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Social Emotional Learning and Its Effects on Behaviors in the Kindergarten Classroom

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Social Emotional Learning and

Its Effects on Behaviors in the Kindergarten Classroom

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An Action Research Presented

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research project is to determine the impact of explicit social emotional instruction in the kindergarten classroom. Quantitative data was collected through behavior reports to determine the effects that this instruction had on students' behavior. The kindergarten class consisted of 20 students, including eleven females and nine males. The research was done during winter of 2019-2020. Social emotional lessons were implemented over a four-week period to the kindergarten class. Data were collected to determine if negative behaviors decreased after implementing these lessons. It was concluded that implementing social emotional instruction for the four-week period did have a positive effect on student behavior.

Key words: Kindergarten, Social emotional learning (SEL)

Social Emotional Learning and Its Effects on Behaviors in the Kindergarten Classroom

Kindergarten grade level expectations have changed over the years (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). The change in these expectations can be traced as far back as 1983, with the *Nation at Risk,* a report that criticized the state of U.S. schools and called for much-needed transformations to public education (Alvarez, 2015). Early childhood is a time of enormous growth and development in multiple areas (Charlesworth, 2011). With this shift in academic focus, teachers are finding it harder to focus on social and emotional development. Typical kindergarten schedules may consist of 150 minutes of literacy, 60 minutes of math, 30 minutes of science or social studies, designated recess, lunch, specials, and interventions time (Graue, 2011). Center time consisting of dramatic play, such as playing with blocks, dress up, and cars is now optional in many schools or has been cut in order to make room for academics (Graue, 2011). More time needs to be put into place for social and emotional learning to give students opportunities to play and interact with one another.   These activities give students the opportunity to interact with one another and increases their ability to develop healthy friendships and peer relationships.

Young children's healthy social and emotional development is critical to school readiness and positive long-term outcomes (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000). The prevalence of mental illness and low social skills has increased over the years (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). According to the Center for Disease and Control, "One in six U.S. children aged 2-8 years (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental behavioral or developmental disorder" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Teachers fill in the large gaps of missing social and emotional skills that previously had been learned through play skills and promoted at home.

Teachers should devote just as much planning and preparation to social emotional skills as they do to their academic lessons (Gartrell, 2013). Lessons should include decision-making, relationship building, empathy, taking turns, and problem solving. Teachers are the driving force behind social and emotional learning programs (Gartrell, 2013). Purposefully planning for these skills should be one of the priorities of our teachers. Acquiring these skills at an early age will have lasting effects on relationships and academic success in the future. The skills reinforced in these lessons are imperative to becoming a good student, worker, and citizen (Weissberg, 2013).

Early years of development are critical for providing a firm foundation in cognitive, language, and motor development, as well as social, emotional, regulatory, and moral development (Workforce, 2012). Students entering the classroom come from a variety of backgrounds and enter school with varying ability levels (Graue, 2011). Students may enter school with one or two years of preschool and a potentially a year of alternative kindergarten before coming to kindergarten. Many students who enter with no prior schooling before their first day of kindergarten are at a disadvantage. A study of the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program had meaningful long-term effects for children who participated in preschool in comparison to children who did not (Jung, Barnett, Hustedt, & Francis, 2013).

One of the goals for social-emotional learning is to create a classroom that functions effectively with limited behaviors, however we need to start with the individual so that our students can focus, learn and positively contribute positively to their classrooms, schools and communities (Gallagher, 2019). In 2015, a study was conducted to show the relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. The study found that having higher social-emotional skills in kindergarten is related to important outcomes at age 25 (Jones, Greenberg, &

Crowley, 2015).   Acquiring early social-emotional skills is related to how socially, emotionally,

academically, and professionally prepared we are later in life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Educators need to focus on social emotional skills in their classrooms (Tarshis, 2016).

These skills include building confidence, developing good relationships with peers and adults,

having persistence, communicating emotions effectively, listening skills, and the ability to solve

social problems (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2017).   Social and emotional edu-

cation refers to the process of teaching and learning the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that

support self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and the ability to

make responsible decisions (Iowa Department of Education, 2019). Joseph Durlak, a senior re-

search scientist says, "More than two decades of rigorous scientific research shows that high-

quality, well-implemented SEL can have a positive effect on school climate and promote a host

of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students" (Durlak, 2011, p. 11). According to

Durlak, social and emotional learning needs to be embedded in curriculum, instruction, student

supports, and after school programs. Improved social and emotional skills and classroom behav-

ior, less disruptive behavior such as aggression and bullying, and reduced emotional stress are

the heart of social and emotional learning.

