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Promoting Social and Emotional Competence in Preschoolers

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Introduction

The lack of social and emotional competence in preschoolers needs to be emphasized and more structured in the classroom, as they are not prepared to handle kindergarten readiness within this development. This project will consist of teaching preschoolers emotional and social competence by means of activities that focus on promoting emotion recognition and social supportive skills with their peers. This lesson plan will take place over a 2-days at the Child Care Center located at California State University, Monterey Bay, Seaside, CA.

Need Statement

Social-emotional competence is an important implication for young children, particularly for preschoolers as it is an important indicator for school readiness. Not enough of students are socially and emotionally competent to function in an educational setting() , 46% of Kindergarten teachers reported that more than half of their incoming students were not capable of the basic social and emotional competencies necessary to succeed in school (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000, as cited in Sheridan et al., 2010). The social-emotional development begins at age 3 and continues into preschool, therefore it is crucial that this area of development is stimulated as much as possible within preschools to create a solid foundation of social-emotional competence skills, such as recognizing emotions, and being socially supportive of their peers. It is just as important that these skills are emphasized for disadvantaged and poverty affected students, given that they are more susceptible to daily life stressors, and may have less social-emotional competence than their more advantaged peers.

The regulation of emotions in preschoolers serves as an important component of social-emotional competence (SEC). Young children who have difficulty regulating their

emotions and behaviors are more susceptible of becoming less engaging, less positive about learning, and have fewer opportunities of learning from their peers (Morris et al., 2014). When a child does understand the emotions within themselves and others, they are more likely to make good decisions regarding social problems, express healthy emotions, and engage in prosocial behaviors, all of which works together to create a successful school experience (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Denham, Brown, & Domitrovich, 2010; Wesley & Buysse, 2003, as cited in Denham et al., 2013). Emotion recognition and management are both fundamental in the development of positive SEC, as both function as essentials of emotion regulation.

For preschoolers, an outcome of being social-emotional competent is being able to have prosocial behaviors and healthy relationships. Peer relationships in preschool are typically the first non-family same age relationships that preschoolers first encounter (McCAbe & Altamura, 2011) therefore, preschool is an important milestone for early promotion of social competence. Social competence refers to how well children get along with peers and adults, and establish successful relationships (Ashiabi, 2007, as cited in McCabe & Altamura, 2011). Preschoolers who develop socially competent behaviors such as, positive engagement and self regulation during peer interaction are in a good position to thrive in the social world. (Denham, Blair, et al., 2003) Thus, early social competence is a major determining factor for later development of positive social growth, both independently and dependently.

It is important that social-emotional (SE) learning is sufficient in diverse educational environments. The disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged young children when it comes to school readiness is a growing concern within many American communities, as this disparity tends to widen over time (Brooks-Gunn, Rouse, & McLanahan, 2007; Chatterji, 2006;

Future of Children, 2005, as cited in Sheridan et al., 2010). As SE difficulties are common in preschoolers, there are changes in family and society that are leaving children at greater risk for developing SE deficits (Doll & Lyon 1998; Greenberg et al. 2003; Egger & Angold 2006, as cited in Gunter, 2012). Children that have SE deficits may have difficulty connecting with their teachers and peers, and may turn to physical acts of aggression (Denham & Weissberg 2004; Merrell & Gueldner 2010), as cited in Gunter et al, 2012). Early intervention of SEC in preschools can offset students who are experiencing SE deficits, allowing students to become more socially and emotionally prepared in a school setting. Students that are able to achieve SEC in preschool are more likely to have a successful overall learning experience that extends into grade school years.

Given that emotion recognition, positive interaction with peers, and inclusive social-emotional learning are subtopics of social-emotional competency, I have created a 2 day interactive lesson for preschoolers, with ages ranging from 4-5 years old, at the Child Care Center at CSU Monterey Bay, Seaside, California.

Development Application

The social and emotional development of preschoolers, particularly between the ages of 3-5 years old are in the beginning stages of developing emotional and social skills. This stage known as *initiative vs guilt*, according to Erikson's 8 stages of psychosocial development, for preschoolers are beginning to learn how to take the initiative in their activities, feel secure in their ability to lead, and make decisions on their own (McLeod, 2008). McLeod also notes of erikson's stage, that if achieving the initiative stage is not met, then the child may develop a sense of guilt, and remain a follower, and lack self-initiative (2008). This stage of development

for preschoolers is especially important in the development of SEC, consequently, if a child stays stuck in the guilt stage, then they may lack the ability of becoming socially independent, as well as lack positive emotional expression.

