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Improving Self-Regulation in First Graders

Areli Santiago Perez

A Capstone Project for the Bachelors' of Science in Human Development and Family Science

Introduction

This capstone project focuses on the development of self-regulation skills in a first grade class. Self-regulation is an individual's capacity to comprehend and control their behaviors, emotions, and thoughts (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Self-regulation abilities influence a child's academic performance. For example, some school age children get easily distracted from one activity to another, struggle to follow directions, and find it difficult to regulate their feelings, which can seriously create difficulties in their learning capabilities. Therefore, there is a need for self-regulation strategies to be taught to young school age children. By improved emotional control, students with higher self-regulation can obtain higher grades (Montroy et al., 2016). Also, increasing children's self-regulation skills helps create a safe and positive environment in the classroom; thus, the children will feel more motivated to learn and complete their tasks. This project addressed three areas of self-regulation: emotional, behavioral, and environmental. This capstone project provided 3 lessons for first grade children to increase their self-regulation skills. The lessons were presented in Salinas at the Montebella Elementary School with a first grade, bilingual English and Spanish class where students are mostly of Mexican descent.

Needs Statements

Low self-regulation skills can negatively affect school-age children's peer relationships, school performance, decision making, and stress management (Montroy et al., 2016). The Covid 19 epidemic appears to have had negative impacts on many children's capacity to regulate their behavior (Raghunathan et al., 2022). Because of the pandemic, classes were switched to an online setting, leaving school-age children taking classes from home without physically interacting with their classmates and teachers. When school-age children find it difficult to

concentrate on a task, follow directions, or manage/recognize their emotions, it is likely that they contribute to a less safe classroom environment by interrupting their classmates with actions such as being loud, standing up from their desks, talking to teacher/classmates or even crying. Students may be less likely to attend class altogether or be less able to concentrate while they are there if they feel unsafe at school (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). It is important to investigate self-regulation because it is a vital process that helps children learn to behave appropriately, perform their tasks on time, and stay focused on their activities (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). My capstone project helped first grade children to increase their self-regulation skills. It addressed three areas of self-regulation: emotional, behavioral, and environmental.

Self-regulation refers to the capacity to control thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to accomplish a task or respond appropriately to circumstances (Maguire et al., 2016). It is a skill that develops as children in early childhood interact with their caregivers and the environment. Self-regulation helps children control their impulses and focus their attention. Self-regulation positively impacts the lives of school-age children since self-regulation helps children to improve their relationships, increase their well-being and increase their grades. It also helps children learn to remain calm in difficult or stressful situations. Self-regulation helps children develop the ability to understand and manage behavior and reactions to feelings and things happening in the environment. Improving children's self-regulation skills in the early years is more likely to have a lasting positive impact on later learning in school, and will also have a positive impact on broader outcomes such as behavior and perseverance (Piotrowski et al., 2013). As children grow, self-regulation helps them learn in school by giving children the ability to sit, listen, and follow directions. In addition, self-regulation gives children the ability to control their impulses, take turns in games, and share toys. Self-regulation gives children the

ability to make appropriate behavioral decisions to know how to behave in unknown situations. Working on self-regulation early in children has a significant impact on how they solve future life problems.

When school-age children are able to self-regulate, problems in the classroom are fewer and there are fewer confrontations between children. Children with poor self-regulation tend to have difficulty with transitions, trouble with daily routines, be unresponsive to certain sensations, seem disinterested, also have difficulty regulating their own behavioral and emotional responses which causes an increase in tantrums, impulsive behaviors and are easily frustrated (Acar et al., 2020). In addition, self-regulation helps motivate children to achieve academic success (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Academic achievement is higher for highly self-regulative learners than for pupils who have poor self-regulation abilities or who lack learning regulation (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). When children enter school they face a big change as rules, schedules, peers and teachers change. Because of all these changes, self-regulation helps children perform better academically.