The effect of the use of social emotional learning on positive behavior in students in kin-

dergarten is the topic of this current action research. The guiding question is, "Can the imple-

mentation of social emotional lessons help derive positive behaviors of kindergarten students?"

This action research will give a greater look into the effects of social skills instruction on the de-

velopment of social emotional skills in the classroom. This action research may help determine

if implementing planned and purposeful social emotional learning would be beneficial for kin-

dergarten students. This study has the potential to benefit all early childhood educators,

researchers, and administrators by helping to make decisions on instruction in the area of social emotional development.

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

The focus of this literature review is on both the importance as well as the effects of social emotional development in the classroom. In this review I emphasize these skills in the kindergarten classroom as well as why they are so important. This review also looks at the Social Explorers curriculum and the peer-mediated instruction strategy that the teacher used when implementing these lessons.

Definition of Social Emotional Learning

In kindergarten children are expected to interact with their teachers and other children and follow many rules and social norms that are a part of the classroom. Evidence has shown that a number of students who enter kindergarten are entering without these skills that are a fundamental component to their success in the classroom (Quick, 2018). These skills are referred to as social emotional skills that students acquire through social emotional learning. The state of Iowa has defined Social Emotional learning as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships with others, and make responsible decisions (Iowa Department of Education, 2019). The learning competencies developed by the state include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Adults and caregivers who interact with children on a regular basis should be prepared to offer guidance in social-emotional skills as well as basic mental health support (Heath, 2017).

What we think and feel about ourselves is the driving force behind our relationships and our interactions as early as the preschool years (Tarshis, 2016). Our collective social expectations are derived from how we relate to our thoughts, the thoughts of others, our behaviors, the behaviors of others, and therefore all subsequent reactions into all human interactions. Different situations are going to require students to use different social skills. Students are going to have beliefs, feelings, and understandings that are different and are going to drive how they react and respond to different social situations. Social emotional learning will help students makes choices on how they want others to feel and how we want them to see and treat us based upon our reactions.

Developing Social Skills

The development of social skills is not linear and focuses around the whole child. Emotional and cognitive development are intrinsically related in early childhood. These two parts together form an integrated, functional, healthy, happy, playful, and interactive child (Tarshis, 2016). From the time we are born, social development has begun (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In the first two years, brain development is very rapid (Glaser, 2014). Responsive caregiving, the warm acceptance of infants' needs and interests with responses that are contingent and prompt with the infants' signals, are thought to support the infants' ability to self-regulate (Glaser, 2014). In the toddler years, cooperation and collaborative play begin. During this time self-regulation and executive functioning are beginning to develop. Tarshis asserted that the focus of a typical three-year old is all about self-regulation, emotional regulation, and learning to exist within a group. Playing as a group requires the skills to communicate a child's ideas as well as being able to imagine and accept the ideas of others (Segal, 2004). Once children enter school, the skills of abstract thinking, collaboration, and communication become critical. The

Common Core Standards, which were adopted by 45 of the U.S. states, include an entire section devoted to speaking and listening skills.   Kindergarten students are expected to participate in conversations with peers and adults about kindergarten topics and texts in both a large and small group setting. Students need to follow agreed upon rules for discussion in order to have a conversation as well as ask and answer questions in order to get help or new information that is needed (Common Core State Standards, 2010).

The research by Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley examined whether kindergarten teachers' ratings of children's prosocial skills would be a predictor of key adolescent and adult outcomes. The researchers first collected data when the children were attending kindergarten. The classroom gives teachers the opportunity to observe children's abilities to interact with others to complete daily tasks and resolve conflicts. These skills are imperative for successful progression in early grades. The follow-up data was collected 19 years later. The follow-up data was collected by public records, school reports, self-reports, and parent reports. They found that there were statistically significant associations between the measured social-emotional skills in kindergarten and key adult outcomes across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance abuse, and mental health.

