uses emotion coaching skills, children can easily communicate about their feelings. Being aware of the child's emotions allows the parent or caregiver to assist the child in regulating his or her emotions. Children with parents that use emotional coaching skills experience fewer behavioral problems compared to parents that don't use this technique. Ellis et al. (2013) mentioned that emotion coaching could mediate the role of family risk in children's functioning and children's emotion regulation. Also, by having open communication between the caregiver and the child, this conversation allows children to recognize and reflect on their emotions.

According to Graziano and Hart (2016), children with externalizing behavioral problems are more likely to exhibit self-regulation difficulties. Externalizing behavioral problems include

aggression, noncompliance, inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Graziano, Slavec, Ros, Garb, Hart, and García (2015), mentioned an epidemiological study estimated that between 15% and 20% of preschooler experience social, emotional, and behavioral problems. It is important for children to learn about self-regulation in early childhood. By practicing self-regulation skills, this allows children to remember classroom rules, participate in activities and inhibit impulsive responses (Graziano and Hart, 2016).

Preschoolers that are vulnerable to poor emotional regulation can come from low-income families living in poverty or be at-risk of poverty. Children in low-income families can be experiencing different emotions from their parents or caregivers that are struggling with their need for food, living arrangements and not having a stable job. About 20% of children that are living in poverty in school entry exhibit disruptive behaviors (Mathis and Bierman, 2015). Ellis, Alisic, Reiss, Dishion, Fisher (2013), mentioned that families living in poverty push their children to develop different strategies for regulating emotions that fit into their social environment. By using these different strategies for regulating emotions can teach children to manage emotional distress in less successful ways (Ellis et al., 2013). Families that are living in poverty teach their children poor emotional regulation by the parenting style they are using. A parent that uses hard discipline accompanied by high levels of negative emotion and decreased parental warmth (Garder and Spears, 2000). Parents can also show permissive parenting style,

high in warmth but low in control, causing poor emotional regulation. Garner and Spears (2000), mentioned that low-income children may be at risk for developing internalizing problems and externalizing problems. Internalizing problems in preschoolers can be feeling loneliness or rejected by peers. Externalizing problems in preschoolers can be impulsively hurting a peer or kicking an object.

Preschoolers are beginning to recognize emotions of their own and their peers.

Preschoolers are still unaware of how to regulate their emotions during challenging situations. In order to increase their emotional knowledge and emotional regulation, I have created a three-day lesson plan on emotional regulation for preschoolers at the Marina Child Development Center in Marina, California.

Development Application

According to Dennis and Kelemen (2009), at the age of two, children begin to show insights into how emotions influence their own and others' behavior. In early childhood, children begin to learn emotional terms and identify the term with facial expression. Preschoolers can usually identify their peer's expressions of emotions, for example smiling when happy or crying when feeling sad. Emotional development is learning about feelings and emotions, how and why this happens. Hansen and Zambo (2007), mentioned how emotions are important to young

children because they focus their attention, energize their bodies, and organize their thinking in order to adapt to their needs.

Emotional regulation is being able to respond within one's emotions and having self-control. When a child does not know how to control his or her emotions, this lack of control can also affect relationships among parents, caregivers, and peers. According to Ellis, Alisic, Reiss, Dishion, and Fisher, (2013), mentioned how the ability to regulate emotions effectively is crucial to successful development. Dennis and Kelemen (2009) mentioned that few studies have examined young children's functional views about emotion regulation. Therefore, I will be creating a three-day lesson plan on teaching young children about emotional regulation.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at the Marina Child Development Center in a classroom with children between the ages of three to five. The Marina Child Development is a free state preschool program that offers readiness skills for kindergarten. The school offers full-day and three-hour programs. For a traditional school year, families with children in the school must meet the income eligibility requirements.

The ethnic breakdown of the children attending the Marina Child Development center was provided from the site supervisor (J. Boyce, Personal Communication, March 12, 2019). The entire site is 58.5% White, 11% Black/African American, 2.5% Filipino, 2.5% Vietnamese, 1.7%

Other Pacific Islander, and 0.8% other (J. Boyce, Personal Communication, March 12, 2019).