Emotional regulation is the first type of self-regulation that is addressed in this project. Emotional regulation is the capacity or ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience in a constructive manner (Denham et al., 2012). This involves being conscious of one's sentiments, keeping an eye on them, and adjusting them as needed to help one cope rather than hinder in a variety of circumstances. It includes the capacity for healthy emotional expression as well. Children who struggle in this area might not have the tools necessary to concentrate on their studies, but children who can control their emotions might be better equipped to participate in class activities. Preschoolers' social effectiveness is linked to both emotion control and the observed positivity of emotion (Piotrowski et al., 2013).

The second area of self-regulation to be addressed in this project is behavioral regulation. The behavioral regulation area can be described as the ability to control in a positive manner one's own behavior when facing any situation (Montroy et al., 2016). When school-age children know how to effectively manage their behavior, it positively impacts their learning and interpersonal relationships (Pennequin et al., 2020). It is important to provide children with the necessary tools such as calm down techniques to be able to face their aggressive or violent behavior. Problematic behaviors are very common at school age since children are exposed to more responsibilities. Calm down techniques can help children achieve emotional regulation, deal with their emotions, and minimize inappropriate behaviors that keep them from being focused and ready to learn.

The environmental regulation area is the third area to be discussed in this project. The environmental regulation area describes the impact that the environment can have on children's self-regulation. The development of self-regulation in childhood depends on different internal and external factors such as, the relationship with parents or primary caregivers and the type of environment (Denham et al., 2012). The behavior of other classmates can become frustrating for other children and affect concentration. An ideal learning classroom environment is when students view their classrooms as a place where they can concentrate and feel safe (Montroy et al., 2016). Many aspects of the classroom environment can affect student motivation such as rules and seating charts. Students who are more motivated put more effort into learning activities.

The early years of life are a crucial period for the growth of self-regulation abilities, which are influenced by linguistic abilities, lived experiences, temperament, environment, and

genetic factors (Pennequin et al., 2020). The prefrontal cortex grows significantly between the ages of 3 and 7, enabling the development of higher order thinking abilities such as executive functioning, effortful control, theory of mind, and empathy (Parrish et al., 2016) which are all essential for the development of self-regulation. According to research, the majority of children have basic self-control abilities by the end of kindergarten, but 35% of children lag behind their peers by up to a year and a half in this area. (Montroy et al., 2016). After age 7, self-regulation gradually emerges. As a result, it is important to recognize that the early years are a crucial time for the growth of self-regulation (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Offering early self-regulation assistance programs is crucial.

This project focuses on developing a lesson about Mindfulness activities to help children improve self-regulation. In addition to behavioral and medicinal treatments, mindfulness meditation can help manage a variety of symptoms, such as the physical and psychological effects of stress, anxiety, sadness, and disruptive behavior (Incagli et al., 2020). To increase self-regulation, particularly in response to stress, parents, childrens can be taught mindfulness techniques. It has been discovered that mindfulness-based interventions can both stop impulsive behavior and break up periods of dysregulation (Incagli et al., 2020). The ability to intentionally control behavior, attention, and emotion is made possible by mindfulness, according to research, which also reduces emotional distraction and cognitive rigidity (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Mindfulness-based interventions can stop dysregulation by interrupting perseveration on negative thoughts or behaviors, increasing tolerance of difficult emotional sensations, and promoting self-compassion and empathy (Incagli et al., 2020).

Self-regulation in young children is frequently regarded as an early indicator of later success in adulthood. The sooner children can self-regulate, the sooner they will be prepared for

school, where academic and social success requires thinking for themselves and meeting the expectations of others. Children who learn self-regulation are able to learn successfully, conduct well, get along with others, and mature into autonomous adults. Additionally, self-regulation is correlated with fewer behavioral issues, improved interpersonal interactions, and greater academic performance (Chan et al., 2016). It also aids children in developing stronger connections, greater happiness, and improved problem-solving skills. For these reasons it is important to teach and strengthen self-regulation skills in children. Therefore, I developed three lessons to help children improve self-regulation skills where they would learn calming techniques that they could use in the future. This project addressed three areas of self-regulation: emotional, behavioral, and environmental.

