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Increasing Kindness Among Kindergartners

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

Introduction

In most elementary school curriculum, prosocial skills, such as the concept of kindness, are absent. When young children have underdeveloped prosocial skills, social relationships and academic achievement may suffer. Children need these skills to successfully interact with their peers and to achieve academic goals. To address the lack of prosocial skills in the curriculum, I have created a three-part lesson about kindness for Kindergarten students at George C. Marshall Elementary School in Seaside, California.

Needs Statement

Instruction on prosocial behaviors, such as acts of kindness, is mostly absent in elementary school curriculum. Prosocial behaviors include behaviors such as helping, cooperating, sympathizing, and giving and the related feelings of kindness include empathy, concern, compassion, and respect (Cataldo, 1984). Many children start school with prosocial behaviors underdeveloped, and teachers have found that children enter school without valuable prosocial behaviors that can create a successful classroom and school community (Binfet, 2015). Underdeveloped prosocial behaviors in young children can impact their academics negatively (Caprara et al., 2000) and their own wellbeing (Layous et al., 2012). With early intervention and guidance, children can learn prosocial behaviors.

There is a link between prosocial behavior and academic achievement. In a longitudinal study of 294 children conducted by Caprara and colleagues (2000), it was found that children with early prosocial behavior further predicted academic achievement. Children who scored high through the three assessments of prosocial behaviors also scored high on academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2000). In another study focusing on behavioral aspects and academic success,

Bierman et al. (2009) found that prosocial behavior was significantly correlated with cognitive performance. Specifically, the findings suggested children with the ability to engage successfully with peers also correlate with the ability to follow rules and focus attention (Bierman et al,. 2009). Therefore, attaining prosocial behaviors are beneficial for children because it indicates higher academic achievement and enhanced academic skills.

Moreover, underdeveloped prosocial behavior can also impact children's overall wellbeing (Layous et al., 2012). A longitudinal study consisting of 415 nine to 11-year-old children was conducted to find if performing three kind acts would have an impact on life satisfaction, peer acceptance, and wellbeing. The results indicated that students who were placed in the kind acts condition experienced increases in positive impact, happiness, and life satisfaction (Layous et al., 2012). Overall, performing prosocial behaviors positively improved the wellbeing of children.

There is evidence that prosocial behaviors can be increased among elementary school students. From the educator's approach, educators can promote prosocial development by building secure relationships between the children and the educator, creating a caring classroom community, modeling prosocial behavior, establishing prosocial anticipations, and supporting families (Hyson & Taylor, 2011). Each of these examples surround the children with a prosocial environment. Secure relationships are built by educators responding sensitively to children's needs, interacting empathetically, and giving full attention to children when listening and conversing. In order to create a caring community, educators can create many opportunities where children are able to work and play together; encouraging friendships and relationships. Modeling prosocial behaviors can further encourage children to imitate the same behaviors. By

establishing clear behaviors such as indicating what a positive and negative behavior is, children have an extra guideline to follow and know what is encouraged of them. Lastly, educators can support families by educating and providing resources on how to encourage positive behaviors outside of the classroom (Hyson & Taylor, 2011). Other classroom interventions include encouraging peaceful language such as teaching the children to say "please" and "thank you". Another intervention is implementing a kindness jar in the classroom where each time a child performs a kind act, a desired object goes in the jar. When the jar is full, the children can empty and share the objects in the jar. Lastly, reading literature to the class that educates children on peace and kindness can also encourage the children to perform what they have learned from the literature (Wheeler, 2005). Finally, Sahin (2012), advocates for empathy training as an effective form of increasing prosocial behaviors. Empathy training includes children reaching the following goals: be able to recognize their own feelings, evaluate what those feelings mean to them, and be able to name each type of emotion. An increase in empathy can further encourage prosocial behaviors.

Children can benefit from learning kind and prosocial behaviors considering their academic achievement and wellbeing may be at risk. In order to encourage prosocial behaviors, I have created a three-day lesson about kindness and kind acts for kindergarten children at Marshall Elementary, Seaside, California.

Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory is a theory based on the idea that people learn from others by observing and developing similar behaviors. Individuals are believed to learn through social experiences such as exposure to models. Models include live models, such as people, and

symbolic models, such as a book. The theory has four main components involved with the process of modeling. First, the observer must pay attention to the live or symbolic form of what is being modeled. Second, the observer must retain this information by memory through imagery or verbal demonstration. Third, the symbolic form must be transformed into the initial modeled behavior. Lastly, there must be a motivational aspect to encourage this modeled behavior (Grusec, 1992). This theory applies to my approach because of the way I am teaching the content. I am providing a symbolic model by reading a book which involves fictional characters displaying kind behaviors. Further, the children are going to verbally give me examples of kindness from the literature, and this will demonstrate that the children retained this information. Thirdly, the children will be encouraged to perform kind acts with one another with the motivation of stickers that I will be providing. Another aspect of this theory that connects to my approach is the behaviors that children will learn through the two literature examples that I am reading, the worksheet that they will be completing, and the drawing they will be conducting. All components are a platform for observing a variety of models and further developing these behaviors. With the method of my approach to teaching kindness in a classroom, children will learn through observational learning from Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be completed in a Kindergarten class at George C. Marshall Elementary in Seaside, California. According to the School Accountability Report Card (SARC; 2018), Marshall Elementary has a total enrollment of 519 students. Of those students, 47% are White, 29.7% are Hispanic or Latino, 11.9% are of two or more races, 6.4% are African American, 3.1% are Asian, 1.2% are Filipino, 0.4% are American Indian and 0.4% are Native Hawaiian. Additionally, 41.2% are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 3.7% of students are homeless.

Also, 13.1% are English learners. I would expect my participants to be reflective of the school in its entirety. My project is not accounting for all socioeconomic demographics because children have different support systems at home, and this can influence their prior knowledge on prosocial behaviors. Considering 41.2% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, there is a difference in what each student has access to (SARC; 2018). Not all students have the same materials, homework help, access to programs, and family contributions. My lesson will be given in English. Therefore, the participants need to be proficient in English to fully engage in the project and its activities. This project is also designed for children in Kindergarten. The activities are made for their current skills and their ability to comprehend materials at this age. Therefore, if this project were aimed for older children, the book would be replaced with a PowerPoint or a poster and kind actions would be explained to them. Instead of a sorting worksheet, participants could take a quiz on what constitutes kind behaviors and what doesn't. Finally, the drawing of a kind behavior would be replaced with a play that participants could put together to show a kind behavior that they wish to act upon in the future, given that they have more advanced skills.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to conduct three lessons for Kindergarten students at George C. Marshall Elementary School.

By the end of my project, kindergarten participants will:

1) Indicate one act of kindness.

2) Distinguish between kind and unkind acts.

3) Indicate an act of kindness in which they wish to engage in the future.

Method

Day 1

On the first day, I will introduce myself and explain that I will be doing some activities with them. I would start by writing this question on the board and asking the class: "How many of you know what it means to be kind?" I then would have the children sit on the carpet as I proceed to read the book, *The Kindness Book*, by Parr (2019). After I read the book, I will ask the students to tell me an example of a kind act that I read from the book. As the children share, I will write down their answers on a whiteboard. Then, I will write down and ask: "What kind acts do you do?" I will let the children share as I call on them and continue to write the answers on the whiteboard. To end the day, I will ask "What are some new kind acts that you might do between today and tomorrow?" I will let the children share as I call on them. At conclusion, I will discuss that I would be back another day to read another book to them along with a fun activity.

Day 2

On the second day, I will ask the children "Which new acts of kindness have you done?" After this discussion, I will read *Try a Little Kindness* by Cole (2018). After I read the book, I will ask questions about the book such as "How was the octopus being kind to the little fish?" See Appendix A for the full list of questions. After this, I will take out the worksheet activity and discuss the directions. In the worksheet, the children have to distinguish kind actions from unkind actions. See Appendix B. Then, I will instruct the children to go back to their desks while I take out scissors, glue, and crayons for everyone. They will be able to work with their table partners and finish the worksheet together. If they finish earlier than their peers, they can color the images on the worksheet. After they have finished, I will ask for volunteers to hold up share

their worksheet to the class. Then I will discuss the distinction between the kind and unkind acts from the worksheet. I will collect the finished worksheets from the children. Then I will announce that next time, they will be able to color and complete their own drawing.