The ethnicity breakdown is calculated by a program call Learning Genie, an application that the faculty and parents are able to use. Given that I will be conducting the lesson in English, the participants will have to know English in order to understand the worksheets. This project is aimed towards preschoolers and could be applied differently if it were aimed towards middle childhood or adolescents. Preschoolers are beginning to develop emotional knowledge. As for children in middle childhood and adolescents, they are recognizing different emotions related to life events. Since preschool-age children do not have long attention spans, the activities for this project will have to be presented in a fun and active form. As for older middle childhood or adolescents, a survey would be more appropriate with this project.

Learning Outcomes

For my project, I will provide a three-day lesson plan to preschooler at the Marina Child Development Center.

By the end of the project, participants will:

1. Be able to identify the emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and calm.

Measured by reading a book and asking questions.

2. Identify their own emotions

Measured by a coloring worksheet activity.

3. Be able to use a coping skill for self-emotion regulation.

Measured by creating a coping skill tool.

Method

Day 1

First, I introduced myself to the students. Then, I asked the class if they could define what were emotions. The participant communicated about emotions, but these ideas were not written down. I proceeded with reading the book, *The Color Monster*, Llenas (2018). After I finished reading the book, I asked the participants to identify the emotions the book displayed. I created a poster board that displayed images of the color monsters. See Appendix A. I asked the participants what emotion each monster displayed and wrote down their answers. After the students gave me the answers, I asked: “what makes you happy?” They answered with things that make them happy. I did this with each emotion monster. The connection of this activity was for participants to identify emotions that are being displayed by the book that was read. I summarized the activity to the participants by explaining how certain causes make them feel a certain emotion. Once I was done with the discussion, I gave them a sticker for participating.

Day 2

Today, I asked the class if they can give me a quick summary of the discussion they had on the previous day. After ten minutes, I explained a worksheet activity that each student would

do. The worksheet had five different jars; each jar was labeled with different emotions. The participants would color the jar of the emotion they were feeling. The colors that were used were like in the book, *The Color Monster*, (Anna Llenas, 2018). See Appendix B. Once the participants were done, they continued with their class schedule.

Day 3

On Day 3, I asked the class about activities that they can do to control their emotions. Participants raised their hands and answered with breathing in and out or counting to ten. I then introduced the class with a coping skill that can be used to control their emotion. A stress ball can be used as a coping tool for self-emotional regulation. For the coping skill activity, the participants made a stress ball. This connected with a learning outcome due to participants being able to use a coping skill tool for self-emotional regulation. I set up a table with trays, a small cup filled with water beads, and a nylon sock. See Appendix C. I worked with a small group at a time. Each participant filled up the nylon sock with the water beads, and I assisted with tying the nylon sock. I explained to each participant how squeezing the ball and counting to ten can help control their emotions. After I was done with the activity, I thanked the class for having me.

Results

Learning outcome 1 was that participants would identify emotions described in the book I read, *The Color Monster*. I believe that the learning outcome was met. After I read the book, I

had a discussion with the participants. I asked the participants if they could identify each monster's emotion from the book. The emotions that were discussed were happiness, sadness, fear, and anger. All the participants were able to identify which emotion belonged to the image on the poster board. On this day, there were a total of 21 participants in the class. When one participant identified an emotion, I would ask the rest of the participants to raise their hand if they agree with the answer. All the participants raised their hands. I repeatedly did this with the rest of the emotions on the poster board displayed. When I asked about the emotion of fear, participants were unaware of the term fear, I then used the term scared. Once I used the term scared, then the participants were familiar and able to identify the emotion. See Table 1. By having the discussion, I was able to know if the participants knew the emotion each color monster represented. I also asked the participants if they could explain what causes them to feel an emotion. See Table 2. By the participant's answers, I knew that the participant could relate the cause to the emotion being identified. See Figure 1 for the responses from the discussion.

Learning outcome 2 was that the participants would be able to express their emotion measured by a coloring worksheet activity. The learning outcome was partially met. The participants were split into smaller groups. I explained that they would color the jar based on how they were currently feeling. I showed them an example of what each color represented in regard to the five emotions that were discussed. The colors that were used were yellow for

happiness, blue for sadness, black for fear, red for anger, and green for calm. See Appendix 2 for results from the coloring activity. Eleven out of twenty participants colored the jars associated with how they claimed they were feeling at the time of the activity. Nine participants out of twenty colored all the jars or used the wrong color on a different emotion jar. Only 55% of the participants were able to express their current emotion at the time of the activity, this demonstrated that the participants were unable to express their emotions. At this age, preschoolers still are learning about expressing emotions.