We know that at some time or another, a majority of children are considered to be at risk. Stress is prevalent in many families. Divorce rates are climbing, there is a growing number of single parent families, and families in which both parents work. Children come to school unprepared because of the stress their families are undergoing (Bagdi, 2005). Students are coming to school unprepared for both school and life circumstances. The National Academy of Sciences reported that 60% of children enter school with the cognitive skills they need to be successful, but only 40% have the social-emotional skills needed to succeed in kindergarten (Ashdown,

2012). Teachers need to be trained beyond just teaching academics; they need to be trauma in-formed in order to prepare this current generation of students. Twenty-six percent of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before the age of four (Craig, 2016). With such a high prevalence of unresolved trauma across the school-aged population, we are experiencing a public health epidemic that threatens our children both academically and so-cially (Craig, 2016). Children who have mastered the social emotional competencies get along better with others, do better in schools, and have more successful careers (Jones, Bailey, & Dolittle, 2017). They also go on to have better mental and physical health as adults (Jones, Bailey, & Dolittle, 2017).

Changes in home life constitute one component affecting today's students. Another large factor is the development of the Internet. The Internet has affected the social-emotional skills of both children and adults (Cross, 2000). As individuals interact in various contexts, different so-cial skills are needed to be successful (Fischer, 2015). Thus, there likely are crucial differences in the behavioral and social skill sets needed in offline and online contexts (Reich, 2017). We have taken away so many of our in-person social interactions and replaced them with transactional in-teractions through the Internet. According to literature, students are texting instead of talking in person or on the phone (Ho, 2011). They are ordering food through online applications instead of eating in restaurants or placing orders over the phone. Shopping has shifted to online orders and fewer in-store purchases.

If we know that research shows us which traits in early childhood will predict outcomes for a child's future, we can intervene early on to change those pathways. We must find ways to mesh academics and social emotional learning together to achieve both goals concurrently in the little time that we have with students each day. Early childhood classrooms begin the more

formalized setting of education, and the classroom needs to have a well-rounded and explicit curriculum to educate for the academic standards as well as the social emotional competencies (Tarshis, 2016). In the early childhood setting this explicit curriculum not only includes math, reading, writing, and science, but also the ability to regulate emotions and work on social skills in a group setting. Enhancing these skills can have an impact in multiple areas and therefore has potential for positively affecting individuals as well as community public health substantially (Jones, 2015).

Peer-Mediated Instruction

Teachers have many tools available to them to achieve the goals of a successful education. However, they often do not know which ones are best for the job. According to Margaret King-Sears, many of the researched and validated teaching and learning methods that have been developed to improve the learning of diverse students, are not being used sufficiently in schools (2001). Peer-mediated instruction and intervention take the most effective practices for teaching and learning and puts them together in a package for teachers to use. Many of the activities incorporate feedback, reinforcement, and active student learning in the classroom. Teachers see an increase in on-task time and response opportunities because each student is involved in the PMI work. Using peer-mediated instruction or PMI, has both student and teacher benefits. There is a large potential for increasing time on task because students' roles shift from being those of passive receivers of information to being more active deliverers of information. Students are getting authentic development and practice of socially acceptable skills. The practice of teamwork is highly emphasized though PMI. Teamwork is a 21st century skill sought after by many employers (Iowa Department of Education, 2019). When students share the responsibility for teaching

and learning with their teachers and peers, the responsibility tends to be a motivational tool (Ashdown, 2012).

Peer-mediated instruction also shows increased achievement for all students including students with diverse learning needs (King-Sears, 2001). Peer-mediated instruction and intervention is based on principles of behaviorism and social learning theory. The components include peer modeling, peer initiation training, peer monitoring, peer networking, peer tutoring, and group-oriented contingencies. The intervention components create a foundation of nurturing and responsive relationships. These positive relationships provide a high-quality supportive environment. PMI focuses on embedding ongoing learning opportunities into typical routines. Teachers utilize peers to facilitate the social and language skills needed for all students. Classrooms need a wide array of evidence-based practices delivered to fidelity, and these practices need to be done in an engaging, fun environment.

