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ABSTRACT

Teachers and caregivers understand well how important their role is in the promotion of young children's cognitive development. However, they must also emphasize the development of prosocial behaviors in children, particularly in light of some recent data indicating possible heightened aggression and lack of prosocial interactions among preschoolers who were in full-time non-maternal care during the first year of life. This paper describes for educators and parents specific ideas and skills to promote prosocial interactions in the classroom and harmonious family interactions. Following a brief review of research indicating the success of cognitive curricula in early education and the need for prosocial curricula, the paper briefly describes 30 classroom techniques to teach and encourage prosocial behavior. Techniques described include teaching children easy words to express feelings; giving clear, reasonable rules; teaching cooperative games; and encouraging more complex, positive sociodramatic play. Contains 20 references. (EV)

CREATE A PROSOCIAL PLUS COGNITIVE CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

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Teachers and caregivers understand profoundly well how important their role is in the promotion of young children's cognitive development. How can we also emphasize the importance of developing and providing a prosocial as well as a cognitive curriculum for young children? Caregivers and parents need specific ideas and skills to promote prosocial interactions in the classroom and harmonious family interactions.

Books, audiovisual materials, and articles to support teacher promotion of prosocial interactions are useful aids. They contain specific techniques or ideas for working with parents as well as children in putting a prosocial curriculum into place in early childhood settings. Most early education teachers have been taught how to promote intellective and thinking skills. Some teachers are particularly skilled in preparing and arranging materials and environments to promote early learning and language development. But teachers also need tips and skills to promote prosocial

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programs. Sometimes, teachers working in child care settings emphasize cognitive aspects of curriculum more than affective aspects. That is, they are far more likely to teach and promote classification and seriation, uses of materials, and pre-reading skills than they are to teach children how to be cooperative, kind and caring. Indeed, theory, such as Piaget's explanation of the inability of the preoperational child (prior to age 7 or 8 years) to "decenter" and take the point of view of another may have contributed to a belief by teachers of preschoolers that a prosocial curriculum would not be adaptable to the cognitive abilities of young children.

Research Findings Emphasize the Importance of a Prosocial Curriculum

Some of the recent data on long term effects of infancy day care have brought up concerns about possible heightened aggression and lack of prosocial interactions among preschoolers who have been in full-time infancy non-maternal care during the first year of life (Belsky, 1990). With more than 60% of employed parents of young children in the work force, the promotion of prosocial interactions needs to become a primary goal of preschool educators.

Field et al.(1988) report that preschoolers who have experienced stable high quality day care in infancy are socially effective as preschoolers, although teachers rated those who had had full-time early infancy care as more aggressive in peer interactions. Park & Honig (1991) report that among middle class preschoolers, those who had been in full time child care prior to 9 to 12 months were rated by teachers (who knew them for at least one year but who were blind to their child care history), as more unhappy, disobedient, aggressive, lying, fighting and destructive compared

with preschoolers who had not had full-time non-parental care during the first three years of life. However, the teachers also rated the children as more advanced in abstract reasoning and problem solving compared with the no-full-time infancy/toddler care group.

Thus a puzzlement is presented to planners of high quality child care experiences: how can child care personnel keep the cognitive advantages of high-quality programs for young children in the earliest years, and yet mitigate the antisocial effects which some researchers have found? Vigorous attempts at providing prosocial curricula in child care facilities, just as cognitive curricula have been effectively promoted is here proposed as an aid to resolving problems of potential occurrence of antisocial behaviors.

Such a proposal is based partly on research evidence. Haskins (1985) reported that children who had attended the high-quality child care Abecedarian program full-time from early infancy behaved in ways that reflected fifteen times as much aggression in kindergarten in comparison with control youngsters who had not attended the program. Haskins also reported that when an American Guidance Service prosocial curriculum entitled "My friends and me" was implemented, then the next groups of day care graduates did not differ in aggression rates from their controls. Thus, it is highly likely that if caregivers and teachers are provided with ideas, techniques and reading materials to help them to implement a prosocial curriculum, then rates of aggression can be decreased and prosocial interactions increased, whatever the early child care patterns may be.