Theory

The theory guiding this capstone project is Albert Bandura's Social cognitive theory of self-regulation. This theory states that human behavior is motivated and regulated by the ongoing exercise of self-influence (Acar et al., 2020). The major self-regulative mechanism operates through three principal subfunctions: Self-monitoring of one's behavior, judgments of one's behaviors, and effective self-reaction. Learning is affected by cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors. All learning phenomena can occur by observing other people's behavior and consequences. Another principle within the theory is that parts of an individual's knowledge acquisition are directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and external media influences. Humans learn and imitate behaviors observed in other people (Acar et al., 2020). Bandura's theory is relevant to self-regulation because it emphasizes human behavior and learning. The theory stated that learning is affected by cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors. Social factors affect the operation of the

self-regulative system. . Children who can self-regulate tend to have positive relationships with their peers and have a positive impact on academic development in addition to emphasizing the importance of the environment and the importance of learning through observation.

Bandura' theoretical claims relate to the project because it stated that human behavior is largely motivated by the continuous exercise of self-influence. In other words, if children are taught to manage their emotions and improve their self-regulation, their behavior will likely improve for the better. Providing children with knowledge, techniques, and time to practice self-regulation will greatly help them to silence themselves by acquiring self-regulation skills during their development. This theory presents an opportunity to promote self-regulation through lessons that support and help improve children's self-regulation. Through these lessons, children identified techniques that help them maintain concentration on their task despite environmental distractions. In addition to practicing patience through different activities such as practice taking turns and playing a game of Simon Says. In all these activities patience was the key to success. During lessons, children observed and imitated calming down techniques such as deep breathing, stretching their muscles to control their negative emotions in the future.

Consideration of Diversity

The project took place at Montebella Elementary school with a first grade bilingual class in the east area of Salinas, California. The majority ethnicity in Salinas overall is Hispanic, making up 72.9% of residents. The next most-common racial group is white at 18.5%. There are more Hispanic people in the east areas of the city. The Monte Bella school is located in the eastern area of the city. Monte Bella Elementary School serves 835 students in grades Kindergarten-6. Ninety-five percent of the students at this school are Hispanic/Latino. The school offers a dual immersion model, in which each class is composed of comparable numbers

of students who begin the program as English dominant, Spanish dominant, or bilingual. The activities of the lessons were selected according to the age of the children who were around 6 to 7 years old. Calming techniques and other activities were chosen especially for young children, they were easy to perform and guided through photos and clear examples. Since the children's first language is Spanish, the lessons were in Spanish which made it easier for the children to better understand the content of the lessons. The use of Spanish slides and Spanish readings facilitated comprehension and helped the children stay focused.

Learning Outcomes

This capstone project helped first grade children to increase their self-regulation skills. It addressed three areas of self-regulation: emotional, behavioral, and environmental. The project on self-regulation was conducted at Montebella Elementary School with a first grade bilingual class. The learning outcomes of this project are the following:

1. Children will be able to patiently follow instructions as they complete a series of five steps in the activity "Make a Paper Pants".
2. Children will be able to demonstrate two calming techniques/activities for when they are feeling negative emotions and stress.
3. Children will be able to identify techniques to help them concentrate in their task and avoid distractions from the environment.

Method

Location and Participants

The project on self-regulation was conducted at Montebella Elementary School with a first grade bilingual class. The first graders attended the three lessons during one week. There were 20 participants (12 girls and 8 boys) whose ages ranged from 6 to 7 years old. This class is in the Dual Immersion program. Students were more proficient in Spanish in terms of comprehension, writing and reading. Most participants were Latinos and the lessons were conducted in Spanish.