Social Explorers Curriculum

The Social Explorer's Curriculum was designed in 2013 by Ryan Hendrix, Kari Zweber Palmer, Nancy Tarshis, and Michelle Garcia Winner to help children ages four to seven, build fundamental social competencies and improve their social and academic performance. It was originally designed for students with social learning weaknesses but has been found to be beneficial in regular education classrooms. The curriculum helps students establish a common vocabulary to talk about social issues and to build social awareness and social skills. Social Explorers is a language-based approach. The curriculum can be used in both small and large group settings. One of the key aspects of teaching this curriculum is to take advantage of "teachable moments" that occur throughout both the lessons and the school day.

The curriculum is divided into two books. *We Thinkers!* Volume 1 and Volume 2 are comprised in total of ten units that teach various concepts. Volume one consists of thinking thoughts and feeling feelings, the group plan, thinking with your eyes, body in the group, and whole-body listening. Volume two includes hidden rules and expected and unexpected behaviors, the smart guess, flexible and stuck thinking, size of problems, and sharing and imagination. Each unit is designed to teach a specific concept. Once a concept is introduced, it is permeated across the other units for instruction. Students should find a deeper level of understanding of social skills as they evolve through the units and through their experiences. Lessons include an opening routine, opening activity and storybook, structured activities, dramatic play to reinforce the concept and vocabulary, as well as a closing routine.

Positive Systems Approach

A Positive Systems Approach, developed by University of Oregon researchers George Sugai and Rob Horner in the early 1990s, will also be used during the intervention to include all students and not just students who are or were disturbed seriously with emotions. There is benefit to all students receiving this instruction. This approach emphasizes five components. It outlines the importance of prevention to decrease the likelihood of the occurrence, development, and escalation of problem behaviors. There is a focus on early screening to identify high-risk students for school failure. It sets up a function-based approach that should be implemented for assessments and support planning. Antecedent-based strategies are given the same if not a greater importance than consequence-based interventions. Student behavior should be supervised actively, continuously, and directly. Effective, efficient, and relevant social behaviors are taught in the form of social skills instruction to compete with occurrences of problem behavior and are linked to classroom and schoolwide social behavior expectations (Dunlap, 2010).

As research has shown, children come into the classroom with different backgrounds, needs. and experiences. Some students have had previous exposure to social-emotional skills at school and home, and some have not. A strong curriculum designed to focus on understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships with others, and making responsible decisions will have a lasting impact on students. Teachers who have training and tools available to support the social-emotional needs of their students are going to educate their students through the social skills that are needed to be successful in their futures (Heath, 2017).

Methods

Participants

This action research was conducted in a kindergarten classroom in Marion, Iowa. The students who participated in this study ranged from five to seven years of age. The students attend a full day of kindergarten in the Linn-Mar Community School District. This is a classroom of 20 students. The family incomes ranges of these students range from poverty up to upper class.

The gender variation is comparable to other classes and this will not be a factor in the results of the study. The classroom consists of eleven females who are 55% of the class and nine males who are 45% of the class. The student's gender should not affect the overall outcome of the study. Both genders will be able to participate in all lessons and activities as they already participate together in lessons and classroom activities.

The students' race is typical for the area in which the study was conducted and is a typical make up of what is in this particular classroom from year to year. There are seventeen Caucasian students who are 85% of the class, two Hispanic students who are 10% of the class, and one

African American student who is 5% of the class. The race of the students is not a factor in this study, as all students will be delivered these lessons and are capable of learning.

Language should not be a factor in this study. There is one English language learner in this classroom. Her parents speak Spanish at home; however, her siblings as well as herself all speak English and very little Spanish. She does not have difficulty being receptive to the lessons that are taught in the classroom. She does receive English Language services but will be phased off the program based on testing results.

There is also one child on an Individualized Education Plan for communication and adaptive behavior. This child could skew the results of the study based on the that he currently struggles with social emotional skills. In order to reinforce the skills for this particular student, the teacher will conduct an additional small-group lesson on the same topic for this student to get more direct instruction.

A student's socio-economic status could impact the findings of the study, but this was not specially looked at in the study. The class is composed of eleven students who receive free or reduced lunch which is 55% of the class. These numbers are comparable to other classrooms in the school and similar to numbers from previous years. Socio-economic status has been proven to play a role in student's social emotional behaviors so this may be considered for future research and studies.

