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Bullying Prevention in a Preschool Setting

Audrey Garcia

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

Introduction

This capstone project focuses on anti-bullying and bullying prevention in early childhood education settings. Bullying is something that plagues schools across America. However, bullying in an early education setting can be difficult to distinguish because it can be misinterpreted as children discovering how to express negative emotions. According to Saracho (2016), preventing bullying in a preschool setting is important because it is a child's first social environment outside the home. Educating children on bullying and how to prevent it in an early education setting is important because this is their first experience with peers and potential conflicts amongst these peers. Because of this issue, there is a need to educate children on bullying prevention in early childhood years. Because of this, I have developed a project that teaches children how to treat their peers kindly and how to speak up if bullying is occurring. The workshop covered what bullying looks like in a preschool setting, what children can do if they experience or see something, and how children can be kind friends to their peers. These three lessons took place over a school week at Carmel Child Development Center, in Carmel California, to educate them on how to prevent bullying.

Needs Statement

Preschool should be a safe and nurturing environment for children. Since this is typically the first place outside of the home where children face conflicts and the challenge of interacting with peers, it can be difficult for them to navigate on their own. Young children may begin to face challenges with their peers when attempting to socialize and fit in. When trying to navigate socialization children may fall victim to being bullied by their peers. Bullying is an action of

aggression done by stronger perpetrators onto a weaker victim. According to Valchou et al. (2011), during early childhood years, most victims do not experience aggression repeatedly but only for a short period, which could partially be because of the unstable social skills this age group possesses. Early on, not all children have the social skills necessary to understand positive and negative peer interactions. Because of this, children might not be aware that bullying is taking place. This is why children need to be educated on bullying and what they can do to help prevent it. The lessons helped them understand what to do when faced with a bully, if they witness bullying, and what they can do to treat others around them with kindness and respect. Teaching children how to address bullying among their peers can help them build skills they can carry throughout their lives.

During the preschool years children are faced with many new challenges as they begin to navigate a world outside of home. This experience presents them with many new emotions and situations that they have never faced before. According to Tremblay et al. (2004), children are beginning to learn and understand how to better restrain and control their aggression, these years are the most appropriate time to take preventative measures. By incorporating these preventative interventions into a child's early developmental years, they are learning how to properly cope with their new feelings and experiences as they are happening. This practice is important because it helps prevent the children's aggression build up and helps prevent them from taking these emotions out on their peers in a form of bullying. If children do not fully learn the best ways to deal with their aggression when they are young it is likely this pattern will continue as they grow. This aggression and bullying can sprout into higher levels as children grow. Tremblay et al. (2004) later discusses how many cases of physical aggression and some cases of serious violence in adolescents and adulthood began with high levels of physical aggression during preschool

years. What this shows is that early prevention is important when dealing with bullying and aggression. By inhibiting these behaviors early on, it can help lead to a decrease in aggressive behaviors and bullying in later years.

Exploring and experiencing different social situations leads to a great amount of learning for children in their early developmental years. Much of the learning they do during these years shapes the base for the rest of their growth throughout their life. Because these social settings are new for children, it is common for them to be unaware of the proper way to respond.

Kamper-DeMarco et al. (2023) found that children who were exposed to aggressive behaviors, or bullying, were more likely to respond with aggression. Experiencing aggression often harms children's behaviors. Children often learn through watching and modeling the behaviors around them, so if they experience and witness bullying they will simply assume this is an acceptable way to act and treat their peers. Kamper-DeMarco et al. (2023) later mentioned that when children are often victims of aggression from their peers after time they begin to express the same violence on other peers. This creates a cycle of bullying and violence in young children that could be prevented if children were aware of how to react when they experience and witness violence properly. Taking the time to educate young children on the best ways to respond when aggressive behaviors are expressed toward them or towards their peers creates healthy reactions to unwanted interactions. Knowing how to address difficult situations, such as bullying, allows children to learn communication skills they can use throughout their development.