There is growing theoretical framework that has become popular in recent years called *Social Emotional Learning* (SEL). This framework combines Krasnors social competence model, Howes model of social competence in early childhood, and Payton's SEL model showing emotional competence and prosocial skills (Denham et al., 2012). "The SEL tasks specific to early childhood center on maintaining positive engagement in the physical, social, and cognitive/attentional environment, as well as managing emotional arousal (Howes, 1987; Parker & Gottman, 1989, as cited in Denham et al., 2012). These tasks are considered important benchmarks to evaluate a child's SEL success (2012). With this framework, the focus on the achievement of successful social-emotional competence in young children through the support of preschools would have specific SEL designs that aims to enhance a child's social and emotional development.

<center>Diversity</center>

Before the lesson plan took place at the child care center, I volunteered there a few months prior. Based on my previous observation during this time, I knew that the population of the students had at least one parent in the household who either had a college education or worked at the college where the child care center was located, Monterey Bay State University. The current diversity of the students that I observed while carrying out the lesson plan were mostly white, with a handful of students who were hispanic, and one black student. The overall class of students were english speaking, with the exception of one foreign Russian student who only

spoke the Russian language. This lesson plan was aimed at students who had a basic knowledge

of the english language, able bodied with their hands, and have adequate verbal communication.

Some students were unable to participate because of their lack of one or more of these

circumstances.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will identify 2 emotions of another student

- Students will correctly identify 2 Do and Don't scenarios of peer communication

- Students will demonstrate 1 way of successful collaboration

Methods

Day 1

Before the lesson began I was introduced by the teacher to 24 preschoolers and she gave

them a short talk that I was going to work with some of the students for a short time. Out of the

24 students, I had 6 students, 5 girls and 1 boy. The age range was meant to be only 4-5 year

olds, but there was one 3 year old that participated. [I will not account for the 3 year-old in the

results section, due to her lack of verbal understanding of the activity, lack of participation, and

was not originally meant to be part of the study due to her being part of another class that was for

toddlers]

Before engaging in the main activity, I had a short discussion with the students about how

we were going to talk about emotions through a song. For this activity, I sang a song called,

Feelings (APPENDIX A). The song described feelings with a physical motion attached to it,

such as a smile or frown. I taught the song to the children, and sung it with them twice, including

showing the motions each time. One at a time, 3 students faced the other children and made the

physical motion of the song, the rest of the children were asked to identify as a group what

emotion the student was making.

Day 2

For the day 2, I had 8 students. Half of the students were the same students from Day 1,

and the rest consisted of a new set of students. First, I discussed with the students about

friendships, afterward I questioned them about the do's and don'ts of being a good friend, and

wrote down their answers on a sheet that I created (Figure 1, Table 1). Afterwards, I asked them

to identify 2 do and 2 don't scenarios of friendship communication, with a total of 4 scenario

questions(APPENDIX B). Lastly, the students made a "Friendship Tree", a collaborative art

piece with their painted handprints (Figure 2). Each student had a paint container of their own.

The students were given a brief explanation that the 'Friendship Tree' had to be done together,

and that everyone had to participate. Children were only given 5 paint containers total, instead of

having their own, in order to better monitor how they collaborated with one another.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Learning outcome 1 stated that students would be able to identify 2 emotions of another

student. I believe this outcome partially met. In accordance with day 1's song and motion

activity, when questioning the students about what emotion another student was identifying with

based on their actions, most of the children were able to answer correctly. For each of the 3

students that made an action, 'smile' being in accordance with happy was the only action that all

the children were able to answer correctly. Half of the students did not participate in identifying

another's student 'frown' which was associated with being sad, while the other half did

participate and correctly identified sad. Five of the participants did not participate in identifying

mad with the association of the correct action, and instead the student made a facial expression

that concurred with furrowed eyebrows and pouty lips, and only one student answered, with his

answer being correct.