Procedures

During the last week of November and throughout the month of December, the teacher collected behavior data for four weeks. This data collection was done by collecting data based on practice cards given to students throughout the day. Students received practice cards for negative behaviors. The practices cards were issued for students who needed consistent reminders for

one of the four classroom rules. The rules were as follows: One--follow directions quickly, two-

-raise your hand for permission to speak, three--raise your hand for permission to leave your

seat, and four--make smart choices.

Quantitative data was used to indicate the number of problem behaviors throughout the given

time period by tracking the practice cards that students received. The teacher took anecdotal

notes to keep track of which practice card was given as well as the specific reason for issuing the

practice card. The practice cards were also tracked in a daily take home folder for each student.

Upon collecting the original data, the teacher incorporated social emotional lessons into the

classroom. The teacher implemented social emotional lessons over a four-week period begin-

ning on January 2nd, 2020. The lessons consisted of 20-minute lessons three days a week. The

lessons included daily social-emotional lessons, peer-mediated instruction, books, social stories,

videos, role play, modeling, and reinforcement strategies. Many opportunities for practicing

these skills were included in the lessons and during supervised play.   Modeling behaviors with

staff was another key component of the instruction. After implementing these new skills, data

was again collected over a four-week period in the month of February. Data was collected dur-

ing the same hours for the initial data collection and the post teaching data collection, roughly

five hours a day. The teacher collected the data using the same behavior tracking sheets and an-

ecdotal notes. The data was collected over the same time period to ensure the data was as con-

sistent as possible.

Variables

The focus of the action research was to determine if the implementation of specific so-

cial-emotional learning reduces the number of negative behaviors in the kindergarten classroom.

The dependent variable of change was student behaviors, which were measured by tracking the

number of practice cards during the specified time frame. The independent variable was the

teaching of social skills in the classroom. This research was both qualitative and quantitative.

The number of practice cards given supported the quantitative research and will show a specific

amount of decrease of negative behavior. The qualitative data involved the specific type of be-

havior that was observed. This data was supported by anecdotal records that were kept during

the collection period to help give more specific information about behaviors. These daily skill

lessons included social stories, books, modeling, role playing, peer mediated instruction, guided

play, and reinforcement strategies.

Findings

Data Analysis

There was minimal researcher bias in this action research project. The researcher is a

certified teacher with five years of experience in the kindergarten classroom. The research was

collected independently by the classroom teacher both prior to implementing the new skills as

well as post implementation. Collecting quantitative data allowed the researcher to understand

the benefits of social emotional instruction. Collecting qualitative data allowed the researcher to

break down specific behavior concerns.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data was collected using a table to track the number of practice cards per

student during the pre- and post-implementation periods. The behavior logs and office reports

(Table 1) were tallied to track the number of incidences within the collection period for each stu-

dent. Additionally, total number of incidents for the classroom pre- and post-implementation

(Table 2) were tracked. Incidents were then broken down for each rule using pre- and post-im-

plementation data (Table 3) to compare the differences based on the specific rules.

Table 1

Number of observed and recorded incidents per student

Student	Preliminary	Post	Change
1	0	0	0
2	1	0	-1
3	9	1	-8
4	8	3	-5
5	2	0	-2
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	1	0	-1
9	0	0	0
10	1	0	-1
11	0	0	0
12	0	4	4
13	0	0	0
14	1	0	-1
15	9	2	-7
16	1	0	-1
17	2	2	0

18	4	4	0
19	0	0	0
20	0	0	0

Table 1 indicates the total number of practice cards given out per student pre-implementation in column two and post implementation in column three. One student, 5% of the sample, showed an increase of practice cards after implementation of peer-mediated instruction and the Social Explorers curriculum. Nine students, 45% of the sample, showed a decrease in practice cards post implementation. Additionally, ten students, 50% of the sample, showed no change in their behavior. Of those ten students, eight of them did not have any practice cards before or after implementation of the new instruction. Two students showed the same number of practice cards for both observed time periods. Student 17 reflected no change: there were two indicated practice cards pre-implementation as well as two practice cards post implementation. Student 18 also reflected no change: they had four practice cards prior to implementing the new skills as well as four practice cards post implementation.