When children are able to identify what aggressive behavior might look like, it can help differentiate between common behaviors and bullying behaviors. Aggressive behaviors in children can be seen as pushing, hitting, biting, name-calling, throwing objects, etc. Understanding that bullying and aggression can start at a young age is important because it can

be an indicator that the child will continue to show aggressive patterns as they grow up, (Levine & Tamburrino, 2013). If children do not know that these behaviors are not allowed they are likely to continue them. This is why it is important for children to be educated on what behaviors are good or bad and what is appropriate behavior towards friends and at school. Preventing bullying in later adolescent years begins in early childhood. This is because social behavior is much easier to mold during early childhood when compared to adolescent years, (Shaw & Taraban, 2017). Educating children during their preschool years about bullying and aggressive behaviors is important because if children are aware from an early age that these behaviors are not appropriate they will carry this social skill into later adolescent years. These behaviors do not require intervention, but instead prevention.

In school settings, it is not uncommon for children to experience or witness bullying in the classroom or the playground. According to Repo et al. (2016) the action of traditional bullying is the repeated exposure of a child to negative actions with no ability to defend themselves. Many of these actions differ in intensity and frequency as children are encountering social situations for the first time. Because children are likely socializing with peers for the first time, they might not understand that these negative actions are not the appropriate way to be treated by their classmates. If children are not aware that aggressive behaviors are not acceptable between one another they likely don't know how to deal with these situations which can have lasting effects on a child. This is why it is important to educate children on how to properly deal with bullying they might see and experience. Kayiran (2023) mentions that children who are subjected to bullying at a young age are more likely to experience this behavior throughout their developmental years. If children are not given the proper tools to stand up for themselves and their friends, they are more likely to get stuck in a pattern of continuous negative interactions

with peers. Teaching children how to deal with these situations from an early age is important, because it can help deter bullying in the future and help combat negative consequences that might come with it. For children, knowing how to stand up to bullying and being able to report what they have experienced or witnessed can have benefits on their ability to form and maintain social relationships as well as their development and mental health later in life.

Being able to form meaningful and healthy connections with peers is an important part of development during the early childhood years. Connections with peers that are made in a friendly and compassionate interaction support their development and stimulate their social growth. In their study, Tejada et al. (2023) discuss how relationships made during preschool years play a key role in shaping a child's social skills, behavior, and self-perception. Early childhood marks the beginning of children's social journey and can set the tone for the rest of their relationships. When children hold a strong relationship with one peer it displays their capability of maintaining relationships. Tejada et al. (2023) also mention that children who held mutual friends with their peers were more likely to be liked by their peers. These positive reinforcements in their social lives help promote positive growth and development into their adolescent years. Children who were perceived as unliked by their peers struggled with psychological consequences. When children are kind to their peers they are more likely to form relationships with them which can act as a protective factor against bullying. Displaying kindness and being respectful to peers is an important part of forming relationships and can combat bullying early on. These qualities can help children feel as though they aren't alone and create stronger bonds amongst peers which can limit bullying or encourage them to speak up for their peers. This evidence displays that children who were recognized as good friends were more likely to benefit developmentally. Whereas children who weren't perceived well by their peers

faced struggles in their later developmental years. When children show kindness and are a good friend to their peers, they are more likely to reap the developmental benefits of healthy peer socialization.

As stated, bullying is an issue that plagues many schools and classrooms across America. Many people believe that bullying does not occur until the elementary school years. However, it is clear that these behaviors can often begin at a much younger age. This further proves that there is a need for intervention in earlier years as a way to stop, or prevent, these behaviors early on in children's lives. This capstone project aims to provide preschool aged children with the knowledge necessary to help minimize bullying in their classroom. There is clear evidence that bullying starts at a young age and can only continue over time when there is not enough knowledge on how to intervene. This project was executed with the hopes of providing preschool children with the skills and knowledge they might need when faced with a bully in their classroom or when experiencing peer aggression. To help achieve this goal, the children were presented with three lessons that prepare them for a situation where they inevitably encounter a bully or witness one of their peers being bullied. Being able to supply children with the social skills necessary to react appropriately to aggression and bullying can help them better understand the best way to react when faced with these challenges. An issue as prevalent and long-lasting as bullying and aggression are best approached with a method of prevention to work towards limiting the behaviors before they begin.