From early infancy through the preschool and early school-age years, materials are available to promote: positive cooperation in classrooms, empathic responsiveness to peer distress, helpfulness toward younger or atypical children in program, kindness and sharing, generosity, turn-taking, positive group-entry skills, and friendliness. Below are some teacher tools to create a classroom flourishing in prosocial interactions as well as cognitive competence.

PROSOCIAL TECHNIQUES FOR CAREGIVERS OF PRESCHOOLERS

. Acknowledge positive motives and activities. Attributing kindness and helpfulness to children makes them feel that they ARE caring persons (Honig & Wittmer, 1992). Some examples are: " You waited your turn with the trike so patiently." " You were so generous in sharing blocks when Jan needed more long skinny blocks for her building."

. Teach children words for feelings. Easy words are: "mad", "sad", and "glad". Preschoolers can understand "worried" , "scared," "happy", and "proud" also.

. Use "Active Listening" to convey your empathy for distressed children so that they feel you understand their worry, fear, grumpiness, resentment, jealousy, or anger (Gordon, 1970). Acknowledge the children's feelings, such as grief, anger, sadness, frustration, puzzlement, or pride. Children are more likely cooperate with a caring adult whom they feel really understands and validates their feelings. If a child is feeling grumpy, you can acknowledge the feelings even when you cannot

allow a behavior: " Ryan, you really wanted to go play outside today with your buddy, but the rain is coming down so hard, we will not be able to go outside even with boots and raincoats. You sure hope tomorrow the weather will clear so you CAN go out and climb up the hill and play outdoors."

. Use the "You wish" technique to validate children's longings. For example, "You wish Jerry would give you the trike right away. But it is his turn to ride right now. Your turn will be in 5 minutes. You wish your turn would be right now. Soon it will be your turn. Then you can ride the trike for 5 minutes." Children who don't have to simmer their unpleasant emotions to the boiling point may well find the strength to self-regulate more frequently, when they know you care about their wishes and wants.

. Provide models of kindness, helpfulness and caring through your adult daily responsive interactions with children. Gentle voice tones and calm soothing words help. A caring hand on a tense shoulder, a gentle stroking of a child's back can restore harmony sometimes when tension escalates. Picking up a tired toddler in arms and just rocking her soothingly in arms may prevent a social outburst against a peer.

. Use bibliotherapy. Books, such as Dr. Seuss' "Horton hears a who" or "Horton hatches an egg" motivate children to understand and want to be like loved prosocial characters in the stories you read to them. Young children often identify with kind animal characters quite strongly (Krogh & Lamme, 1985; Pardek & Pardek, 1997). Children identify with animated toys and vehicles too, such as Scruffy the tugboat. Among trains in children's tales, the "little engine that could" becomes a positive

cooperative, helpful model. While reading that story to preschoolers one day, I saw a youngster pop his thumb out of his mouth, nod his head positively as he listened to the generous feelings expressed by the little engine. Then he whispered to himself "That was very nice of her!".

. Suggest simple phrases a child can use as a specific group entry skill. Supply words so that a child could say: " I can help you pull the blocks in your wagon ", or " I like to jump rope too!". With specific easy-to-remember scripts, a youngster is less likely to break up other children's play (for example, by grabbing the rope) and is more likely to be accepted into peer play situations.

. Give clear, reasonable rules that help children know what is expected to keep a classroom cooperative and friendly. Restate classroom rules such as " Use your words" if antisocial actions occur or are imminent. Be sure you explain that classroom rules are to help keep children safe and happy and good friends in the classroom (Wittmer & Honig, 1994).

. Lower your voice an octave when disciplining or restating rules firmly. Talk slower and look directly in the child's eyes as you clarify what behaviors are inadmissable in your classroom (such as knocking a child down to snatch a toy).