At the beginning of the study, prior to the implementation of the new skills, there were 12 students with documented behaviors. Of these 12 students, nine students 75% of the sample, showed a decrease in their previous documented behaviors. The average decrease was 1.15 cards per student. Using a matched-pairs t-test for mean difference, the p-value for that test is 0.035, which is low enough to argue statistical significance.

Table 2

Total number of behavior incidents observed and recorded

Preliminary	Post	Change

38	16	-22

Table 2 shows the total number of behavior incidents that were observed both pre and post implementation of the new skills. There were 38 documented behavior incidents prior to implementing the new skills. There were 16 behavior incidents documented after the four-week implementation period. This was a change of -22, a 58% decrease in behavior incidents.

Table 3

Total number of behavior incidents broken down by the practice card given for the behavior.

Rule	Preliminary	Post	Change
1: Follow directions quickly	12	5	-7
2: Raise your hand for permission to speak	13	5	-8
3: Raise your hand for permission to leave your seat	1	0	-1
4: Make smart choices	5	4	-1
Office Referrals	7	2	-5

In Table 3 behavior incidents were broken down by each of the four rules as well as office referrals. There was an overall decrease in practice cards given for each rule as well as office referrals. The largest change was in rule number one and rule number two. Rule number one had a decrease of 58% overall. Rule number two showed an overall decrease of 62%.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected for this study was done by anecdotal records pre and post implementation. The researcher reviewed the anecdotal notes to categorize the key areas of

concern for rule number four, "make smart choices." Anecdotal notes were taken for rule num-

ber four because there are multiple behaviors that can be tracked under rule number four. The

other three rules are based around one specific behavior. Incidents tracked under rule number

four included physical aggression in the form of hitting and pushing, name calling or inappropri-

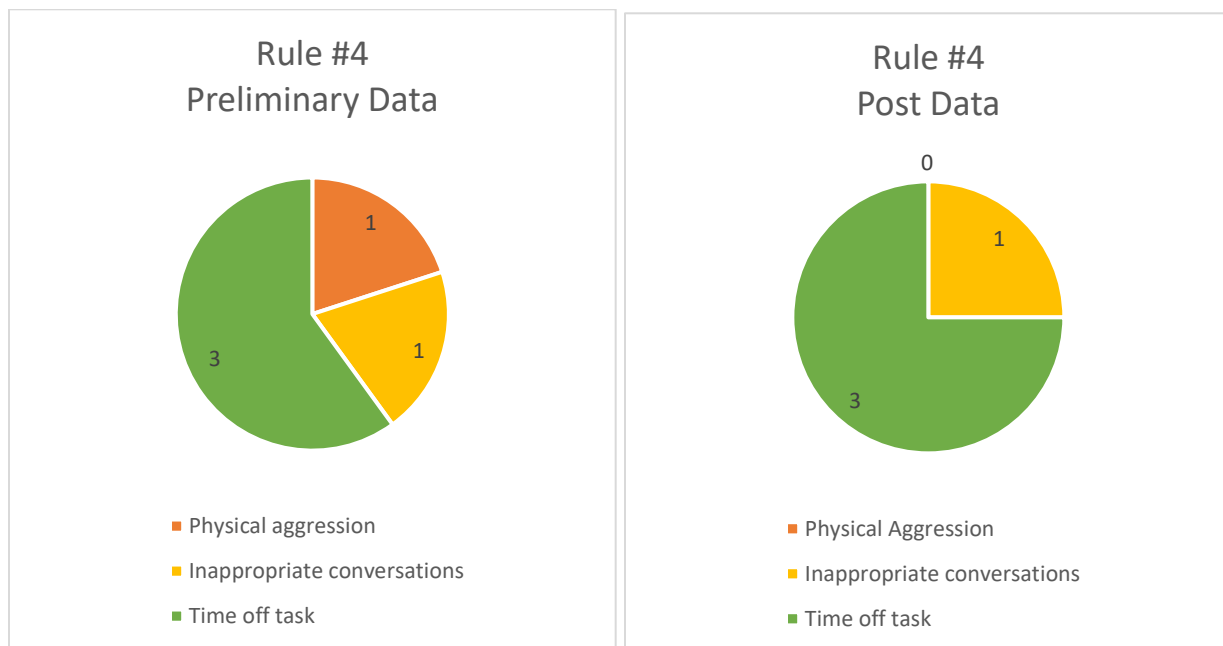ate language discussions with a classmate, and time off task.