Learning outcome 3 was that participants would be able to use a coping skill to control their emotions. Before we started the activity, I asked the participants to share what are some coping skills that they currently knew to help them control their emotions. The participants answered with counting to ten and taking deep breaths and inhaling and exhaling. After that, I introduced another coping skill that they could use which was the use of a stress ball. One participant knew what a stress ball was and said, “When someone gets mad they can squeeze the ball.” I worked with the students in small groups to help them create the stress balls. Learning outcome 3 was not met. Although it was a fun activity for the participants, the participants did not understand the use of a stress ball. I also did not clearly talk about coping skills to control emotions. I was unable to observe if the students were able to use the stress ball outside of the activity for the purpose it was intended.

Discussion

I believe that the project was successful. The participants' age range was between three to five; therefore, they were familiar with the term emotions. At this age, children are able to understand emotions and what causes these emotions among themselves and their peers. When I read the book, *The Color Monster* (Llenas, 2018), the participants were engaged with the story. During the discussion, the participants were able to connect an emotion to the cause of that emotion. The results were not as consistent with the second activity. A few of the participants were able to identify their feelings with the coloring activity. Other participants did not understand the directions for this activity. What I would have done differently for this activity to work in a smaller group or work with one participant at a time. This way, I can explain the emotions and how they will color the jar to the emotions that they were currently feeling.

Also, when I talked about coping skills with the participants, I believe that participants understood what can be done in order to control an emotion. When making this activity, I explained the purpose and how it is used. The participants were engaged with this activity. What I could have done differently for this activity was to discuss more on different styles of coping skills and take notes of what the participants understood about using a coping tool to regulate their emotions.

In regard to gender, during the first activity, all the participants were able to identify emotions. The second activity, where participants had to color in the jar with the emotion they were currently feeling, not all participants could identify their emotions. Six boys and five girls were able to identify their emotions. According to Chaplin and Aldao (2013), in western popular culture, there are gender differences in children's emotion expressions. "Boys don't cry" and "sugar and spice and everything nice" is a common expression used towards young children when expressing their feelings (Chaplin and Aldo, 2013). In my project, I noticed that boys were able to express their emotions compared to girls. I would do this lesson differently by having all the boys in one table and all the girls in a different table. If the girls are around other girls, they might be able to identify their emotions and same the for boys. They can have communication among their peers about their emotions.

Overall, I feel that the participants learned about what emotions were and what are certain causes towards those emotions. The lessons that I executed contributed to children's development because at the age of two children are able to recognize, label, express and demonstrate their emotions. In early childhood, children also learn about emotion regulation and how to control those emotions during challenging situations. When children are in a school environment, they will be experiencing different challenges among their peers and caregivers. With the challenges, children will be able to use emotion regulation skills. Overall, I had a great

experience executing my lessons. I was able to connect my knowledge from current and previous courses into this project. I feel like the participants gained emotional knowledge and are aware of expressing their own emotions.

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*Table 1**Percentage correct for identifying emotions*