Procedures and Materials

On the first day I went with the necessary materials and also prepared a presentation associated with Learning Outcome 1: Children will be able to patiently follow instructions in the activity Make a Paper Pans. First, I introduced myself to the class and presented the topic of emotional regulation to the children. The children gathered on the carpet. I started with the first slide and asked the children "what is patience?". I allowed the children to participate and then continued explaining what patience was and the importance of having patience. I also gave examples of some day-to-day situations where following instructions, listening and waiting for our turn is essential. I also read some small fragments from the article AGREGAR de donde saque la lectura about some animals that practice patience in order to survive (see Appendix A). Then I asked the children to return to their desks. Then we started doing the activity "Make paper pants". At the beginning of the activity I told the children that they had to stay in their places, and follow the instructions and that if they needed help they would wait in their place for help. Each child was given a piece of paper of a different color. I gave the instructions and gave the example of how to fold the paper. If necessary, repeat the procedure again. Help was only given to children who could wait in their place. At the end of the activity each child showed their final result. I was able to do my assessment on who was able to complete the activity.

On the second day I went to class with a slide presentation associated with Learning Outcome 2: Children will be able to demonstrate two calming techniques for when they are feeling negative emotions . When I arrived at the room, I greeted the children and asked them to sit on the carpet so that they could see the slides easily and have their attention. I introduced myself and started my presentation by asking them "how are you feeling today?", the supporting slide had an image representing different moods (see Appendix B). I allowed the children to participate and express how they felt. After listening to some responses from the children, I continued with a brief explanation that feeling different emotions was normal. Then I gave some examples of certain situations that can provoke negative emotions. I also mentioned the importance of regulating our emotions. I then taught the children different techniques to stay calm when they experience negative emotions. The children saw and performed 3 different breathing techniques and 2 stretching exercises (see appendix C). After practicing all the relaxation techniques I asked the children to demonstrate for me some of the techniques we had practiced. I was able to do my assessment by counting how many children were able to model techniques.

On the last day , I brought worksheets and a slide associated with Learning Outcome 3: Children will be able to identify techniques to help them concentrate in their task and avoid distractions from the environment. At the beginning of the presentation I explained to the children the importance of maintaining concentration during our activities and I asked them "What causes them to lose concentration during their tasks." After listening to the children's answers, I also mentioned that there are certain distractions in the environment that we cannot avoid but that it is important to be able to focus again on the activities. Then I continued by mentioning some techniques such as ignoring distractions, asking a teacher/adult for help,

turning your body away from the distraction, and walking away from the distraction (for more details see appendix D). I explained to the children that they can use all of these techniques in the classroom or at home and that it will help them maintain concentration or regain concentration and continue with their tasks or activities. At the end of the lesson I gave each child a worksheet with three boxes where they could write down some techniques we had reviewed. I asked the children who were not writing and they responded orally. I was able to do my assessment on who was able to complete the activity.

Results

The first learning outcome was that, by the end of the first lesson, children will be able to patiently follow instructions in the activity Make Paper Pants. To assess the first learning outcome, I first explained to the Children that we would make some paper pants and that to make them they had to follow the instructions and if anyone needed assistance, they had to raise their hand and wait at their desks patiently to be helped, otherwise they would not receive help. I continued to evaluate the result of each child, 12 of 20 (60%) children passed the assessment. The 12 children were able to follow the instructions and knew how to wait patiently for help at their desks. Eight of the children did not follow the instructions for making the pants and they also could not wait for help at their desks. Most of them remained standing and making noise despite being told to stay at their desks. A passing percentage for this evaluation was that at least 14 out of 20 (70%) children managed to make their paper pants. By the end of day one, I was able to conclude that this learning outcome was partially met.