. Become aware of a child's **goals** in misbehaving or behaving positively. Does the child crave more of your attention? Is the child hurt by being belittled too much and is seeking power or revenge? Is the child acting discouraged and incompetent and feels that he or she can get you to interact in a nurturant manner only through displays of inadequacy? (Dreikers, Grunwald & Pepper, 1971). Tailor your response

to the child's goal. Avoid fights. Promote self-esteem and positive feelings whenever possible.

. Choose a discipline technique such as "time out" sparingly and not in anger. If you do choose this technique, decide to treat "time out" as a "teach in", under limited circumstances, in order to help a child gain control of negative emotions and calm him or herself (Honig, 1996).

. Challenge children to learn ICPS (I Can Problem Solve) techniques (Shure, 1992; 1994). Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving Techniques help a child to figure out the **consequences** of inappropriate behaviors. ICPS challenges a child to choose **alternative** behaviors to meet social goals rather than aggressive or inappropriate interactions. Ask the child " What will happen NEXT?" after an inappropriate behavior. Ask : " What ELSE can you think of ?" to boost ability to generate more prosocial ideas to solve an interpersonal problem.

. Create cooperative games where children have to work together in coordinated ways in order to be successful or enjoy the activity (Kreidler, 1984; Orlick, 1981). Children can seesaw together, draw a mural together, or bounce a ball on a towel together.

. Change room arrangements so that children feel more comfortable playing in a friendly and cooperative fashion with one another. Sometimes this means **enrichment** with more activities or choices. Sometimes **decreasing environmental stimulation** helps children play more peacefully. Be sure to brainstorm your room arrangements to optimize children's comfortable feelings in playing or sitting together. If large muscle

activity is permitted very close to a table where fine motor activities are offered, few of the younger children will feel safe sitting at that table. They may not choose to sit and work puzzles or play with pegboards if others run or play vigorously too close by. Block areas need enough play space. Otherwise crowding can lead to irritations and use of blocks as weapons.

. Ask Socratic, open- ended questions to help children become aware of and think about the feelings of others and themselves. Open-ended questions give children a chance to remember and organize what they do know already (Honig & Wittmer, 1982).

. Employ victim-centered discipline firmly if one child hurts another (Honig & Wittmer, 1992; Kohn, 1988). Say: "Look at Denny's face. It is red. He is crying. Hitting hurts! I am here to keep the children safe. I do not want anyone to hurt you. I cannot let you hurt another child. We need to help Denny feel better. How can we make him feel better?"

. Behave as a "beacon of safety" when children are on a playground or in a gym. Position yourself to observe and be ready to assist calmly if a child needs support for ego control (Wolfgang, Mackender, & Wolfgang, 1981). Adults promoting prosocial interactions among children do not cluster and socialize together when children are playing outdoors. On the playground there are lots of good opportunities for an observant, creative adult to promote patience and assist turntaking play at a slide or other outdoor equipment.

. Arrange for children to act out playlets and stories where characters behave in

a variety of prosocial as well as thoughtless or aggressive roles. Some good playlet ideas can be acted out for "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" or "The Three Billy Goats Gruff". Discuss the roles and the feelings of the characters. What actions made characters feel scared or mad? What actions or words helped them be brave and protect themselves and others?

. Encourage more complex, positive sociodramatic play by giving small suggestions to enhance inclusion, empathy, and enjoyment by children who would otherwise feel left out of the play (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). Be sure a particular child does not always end up in the assigned role of the baby or the dog in role play. Without being intrusive, teachers often need to enter into sociodramatic play just enough to help the children become creative in assigning roles and finding new roles to include a peer in play.

. Work toward less stressful transitions. Talk through the steps of every project and give plenty of lead time for changes so that children can adjust and prepare for change to lessen chances of distress and acting out inappropriately. Children get aggravated when they have to switch activities suddenly because of rigidly programmed time schedules in care. More peaceful transitions will decrease their frustration.

. Play calm music that soothes and promotes relaxation of tension among children. Slow dancing to dreamy music refreshes and relaxes little ones. If parents can sew up the edges of large colorful nylon squares, the children may enjoy expressive dancing even more as they swirl the light gauze about them.