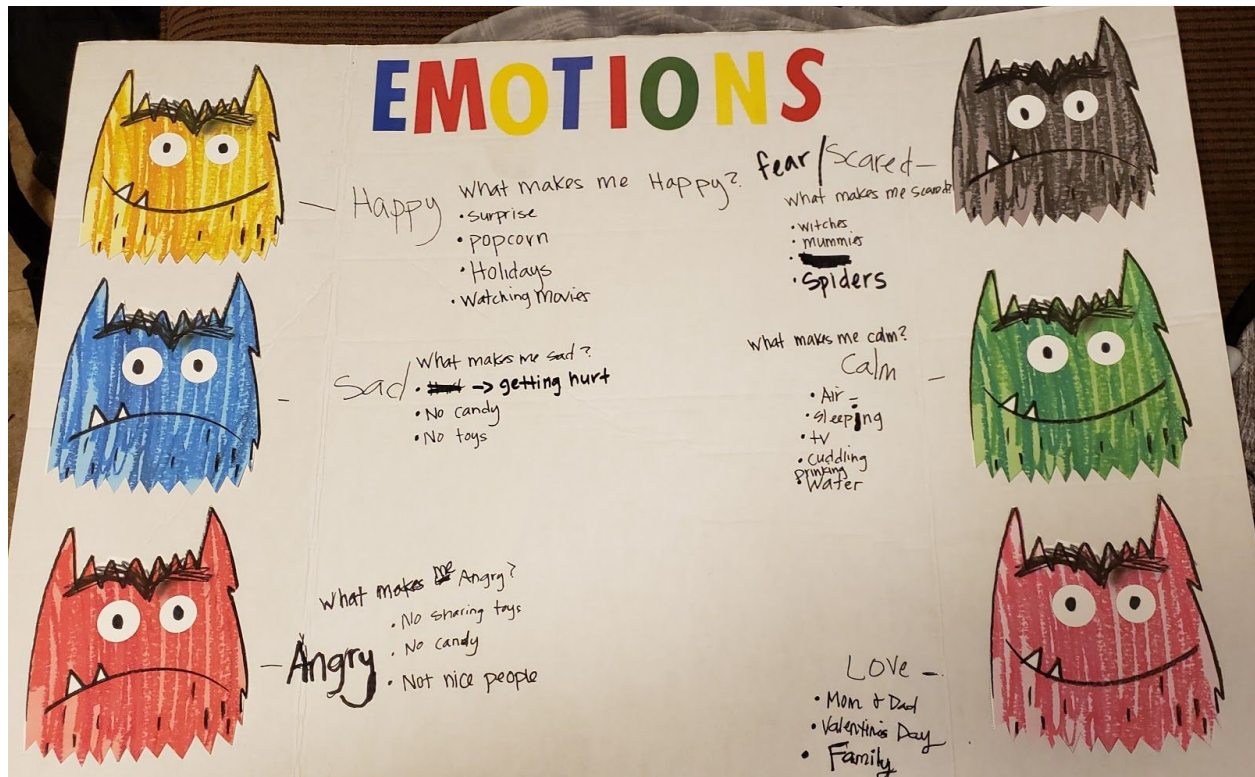
Emotions	Percent Correct
Happy	100%
Sad	100%
Angry	100%
Fear/Scared	80%
Calm	90%

*Table 2**List of response of participants on what causes emotions**What makes me...?*

Happy	Sad	Angry	Fear/Scared	Calm
Surprises Popcorn Holidays Watching movies	Getting hurt No candy No toys	Not sharing toys No candy Not nice people	Witches Mummies Spiders	Air Sleeping T.V Cuddling Drinking water