Theory

This capstone project was inspired by Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Vygotsky's theory discusses how a child's development and ability to learn can be influenced by their surroundings and social interactions. He greatly believed that learning was not an independent

journey for a person, but rather a social process of discovery. Vygotsky was interested in studying how the child's social environment and their surroundings could influence their developmental patterns and overall development. Sociocultural Theory discusses how different cultural settings (family, school, peer groups, etc.) each have their own set of social norms that have been established over time, (Maunder & Crafter 2018). When a child is learning through their environment they often seek out the most culturally appropriate way to react or complete a task. This development can be altered based on the peers children are modeling their behavior after and what is considered acceptable by the culture that has been created by the environment around them. The way a child's development evolves shows a connection between them and their social environment.

This project discusses how negative social interactions can affect a child's overall development and have lasting effects. The Sociocultural Theory supports this idea by explaining how different social environments can lead to permanent alterations in the path of a child's development. If children are not able to make meaningful connections with peers they could risk facing developmental consequences that can affect them for years to come. Through social learning, children's development can be nurtured and help them prosper. However, when children are isolated by their peers through situations such as bullying they can face negative consequences regarding their development. Maunder and Crafter (2018) discuss how there is value in studying bullying in relation to social environmental context to better gain information on how to provide bullying intervention. Through learning about development and its relation to social interactions we can better learn about new ways of supporting children and how to help limit or prevent them from experiencing developmental consequences that relate to social interactions. When creating this project it was important to keep in mind how positive and

negative social interactions can affect development overall. Creating a goal of increasing positive social interactions and decreasing negative ones can lead to a better impact on children's development. This meant that during the project the curriculum was focused on highlighting both positive and negative interactions the children might see and experience.

Consideration of Diversity

Carmel Child Development Center (CCDC) is located in the Carmel Valley which is a part of Monterey County. In Monterey County the population is as follows according to World Population Review: about 40% white, 6% Asian, 3% African American, 10% two or more races, and 40% were classified as other races. The diversity at CCDC is very slim with the majority of the student population being white. The findings from the Monterey County population and the population of the school show that the majority of the participants are white. It is important to note that the curriculum was not designed specifically for this race, but was intended to be inclusive. The curriculum for this project was not designed to cater towards a specific race more than others. Instead, it is aimed to be accessible and relatable for all cultures and ethnicities. Because this is an issue that anyone could face, it was not created to cater towards one ethnic group in particular, instead only a younger audience. When designing the curriculum it was also important to remember that it would be taught to boys and girls. Because of this, it was important to incorporate aspects that both genders are likely to experience (ex. girls are likely to experience verbal bullying whereas boys are more likely to experience physical bullying).

Learning Outcomes

These lessons are intended to educate preschoolers about bullying in peer settings. These learning outcomes have been created to assess that the main goal of this workshop was met.

After completing this workshop the preschoolers will be able to:

1. Identify 3 signs of bullying.
2. Demonstrate 2 ways to deal with bullying.
3. Demonstrate 3 ways to treat others kindly and with respect.

Method

Location and Participants

The lessons on bullying and peer relationships took place at Carmel Child Development Center in Carmel, California. These lessons were conducted in an inclusive classroom with a mix of children with and without special needs over two days. These days were Monday and Wednesday within the same week. This preschool is the same site where I conducted my service learning hours, so I was able to return to the classroom and conduct my lessons. These lessons had six participants, who were the same for all three lessons, who were three and four years old and in preschool. Out of the participants, three were girls and three were boys. The two children in the class with special needs did not participate, one was out of class receiving speech therapy and the teacher felt it was best if the other did not participate.

Procedures and Materials

The lessons on bullying were presented over a period of two days. Lessons one and two took place on Monday and lesson three took place on Wednesday of the same week. I gave the lessons to the whole class during their designated circle time which falls after freeplay and

before snack and recess in their daily schedule. After the lessons I pulled them aside individually to test them on the learning outcomes. In doing this I was able to work with the class as a whole while presenting the lessons and test them individually to maintain their schedule and keep the lessons organized.