Figure 1 behaviors tracked under rule #4. The figure illustrates the different behaviors

that caused practice card number four to be issued.

Figure 1 illustrates the different behaviors that were tracked under rule number four.

There were five practice cards issued for rule number four prior to implementation. Post imple-

mentation there were four practice cards given for this rule. That was an overall change of -1 or

a 20% decrease. The number of behaviors observed as time off task stayed the same with three

incidents both pre and post implementation. The number of inappropriate comments or discus-

sions also had no change with one pre implementation and one post implementation. Practice

cards given for physical aggression was reduced by 100% with one being given pre implementation and zero being give post implementation. This data shows that there was no increase in any of these behaviors post implementation. The data presented for rule number four is limited and does not appear to show a significant change due to the implementation of this new instruction.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The findings of this action research support the literature that was reviewed and suggest that consistent use of social emotional learning within the classroom can help improve behaviors in kindergarten students. The data shows that although students are in the same kindergarten classroom, getting the same instruction, the degree to which behaviors are impacted may vary. The findings suggest that most students showed progress in improving their behavior, but the progress made was different for each individual student.

The Social Explorers Curriculum helps to establish a common vocabulary to talk about social issues and to build social awareness and social skills. Providing lessons in this way proved to show a decrease in negative behaviors. This curriculum in conjunction with the PMI strategy supported the need for social emotional learning in the classroom. These results will help to identify strategies and solutions that will positively affect future classrooms and help support future literature.

Limitations

One of the limitations was time. The time allowed for implementation was four weeks. Within those four weeks there was one professional learning day that students did not attend, one snow day, and two days of modified schedules due to in school activities. The limited time and

short lessons made it difficult to implement and practice all skills sufficiently. It also made it

difficult to see if these results would continue over a larger timeframe.

The second limitation was that the study used only one kindergarten classroom. The

classroom consisted of twenty students. It is difficult to know if the curriculum is effective over

larger populations, other age groups, or more diverse classrooms.

A third limitation is the limited number of teachers that were involved in the study. The

teacher/researcher in this study was solely responsible for all tracking of behavior cards and

teaching of lessons. Additional support in both of these areas could have changed the overall

study. Another limitation was student absences.

Multiple students had absence both during the implementation period as well as during

the timeframe that the post implementation data was collected. These absences resulted in stu-

dents missing some of the lessons that were implemented. These absences also would affect the

overall number of practice cards that students could have potentially been given.

Further Study

Further studies on the effects of social emotional learning being implemented strategi-

cally into the classroom may want to gather information from other kindergarten classrooms.

Using data from additional classrooms both in the same district as well as in different districts

would help to give deeper insight into this question. Additionally, implementing these lessons

across varying grade levels would give the researcher the opportunity to decrease some of the

limitations of this research project. The researcher in this study did take part in specific training

and continued coaching regarding peer-mediated instruction. However, she did not receive for-

mal training on the use of the Social Explorers curriculum. Additional studies would benefit

from training all school personnel to integrate the skills and vocabulary associated with the curriculum into their classrooms. In that case, when students are in various settings of the school, the expectations and vocabulary are consistent.

Conclusion

Through tracking behaviors and researcher observations the research indicates that social emotional learning instruction creates a positive impact on students' behavior. One student did have an increase in negative behavior after instruction, but it is unclear if that behavior is connected to the new learning or to other factors. The study suggests that the implementation of social emotional learning needs to be fully implemented over a longer period of time to have a more positive effect of student behavior. To better understand the effects of peer mediated instruction and the Social Explorers curriculum, they need to be tested independently from each other to see the degree to which each one is working in the classroom. This information can then be compared to the data presented her with the two skills taught together. Creating better anecdotal reports is vital to a better understanding of the types of behavior as well as where they are coming from. In addition to these changes, implementing social emotional learning throughout the school will allow colleagues to support teachers in this effort. The outcome of this research project indicates that social emotional learning may affect kindergarten students positively, but further study is needed to determine the long-term effects.

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