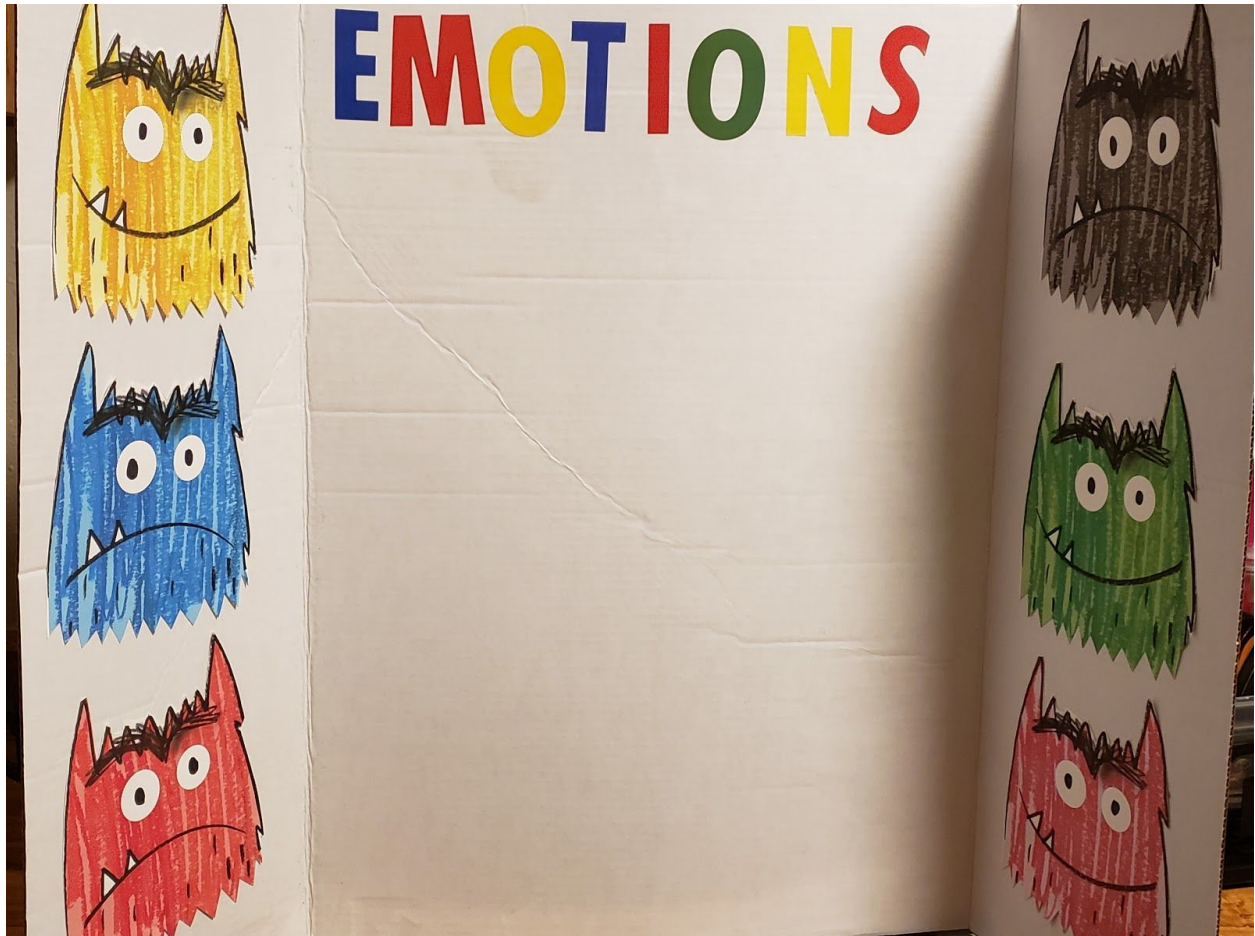
Figure 1

Results of the discussion on identifying emotions



Appendix A

Emotion Discussion Board



Appendix B

Annallenas.com for Feeling Jar Coloring Worksheet Activity

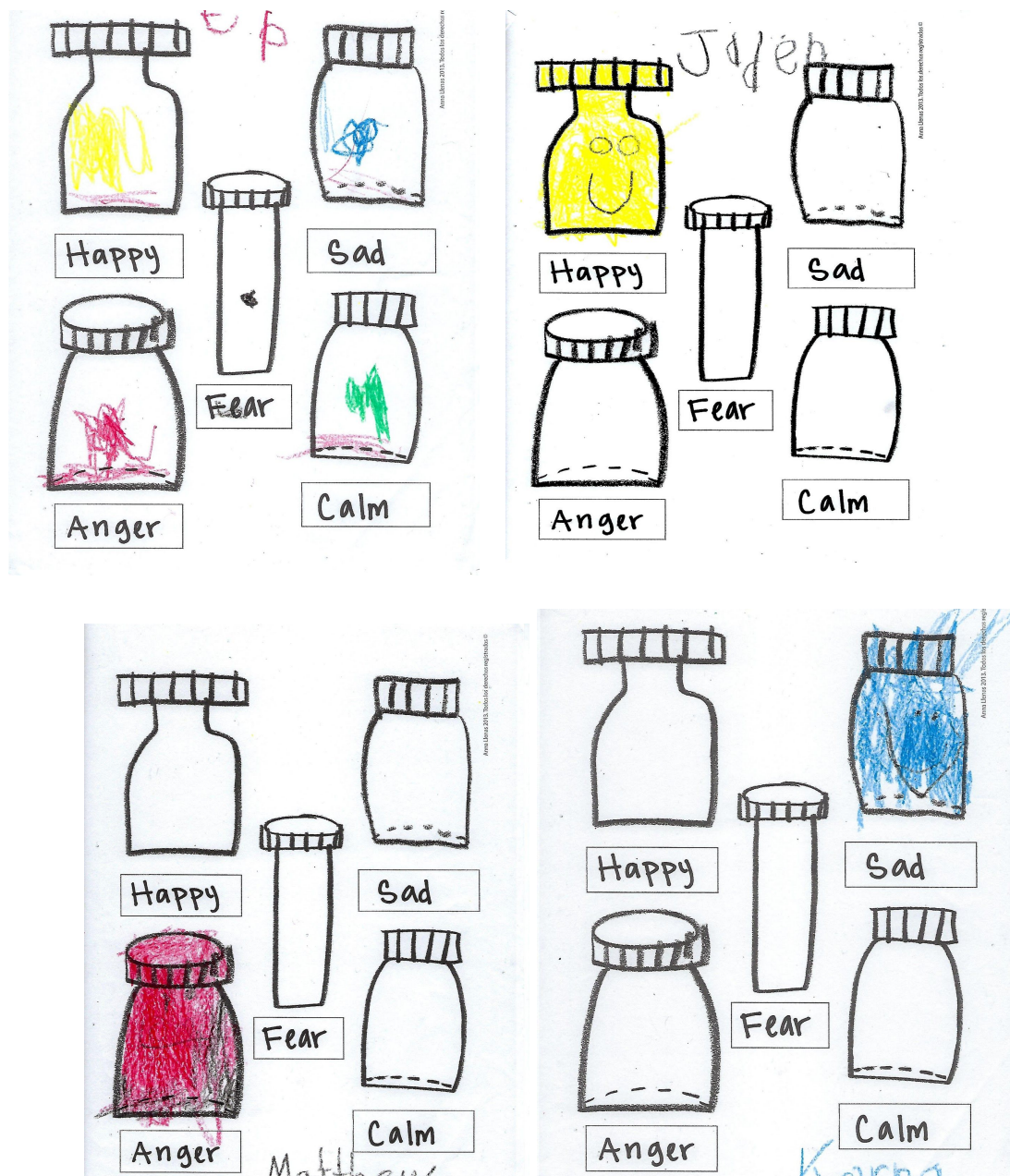


Appendix C Coping Skill Activity



Figure 2

Results of coloring worksheet



TEACHING EMOTIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

VANESSA ANAYA

NEED STATEMENT

- Preschoolers to understand emotions within themselves and their peers.
- Being able to identify emotions and what causes these emotions.
- Having self-emotional regulations to control outburst.

DEVELOPMENT

Emotional Development

- Children at this age are able to recognize, express, and manage feelings