The first lesson was focused on educating the children on how to identify signs of bullying. This lesson took place on the first day that I was in the classroom. I gave the lesson to the children after they had recess time outside. The children all came in and sat down on the carpet after completing their routine for after recess. I spent a few minutes talking with the children about all the new things they have done since the last time I was in their classroom (November 2023). I then started the lesson by introducing what I would be talking about with them in this lesson as well as the other two I would later present. Quickly I discovered that the best way to keep the children engaged was treating the lessons as though we were all just having a conversation. This appeared to increase participation. Next, I asked the children if they knew what bullying was and introduced other terms that could be used interchangeably that they might be more familiar with. I then listed a few examples of what this could look like in the classroom or on the playground and showed them pictures (that I would later use in the assessment) that portrayed bullying (See Appendix A and B). Next, I asked the children to help me come up with more examples and we worked collaboratively as a group to come up with other examples they might experience. Together we came up with a list of indicators that they or their peers are being bullied. Lastly, after the lesson was concluded I dismissed them for free play and called them back over one at a time to complete the assessment. During the assessment I showed the children four pictures, some that were the same from the lesson (See Appendix A-D), that either indicated bullying or being friendly and asked the children to identify if the picture they saw was bullying

or not. The pictures varied in the number of children and activities that were taking place. After the child had made their selection I then asked them to explain their answer.

The second lesson was presented on the same day as the first and was focused on educating the children on different strategies they could use to deal with bullying that they might witness or experience. After I had assessed all of the children on the material from the first lesson I called them all back to the circle and began the second lesson. Because this group does best when they are able to participate I kept the lesson more in the form of a discussion so the children were encouraged to give input and share their thoughts. Using a similar structure as the previous lesson, I talked with the children about what they can do if they experience any of the scenarios we had discussed in the previous lesson. Then, I asked the children to share other ideas they had on how to respond. Next, we discussed why these were the best strategies to use and what the most appropriate responses are. No materials were used in this lesson. Lastly, I assessed the children on what we had just discussed. To do this, I assessed each child one on one and asked them to list two different strategies that were discussed during the lesson. I prompted the children with scenarios such as, 'if you were playing on the slide and you see a classmate who keeps pushing friends off the slide what should you do?' and asked them what they thought would be the best course of action in the situation.

The third lesson was presented on a different day than the first two lessons and was focused on educating the children on how to be kind and respectful to their classmates and peers. For this lesson I structured it similarly to the two lessons I had already done with the class. I met with the children during their circle time after recess. First, I talked with the children if they could remember what we had discussed on the day of the first two lessons. All of the children were able to recall a topic or point that was discussed in the previous lessons. Then, I introduced

the third lesson. I told the children that this lesson would focus on how they could be kind to their friends and how this is important because it combats bullying. Next, I talked to the children about ways they could be welcoming to peers in the classroom and on the playground. Then, I invited the children to provide input and share other examples they could think of that are ways to treat others kindly. I found that inviting the children to discuss the topics with me made them more excited because they weren't being forced to just sit and listen. No materials were used in this lesson. Next, I assessed the children one by one by presenting them with different scenarios such as, 'if you see a friend playing alone what would you do?' and asking what they thought the best response would be or asking what they would do if they were to see this scenario happen in real life.

Results

The first learning outcome that the children were assessed on was being able to identify three different signs of bullying. I assessed this outcome by showing the children pictures of different scenarios, some indicating bullying and some not, and asked them to identify which ones portrayed bullying and which did not. I assessed the children individually while they were participating in free play. This took place after the lesson was completed as a group. I showed all the children the same pictures. There was no pattern in which the pictures were shown (they did not need to be shown in a specific order for the test purpose). I calculated the assessment by making each picture worth a point. Students were scored based on how many pictures they correctly identified. A passing score was given to students who identified 3 out of the 4 pictures correctly. For learning outcome one, 5 out of the 6 (83%) students were able to identify if a scenario was bullying or not. In contrast, 1 out of the 6 students (17%) was unable to correctly identify the scenarios and needed assistance determining. This was understandable because this

student often has trouble focusing and retaining information that is discussed in a group setting. After the assessments were finished it was easy to determine that learning outcome one was fully met.