The second learning outcome was that, by the end of the second lesson, children will be able to demonstrate two calming techniques/activities for when they are feeling negative

emotions and stress. To assess this learning outcome children were asked to demonstrate 2 calming techniques. Fifteen out of 20 children were able to demonstrate 2 calming techniques and 5 children demonstrated only 1 calming technique. By the end of day two, I concluded that this learning outcome was fully met.

The third learning outcome was that, by the end of the third lesson, children will be able to identify 2 techniques to help them concentrate at their task and avoid distractions from the environment. To assess this learning outcome each child received a worksheet with three boxes where they could write down 2 techniques we had reviewed. Children who were not able to write on the worksheet had the opportunity to verbally say the techniques. Fourteen of the 20 (70%) children were able to write or say 2 techniques. The rest of the children were able to write or say only 1 technique. By the end of lesson three, I concluded that this learning outcome was fully met.

Discussion

The capstone project aimed to improve self-regulation in first graders. This project was successful since 2 of the Learning Outcomes were fully met. One of the successful Learning Outcomes was; Children will be able to demonstrate two calming techniques/activities for when they are feeling negative emotions and stress. During all lessons, the participants remained focused during the activities. In the first lesson, the children quickly showed confidence as they were all very participatory when I asked them about how they were feeling that morning. I was surprised by the confidence and initiative that the children showed to participate. I did not expect that I would have many children who voluntarily participated in demonstrating calming techniques. During the readings of lesson one, the children showed a lot of interest in how

animals also practice patience in order to survive. During the activity of making the paper pants they were very excited about the activity. More than half of the class followed the instructions, and they were able to practice patience successfully. It is important to mention that the teacher was a very kind person and in lesson one she gave me extra time to finish the evaluation. At the end of the lessons, the children asked if I would come back to do more activities with them.

However, there were limitations within this project. Learning Outcome 2 was partially met. There was not enough time for the evaluation. Even though the teacher gave me more time for the evaluation, many children asked for help and the group was large. There were 20 children who had to wait for help at their desks. The waiting time was a bit long, and this probably had a lot of influence on the children becoming desperate and not being able to make paper pants. When I began to distribute the color sheets, many of the children shouted, “we will make an airplane” and most of the children began very eagerly to make the pants. At the end of the lesson, the teacher mentioned to me that a few days ago they had tried to make some paper airplanes and that more than half of the class couldn't finish their airplanes due to time and some of the children left crying. This previous event also caused the children to be very anxious and unable to follow instructions.

Therefore, having more time will be ideal when thinking about future directions for this project. Some children needed more time than others to do the activities and due to the limited time, many of them were not assisted enough. If I were to implement this project again, I would divide the class into groups of perhaps 10 children. Also, I could have an aide to support me to assist the children . During the lessons the children showed a lot of interest in participating and due to the size of the class and the time, only some were able to participate at the beginning of the lessons. For lesson number 3, I consider that it would be better for the children to be

evaluated verbally. Almost half of the children had writing difficulties and the assessment was completed verbally. Overall, this project is seen as a success. In the future, I hope that all children will have the opportunity to improve their self-regulation

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Appendices

Appendix A

Los animales también practican la paciencia

Las arañas tejen pacientemente sus telarañas para poder atrapar insectos y alimentarse.



Los osos hibernan largas temporadas para sobrevivir a las bajas temperaturas y si no tuvieran la paciencia para hacerlo, morirían congelados.



Appendix B



Appendix C



Appendix D

Técnicas

- ❖ Ignorar las distracciones en 3 pasos
 - “No voy a mirar.”
 - “No voy a escuchar.”
 - “Voy a seguir trabajando”
- ❖ Pídele ayuda a un maestro o a un adulto
- ❖ Gira tu cuerpo de la distracción.
- ❖ Aléjate de la distracción, si es posible.