. Promote a child's planning and thinking aloud, so that you can better understand how the child reasons about social goals and actions, and whether the plan the child has will further classroom harmony or disruption.

. Engage children in visualization exercises to calm them when they are overexcited. For example, pretend together that you are watching slow lazy little waves rippling in on a sandy seashore, or pretend you are all sitting quietly, happy to watch a fawn nibble on grass in a forest glade. Play cassettes of soothing rippling wave and water sounds or bird and forest sounds to create a restful climate. Have the children close their eyes and visualize peaceful places they imagine they are visiting.

. Take into account the **temperament** styles of each child (Honig, 1997). Some children have short fuses for anger. Some are slow to warm up and suspicious of new activities, playmates, or caregivers. They need more time to get used to new foods or program activities. Children who react with intensity to mild social difficulties may throw a tantrum, sulk, or lash out physically at a child who seems to them to "threaten" their block tower by leaning too close for comfort. Easygoing children may accept problem situations more peacefully. They fall down and pick themselves up and go right on trying to learn to skate or ride a trike or push a wheelbarrow. When a playmate takes a toy from them, they simply find a substitute toy and go right on playing. Highly active, impulsive youngsters need more opportunities to use their energies in safe and socially acceptable ways, such as swinging or running vigorously rather than pushing or hurting to get a toy they want. Some children are more solemn and need more teacher "sunshine" - approval and genuine focused interest - in order

to participate more fully in positive classroom interactions. Recognizing such individual temperament characteristics helps a caregiver fine tune her or his responses to ease a child's social difficulty.

. Suggest that the children draw "Helping Coupons" on paper, illustrate them, and cut them out. If the children can write, let them decide what to write. Otherwise, have them dictate to you each coupon offer, such as " I will 'read' a picture book to baby Joanna tonight while papa is busy bathing Luis." Each coupon is a gift to be given to a family member, a promise of a prosocial helpful action. Prosocial activities are not only for school!

. Teach controlled use of messy materials for children who are undercontrolled. Supervise an angry child who is playing with smeary or gloppy materials, so that he or she is not "flooded" by the chaotic possibilities of creative media. Gaining planful control over messy play can help a child increase control over an inner life space too frequently at the mercy of frenzied feelings.

. Set up regular group times to talk about how children could help those who are poor, or elderly or sick. Circle times are a good time for teacher encouragement and appreciation of peer prosocial actions that the children have noticed during the day (Kobak, 1979). Such circle time sharing of prosocial stories about themselves and others increases children's prosocial behaviors (Honig & Pollack, 1990).

. Introduce your classroom to the "peace rose ceremony (Paulsen, 1997). When two children start to have a conflict, one of them or a peer goes over and brings back the peace rose, a silk flower displayed in the classroom in a crystal vase. Whoever

holds the rose may tell what has happened, how he feels about that, and what he thinks should be done about it. After that, the other child gets a turn to hold the rose and says how he or she really feels about what happened. They are not free to call each other mean names. The children are empowered to interact directly with each other over a social difficulty. When they finish expressing their views, they both hold the stem of the rose and say "We declare peace". If a child comes with a complaint about injustice from another child, the teacher asks: " Do you feel you need to go get the peace rose?"

. Work with parents as partners in creating a prosocial classroom climate (Elardo & Cooper, 1977; Smith, 1982). Inform parents of the classroom policy of creating a climate of caring and cooperation and urge them to support at-home prosocial learning. How can children become more empathic and kind in family situations? A preschoolers who tears lettuce for dinner salad, or entertains the baby with pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo games helps the parent who needs five minutes just to take a shower!

. Invite "moral mentors" from the community to visit your classroom and share their stories with the children. Some folks help out in old age homes, coach Little League, or volunteer at soup kitchens. After school, some teens teach handicapped children to swim. Volunteers who help others provide prosocial models of the kinds of caring adults that you surely hope the young children in your classroom will grow to become (Damon, 1988). Enjoy the wonderful feeling that comes from teaching the **whole** child, so that cognitive plus prosocial understandings and skills flourish in your classroom.

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