- Understanding how and why they happen
- Understanding their peers emotions and feelings

Emotional Regulation

- Self-regulate to cope with difficult situations.

WITH WHO AND WHERE

- Marina Child Development Center, in Marina, Ca
- Class size of 24 participants
- Ages between 3 to 5
- 3-Day lesson plan



EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Seamless transition from pre-K to kindergarten

LEARNING OUTCOMES

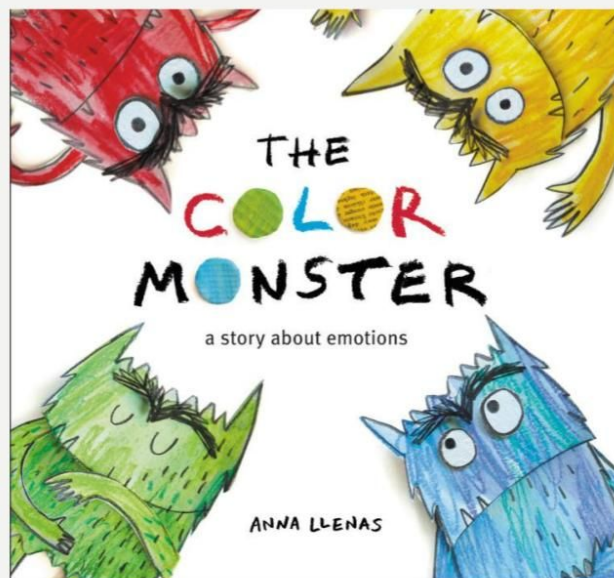
Participants will be able to...

- Learning Outcome #1: Identify the emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and calm.
- Learning Outcome#2: Identify their own emotions.
- Learning Outcome#3: Be able to use a coping skill for self-emotion regulation.