Improving Self-Regulation in First Graders

Areli Santiago Perez

Human Development and Family Science



Introduction

- ❖ This capstone project focuses on improve of self-regulation skills in first grade class.
- ❖ Self-regulation is an individual's capacity to comprehend and control their behaviors, emotions, and thoughts (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Self-regulation abilities influence a child's academic performance.
- ❖ During my learning service, I noticed that most of the children in the classroom had a poor self-regulation and this caused conflicts between classmates and also affected their learning.

Needs Statement

- Low self-regulation skills can negatively affect school-age children's peer relationships, school performance, decision making, and stress management.
- I created a set of lessons that addressed 3 areas of self-regulation; emotional, behavioral, and environmental.

Participants

- First grade bilingual English and Spanish class.
- Twenty participants

Needs Statements

-
- ❖ When school-age children know how to effectively manage their behavior, it positively impacts their learning and interpersonal relationships (Pennequin et al., 2020)
- ❖ The early years of life are a crucial period for the growth of self-regulation abilities, which are influenced by linguistic abilities, lived experiences, temperament, environment, and genetic factors (Pennequin et al., 2020).

Theory

- ❖ The theory guiding this capstone project is Albert Bandura's Social cognitive theory of self-regulation.
- ❖ This theory states that human behavior is motivated and regulated by the ongoing exercise of self-influence.
- ❖ Humans learn and imitate behaviors observed in other people (Bandura, 1991).

The Project Learning Outcomes

I designed a 3 day lessons of self-regulation for first grade class.

It focused on the following learning outcomes:

- 1. Children will be able to patiently follow instructions in the activity Make a Paper Pants.
- 2. Children will be able to demonstrate two calming techniques/activities for when they are feeling negative emotions and stress.
- 3. Children will be able to identify 2 techniques to help them concentrate in their task and avoid distractions from the environment.

Method (Location & Participants)

- Location
 - The lessons was presented in Salinas at the Montebella Elementary School with a first grade, bilingual English and Spanish class.
 - 95 percent of the students at this school are Hispanic/Latino.
- Participants
 - Twenty first graders
 - Ages range from 6 to 7 years old
 - All spanish proficient speaking
 - ALL participants were Latinos and the lessons were conducted in Spanish.

Method (Procedures & Materials)

LO1

First introduce myself

Second I read some small stories about some animals that practice patience in order to survive.

Materials

Presentation with slides
Piece of paper

LO2

First introduce the topic

Second talk about emotions and why is important to managed

I gave some examples of certain situations that can provoke negative emotions. Last, I teach 5 calming techniques

Materials

Presentation with slides

LO3

First introduce the topic

Second explained to the children the importance of maintaining concentration and follow instructions during activities.

Teach techniques to ignore distraction

Materials

Slides
Worksheets

Assessment Results

LO 1

- ❖ Children will be able to patiently follow instructions in the activity Make a Paper Pants.
- Each child had a piece of paper and following the instructions they had to make a paper pants.
- In order to be assisted, children had to wait at their desks to be helped.
- 12 out 20 children (60 %) were able to make paper pants and waiting patiently in their desk.



Learning outcome was partially met

Assessment Results

LO2

- ❖ Children will be able to demonstrate two calming techniques/activities for when they are feeling negative emotions and stress.
- First graders were asked to demonstrate 2 calming techniques.
- 15 first graders out 20 (75%)can demonstrate 2 calming techniques

Learning outcome was fully met



Assessment Results

LO3

- ❖ Children will be able to identify 2 techniques to help them concentrate in their task and avoid distractions from the environment.
- Each child received a worksheet with three boxes where they could write down some techniques we had reviewed.
- 14 out 20 (70%)can write or said 2 techniques
- 6 children write just one

Learning outcome was fully met

Discussion

Success

- LO2 was fully met.
- LO3 was fully met.

- Participants maintained focus throughout activities.
- The children were excited about the activities.
- The children asked if I could come back again.

Discussion

Limitation

- Not enough time
- LO1 was partially met

Future direction

- Less number of participants
- More time to asses
- Additional support (assistant)