The second learning outcome was being able to demonstrate two ways to deal with bullying. I assessed this learning outcome by prompting the children with different scenarios and asking them what they would do, or what they think is the most appropriate course of action for the situation. Much like the first learning outcome, this assessment took place individually after the lesson was completed as a group. All of the students were prompted with the same scenarios. I calculated the assessment by making each scenario worth one point. Students were scored based on how many scenarios they gave an appropriate response to, since there were multiple answers that could be considered correct. A passing score was given to students who identified appropriate responses to 2 out of the 4 scenarios. For learning outcome two, 4 out of 6 students (67%) were able to correctly identify appropriate responses. This means that 2 out of 6 students (33%) were unable to correctly identify responses that fit the criteria and needed assistance determining the correct course of action. Looking at the results from the assessment this learning outcome appears to be partially met.

The third learning outcome was being able to demonstrate three ways of being kind to others. I assessed this learning outcome much like the second one, by prompting the students with different scenarios and asking them what they would do next. Like the previous two learning outcomes were assessed, this one took place after the group lessons were completed. All students were given the same scenarios to respond to. I calculated the score for the assessments by making each scenario worth one point. Students were scored based on how many scenarios they gave correct responses to. A passing score was given to students who identified responses

for 3 out of the 4 scenarios. For learning outcome three, 3 out of 6 students (50%) were able to correctly give appropriate responses. This means that 3 out of 6 students (50%) were unable to give appropriate responses. Looking at the results from this assessment, learning outcome three was partially met.

Discussion

This capstone project was aimed to educate preschool students on the signs of bullying and different practices they can use to intervene or prevent it. Learning outcome one, that students will be able to identify 3 signs of bullying, was fully met. Whereas learning outcome two, that students will be able to demonstrate 2 ways to deal with bullying, and learning outcome three, that students will be able to demonstrate 3 ways to treat others kindly and with respect, were partially met. I count the partially met learning outcomes as a success because it means that the majority of the students had learned enough to pass the assessments. I believe learning outcome one was fully met because more than 80% of students were able to identify signs of bullying. Whereas I believe learning outcomes two and three were partially met because less than 75% of students were able to correctly identify appropriate responses for the assessments. Another successful component of this project was that the children remembered information from the first lesson after multiple days. Lessons one and two took place two days before lesson three so the lesson began with a review of what the previous lessons had covered. When asked if they remembered what we talked about, many of them were able to tell me. The children's remembering of this information is a success because they will likely continue to remember this information and hopefully use it to help themselves or one of their peers in the future.

Even with the successes that this project had, it also had its limitations. One limitation of this project as a whole was that the lessons were slightly rushed. The preschool that the project

was completed at has short days and their days are very scheduled. This meant that the lessons had to be worked into their tight schedule. The lessons took place during their circle time which meant that circle time had to be extended which cut into their free play time. Because of this, I was worried about taking too much time out of the schedule and cutting into their play time. I believe this led to the lesson being rushed which meant I was not able to spend as much time on certain topics as I wanted to. Another limitation that was faced during this project was other distractions in the classroom. Some students weren't participating in the lessons and were doing other activities in the classroom. This periodically caught the attention of the children who were participating in the lessons and their focus shifted onto what their other classmates were doing, which pulled their focus away from the lessons. I feel as though the learning outcomes would have been closer to being fully met, or even potentially fully met, if there were not as many distractions around them.