Day 3

On day three, I will remind the children of an example of what it means to be kind and examples of kind and unkind acts. Then I will ask the students to take out their colors as I hand out construction paper. I will ask them to draw and color a person, place, or thing, in which they plan to be kind to in the future. I will provide examples and write them on the board. For instance, drawing a pet if they will be kind by giving them a treat, or drawing their friend if they will be kind to them by sharing hugs. Students will be given 15 minutes to conduct their drawing. They will be able to work with their table partners. When they are done, I will ask the students to bring their drawings to the carpet. One by one I will ask the children to share their drawing and describe the kind act in which they will do in the future. I would collect the drawings and encourage the supervising teacher to display them in the classroom. I would then move onto the closing activity. I will talk to the students about what it means being kind to one another and explain it is important to get along with their classmates and build friendships. I will then take out the goody bags that I made for the children. Each bag will contain a pencil, an eraser, and a sticker book. After this I will explain that each time someone is being kind to them, they can give that person a sticker from the sticker book.

Results

Project could not be conducted. Results could not be obtained due to COVID-19.

Discussion

Discussion could not be completed due to COVID-19

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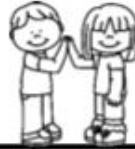
Appendix A

List of questions asked after reading Try a Little Kindness by Cole (2018)

1. What did the cat share with the mouse?

2. How did the wolf help the three little pigs?

3. Why did the penguin visit the polar bear?

4. How was the octopus being kind to the little fish?

Appendix B

Worksheet for activity to meet Learning Outcome 2

Choose Kindness!

Name: _____

This is kind.	This is **not** kind.

pushing

comforting

taking turns

being a friend

tying a shoe

kicking

sharing

laughing at

Appendix C
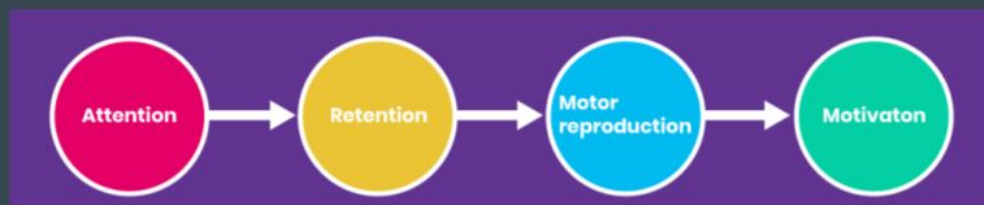
PowerPoint presentation on Increasing Kindness Among Kindergartners

Method

- George C. Marshall Elementary located in Seaside, CA
- Classroom of Kindergarten students
- Three day lesson
  - Read aloud and discuss
  - Read aloud and sorting activity
  - Art activity

Theory

- Bandura's Social Learning Theory
  - Two types of models
  - Components of project are a variety of models
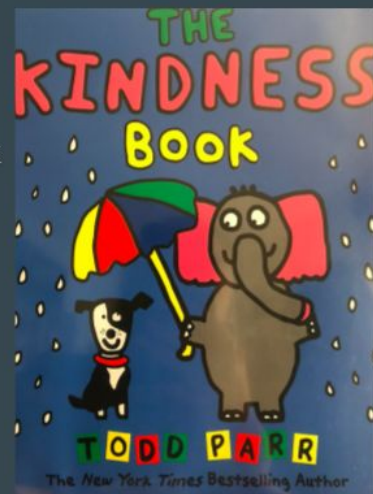
Learning Outcomes

At the end of my project, my participants will be able to:

1. Indicate one act of kindness.
2. Distinguish between kind and unkind acts.
3. Indicate an act of kindness in which they wish to engage in the future.

Learning Outcome 1

- Indicate one act of kindness.
  - Read aloud
  - Write examples of kind acts from the book
  - What kind acts do you do?

Learning Outcome 3

- Indicate an act of kindness in which they wish to engage in the future.
  - Art activity
  - Closing Activity

Results

- Due to COVID-19, my project could not be completed.

Discussion

- Due to COVID-19, my discussion could not be completed.