METHOD

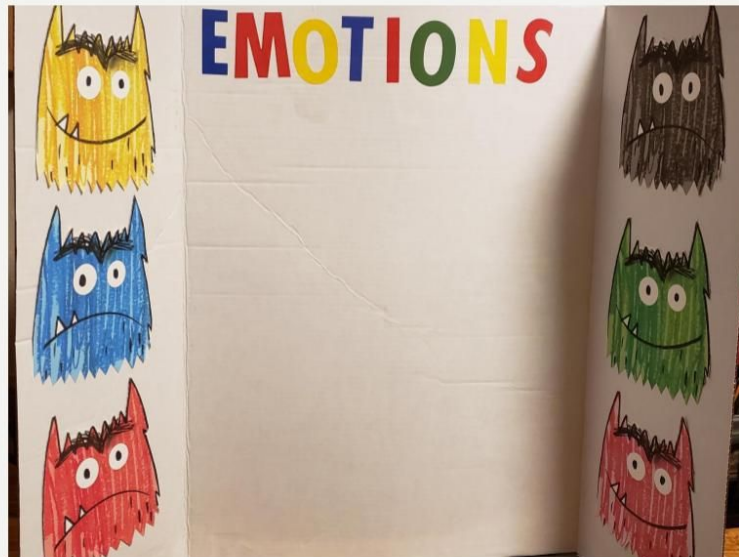
Day 1

- Learning Outcome#1: Be able to identify the emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and calm.
- Read the book, The Color Monster (Llenas, 2018)



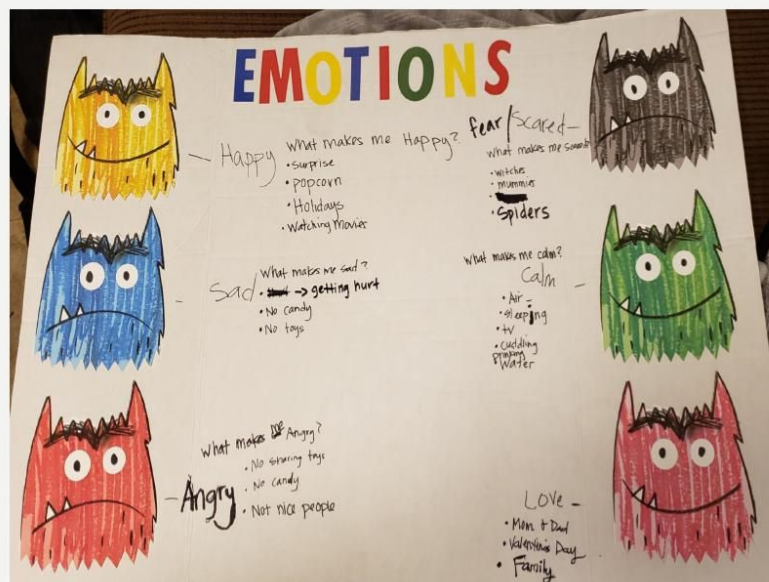
METHOD

- Activity#1:
- Identify the emotions from the book
- Discussed and asked the participants what causes these emotions.



RESULTS

- LO #1: Be able to identify the emotions of happiness, sad, anger, fear and calm.
- LO#1 was met.
- Participants were able to identify each image and explained the causes of the emotions presented.



RESULTS

Happy	Sadness	Angry	Fear/ Scared	Calm
Surprises Popcorn Holidays Watching movies	Getting hurt No candy No toys	Not sharing toys No candy Not nice people	Witches Mummies Spiders	Air Sleeping T.V Cuddling Drinking water

METHOD

DAY 2

- **LEARNING OUTCOME #2: IDENTIFY THEIR OWN EMOTIONS.**
- Short 10 min summary of the book.
- Activity#2:
 - Coloring worksheet on the emotions the participant was feeling.
 - Colors that were used came from the book
 - Yellow=happy, blue=sad
 - Black=fear, red=anger, green=calm



RESULTS

- LO#2 Identify their own emotions.
- LO #2 was partially met.
- Participants were able to color only the jar that identified their emotion.





METHOD

DAY 3

- Learning outcome#3: Be able to use a coping skill for self-emotion regulation.
- Coping skill tool.
- Activity #3:
– Stress ball activity



RESULTS

- LO#3: Be able to use a coping skill for self-emotion regulation.
- LO#3 was not met.
- Participants did not expressed understanding of the coping skill tool.



DISCUSSION

- Overall the project was successful.
- The participants were engaged with the activities.
- What I would have done differently with LO#3, do a different activity that goes more into depth of using a coping skill.
- A different age group.

**THANK YOU! ANY
QUESTIONS?**

**TEACHING EMOTIONS
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**VANESSA
ANAYA**