Based on the limitations of this project there are some minor changes that could be made if the project were to be done again. If I were to do this project again I would find a day, or days, where there was more time in the schedule so the lessons did not feel rushed. This would also give more time for activities and assessments. I would also choose to do the project in a space where other activities were not taking place. I believe this would help the students maintain focus on the lessons. Something else I would choose to do differently would be to implement more visuals into the lessons and assessments. While the children were still engaged when the lessons were discussion based, I found that assessment results were higher when there was a visual component involved. I believe that the visual pieces helped the students fully process the information and connect it to what they might witness or experience. However, the successful aspects of this project indicate that the students understood the content and had an inclination to

learn skills that can make their school a more welcoming environment. While every learning outcome was not fully met, the project still provided education on bullying prevention and peer compassion.

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Appendix A: Bullying Example One



Appendix B: Bullying Example Two



Appendix C: Showing Kindness/Friendship Example One



Appendix D: Showing Kindness/Friendship Example Two



Appendix E: Capstone Festival Slides

Bullying Prevention in a Preschool Setting

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Human Development & Family Science

Introduction

- This capstone project focuses on anti-bullying and bullying prevention in early childhood education settings.
- 1 in 4 students experience bullying.
- Because of this issue, there is a need to educate children on bullying prevention in early childhood years.

Needs Statement

1

By incorporating preventative interventions into a child's early developmental years they are learning how to properly cope with new feelings and experiences as they are happening.

Formbay et al. (2004)

2

Educating children during their preschool years about bullying is important because if children are aware from an early age that these behaviors are not appropriate they will remember this in adolescent years.

Shaw and Farden (2017)

3

Experiencing reoccurring acts of violence, abuse, conflicts, or frustration can cause children to be more inclined to develop depression and similar symptoms during their adolescent years.

Kobak-Moore et al. (2010)

Needs Statement

- Preschool is the first social environment that most children encounter
- Not all children understand that bullying is an inappropriate behavior
- Children are unaware of how to appropriately respond to these interactions
- Educating children on how to identify bullying
- Knowledge on how to respond to bullying
- Providing children with the social skills necessary to react appropriately to aggressive behaviors

Theory

Theorist:
Lev Vygotsky

Theory:
Sociocultural Theory

-Discusses how children's development can be influenced by their surroundings and social interactions

-Different cultural settings (school, home, etc.) have their own set of social norms

Mauder & Gruber (2018)

-Children who are isolated from their peers can face developmental consequences

-Social environments and social interactions can influence overall development

Learning Outcomes

I designed three lessons that would take place over two days on bullying prevention for preschool students. It focused on the following outcomes:

Preschool students will be able to identify 3 signs of bullying.

1

Preschool students will be able to demonstrate 2 ways to deal with bullying.

2

Preschool students will be able to demonstrate 3 ways to treat others kindly.

3

Methods: Location and Participants

Methods: Procedures and Materials

Lesson 1 Intro → What is bullying? → Examples → Group discussion → Lo #1 assessment

Lesson 2 Regroup → How to respond to bullying → What to do when they see bullying → Group discussion → Lo #2 assessment

Lesson 3 Recap → How to be kind → Ways to be a good friend → Group discussion → Lo #3 assessment

Assessment Results for LO #1

Learning Outcome #1: Preschool students will be able to identify 3 signs of bullying

Assessment

- Asked students to identify which images displayed bullying

83%

Results

- 5 out of 6 students were able to correctly identify signs of bullying

Learning outcome was fully met.

Assessment Results for LO #2

Learning Outcome #2: Preschool students will be able to demonstrate 2 ways to deal with bullying

Assessment

- Students were asked to list different ways to react in different bullying scenarios

67%

Results

- 4 out of 6 students were able to correctly identify appropriate responses

Learning outcome was partially met.

Assessment Results for LO #3

Learning Outcome #3: Preschool students will be able to demonstrate 3 ways to treat others kindly

Assessment

- Students were asked to list different ways to demonstrate kindness to their peers

50%

Results

- 3 out of 6 students were able to correctly identify appropriate responses

Learning outcome was partially met.

Discussion

Successes:	Limitations:	Future Directions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-1 Lo fully met and 2 Lo's partially met-Children remembered the info over multiple days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Limited time in schedule to complete lessons-Other distractions in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Find days where there is more free time in the schedule-Complete lessons in a classroom where there are no other distractions-Include more visual components

Thank you for your time!