Learning outcome 2 stated that students would correctly identify 2 'Do and 2 Don't'

scenarios of peer communication, this outcome was met. All of the students were able to

correctly identify all 4 scenarios, with one student even giving an alternative solution for one of

the 'don't' scenarios, which some of the other students agreed with.

Learning outcome 3 stated that students would demonstrate 1 way of collaborating

successfully, I think this outcome was met. On day 2, the 'Friendship Tree' activity was used to

measure how well the students got along, work together with each other after the friendship

discussion, and completing the 'do and don't' scenarios. Some students showed they were able to

successful collaborate by taking turns with the paint, and also shared the containers, this was an

important indication for me that they were successfully collaborating because I was a witness

earlier in the day to some of these students snatching things from one another. Also, after the

activity was done, 7 of the 8 students split into 2 groups to wash their hands. Unexpectedly, each

group called me over and excitedly exclaimed, "look teacher, we're sharing the water!" This

showed me as well that they successfully working together.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Overall, I think my project was mostly successful. The students showed their ability of

being able to work together on the art project, and this collaboration gave those who had a

disadvantage of not having their own paint, and those who had the advantage of getting the paint

first, had to work together so that everyone had to treat each other fairly. Although, students were not able to fully meet the first outcome, these students showed somewhat emotion recognition in other's as they were able to correctly identify another student as happy when they smiled. I was impressed that students were able to correctly identify the scenarios. I was not shocked at this, but it showed me that these students already had a good indication of social competence.

      If I could do something differently, I would choose a different preschool. I would particularly like to try these activities in a school with a higher rate of economically disadvantaged students, as well as work with more students of color. I would also look for a preschool that had more teacher support. The teachers at this site did not prepare the students prior to my arrival, nor allow me to have all the students participate, and since I was disrupting their play time when I did the lessons, some students were eager to finish.

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Tables

Table 1

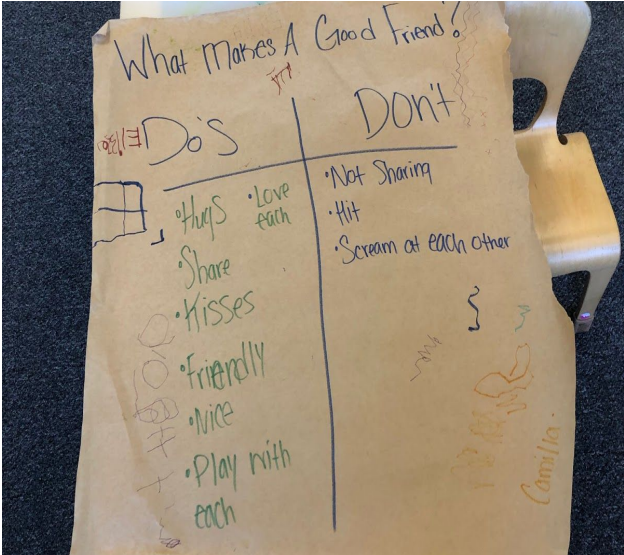| Do's	Don't
● Hugs ● Share ● Love each other ● Kisses ● Be friendly ● Be nice ● Play with other	● Not sharing ● Hit ● Scream at each other

Figures

Figure 1

Figure 2

APPENDIX A

Feelings

Italic Sung to Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

I have feelings (point to self)

So do you (point to children)

Let's all sing about a few.

I am happy (smile).

I am sad (frown).

I get scared. (Wrap arms around self and make scared face).

I get mad (make a fist and shake it or stomp feet).

I am proud of being me (hands on hips, shoulders straight, smile)

That's a feeling too, you see.

I have feelings (point to self)

You do, too (Point to children)

We just sang about a few.

APPENDIX B

"Don't" Scenario 1A: If [child 1] takes the ball from [child 2] without asking for it, is this what a

good friend would or wouldn't do?

"Do" Scenario 1B: If [child 1] gives the ball back and says "I'm sorry", is apologizing something

a good friend would or would not do?

"Don't" Scenario 2A: If [child 1] and [child 2] are arguing over who gets the [toy/object] first,

and [Child 1] hits [child 2], is hitting what a good friend would or would not do?

"Do" Scenario 2B: If [child 1] and [child 2] talk to each other nicely, and agree to share and take

      turns with the [toy/object], is sharing and being nice what good friends would or would

      not do?