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ABSTRACT

This action research project evaluated a program for increasing prosocial behaviors of preschoolers, kindergartners, and first graders. Participating were three classrooms of students, one class in each grade level, in a middle class community in a large Midwestern city. The problem of failure to display prosocial behavior was documented among five students in each grade level, by means of classroom teachers' observations, checklists of prosocial behavior, and student interviews regarding problematic peer-related situations. The intervention consisted of selecting children's literature that addressed the needs of targeted students, reading the literature several times each week, and using follow-up activities to reinforce peer-related concepts. The effects of the intervention were assessed by means of pre-post observations of children's interactions and interviews with selected children regarding problematic peer-related situations. Post-intervention data indicated an increase in prosocial behaviors among the targeted students. The children developed problem-solving skills to assist in social interactions. Growth in speech and language skills was also noted. (Eight appendices include data collection instruments, a bibliography of the books used in the study, and sample lesson plans. Contains 30 references.) (KB)

USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO INCREASE PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN THE EARLY YEARS

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Abstract

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Title: Using Children's Literature to Increase Prosocial Behaviors in the Early Years

This report describes a program for increasing prosocial behaviors of students in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classes. The targeted population consisted of students living in a middle class community located at the far southeastern border of a large midwestern city. The problem of failure to display prosocial behaviors during the early years was documented using classroom teachers' observations, checklists, and student interviews.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students come from diverse family structures, including single-parent, divorced families sharing custody, and foster families. Research has shown that family composition has an effect on student behavior: parents often lack the time to model and encourage the use of positive social skills; "latch-key" children are often isolated from friends; and parent stress affects social relationships between parent and child. Use of electronic media tends to isolate students further.

A review of solution strategies suggested by other knowledgeable researchers, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the choice of an intervention involving selected children's literature which addressed the needs of targeted students, frequent reading of the literature, and reinforcement of peer-related concepts through follow-up activities.

Post-intervention data indicated an increase in prosocial behaviors among the targeted students. The children developed problem-solving skills to assist in social interactions. Growth in speech and language skills was also noted by the researchers.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

Many students in the targeted elementary school fail to display prosocial behaviors during early childhood years. Evidence of the problem includes classroom teachers' observations, checklists, and student interviews.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted school is a preschool through fourth grade building. According to the 1997 School Report Card, which included data from the 1996-1997 school year, it housed 736 students including five half-day preschool sections, seven half-day kindergarten sections, five first grade classes, six second grade classes, five third grade classes, and five fourth grade classes. The building also had three special education classes including one first/second cross-categorical class and two third/fourth cross-categorical classes. Four of the preschool sections served special education students. These classes were designed to help prepare students to cope with the school environment physically, socially, and emotionally as well as academically and intellectually. Of the seven kindergarten sections, three were special education classes. The maximum enrollment for special education preschool and

kindergarten sections was 10, and the maximum enrollment for the other preschool was 15. Standard kindergartens averaged 22.8 students. First grade averaged 20.6 students. The average class size for the remaining grades was as follows: second grade, 25.3 students; third grade, 22.2 students; fourth grade, 24.0 students; and special education cross-categorical, 13.7 students. The racial-ethnic breakdown of the school was 76.4 percent Caucasian, 17.4 percent African-American, 5.3 percent Hispanic, 0.8 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1 percent Native American.

The staff of the targeted school consisted of 31 classroom teachers. The principal shared her duties with a half-time administrator/teacher. In addition to the classroom teachers and principals, the school was served by one physical education teacher, one half-time physical education teacher, one music teacher, one art teacher, one speech pathologist, one learning disabilities teacher and two teaching assistants, one Regular Education Initiative facilitator, and one library assistant. A speech pathologist and two teaching assistants served the preschool and special education kindergarten classes, and another speech pathologist served the remainder of the student population. Two occupational therapists served the special education preschool and kindergarten classes and other students in the building as needed. Each special education class also had one teaching assistant. A nurse and a social worker were available to service children as needed, but were not housed at the school.

The elementary school was built in 1928 and consisted of six rooms, two washrooms, and a combination auditorium/gymnasium. Attendance at the time was

132 students in grades 1-8. By 1932, the freshman and sophomore high school classes were also housed in the elementary school.

An addition was constructed on the east end of the building in 1937 to accommodate three years of high school. By 1940, the full high school was in operation with 186 students and 234 students at the elementary level.

In 1947, a wing was added onto the west end of the building. A vocational building was also built north of the gymnasium. The vocational building was used as a cafeteria. In 1958 and in 1970, two more additions were built.

The latest construction, begun in 1976, included the present office complex, the multipurpose room, several new classrooms, as well as the kindergarten section, and the learning center which housed the library and visual graphics room. The school then served students in grades K-6 as well as the district's early childhood program. The latest change came in 1996 when all of the district's elementary schools were converted into K-4 grade centers.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted school is part of a unit school district (preschool-12) with a total enrollment of 4,236 students. There are seven schools in the district. The district includes portions of six neighboring communities. According to the 1997 School Report Card, the percentage of students in the district who came from low-income families was 18.6 percent. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the district was 53.6% Caucasian, 41.7% African/American, 3.7% Hispanic, 0.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. The number of students in the district who came from limited-English

proficient families was 0.3 percent. The student mobility rate in the district was 17.0 percent, and the attendance rate was 93.9 percent. The operating expenditure per pupil was $6,296. Average teacher salary was $40,606.

The administrative staff of the school district includes a superintendent, a director of business affairs/human resources, a part time director of curriculum, a director of instruction, and a director of special education.

The board of education of the school district is composed of seven citizens who are elected to represent the various communities of the district. The board of education meets once a month.

The targeted school is located in a community of 6,773 residents. It is a far southeastern suburb of a large midwestern city. According to the 1990 census, the racial composition of the community was 94.1 percent Caucasian, 4.5 percent African-American, 0.7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.6 percent Hispanic, and 0.1 percent Native American. The median family income was $46,283, and the unemployment rate was 3.9 percent. The percentage of students completing high school was 83.6 percent. Information obtained from a local realtor indicates that the median home value was $174,990. Housing ranges from mobile home courts, to historical homes, to newer upscale residences.

According to the School Report Card (1997), direction, priorities, and progress are driven by the district Goals:

[The district] will increase student learning.

[The district] will cultivate professional growth and development at all levels.

[The district] will foster communication and collaboration between the home, the school, and the community.

[The district] will increase the development and effective management of human and financial resources to enhance teaching and learning.

The District Education Council, a team of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and Board members collaboratively develops the goals each year during its summer leadership conference. The Board of Education finalizes and approves the goals at a public board meeting. (p. i)

According to the School Report Card (1997), positive relationships with community, businesses, and organizations have resulted in opportunities for district students. An independent educational foundation, which is a tax exempt fundraising organization, was formed. The foundation raised several thousand dollars in its first few months of operation. Money from the foundation was used to pay for student programs and materials which were not funded by tax dollars.

In partnership with a local state university, the district planned to develop a charter school as a means to further serve the community's children. Funded by a grant, the charter school would serve preschool age at-risk children.

The district worked with the area Chamber of Commerce to sponsor a "Business After Hours" open house. The open house gave local business people the opportunity to tour the high school and see the successes and accomplishments of students and staff.

Community organizations provided mentoring and tutoring programs for students. District high school students received scholarships and other support from community businesses and organizations.

Regional and National Context of Problem

Prosocial behavior, an area of young children's social development, includes behaviors such as empathy, generosity, turn-taking, and caregiving. These are some of the characteristics that help people to get along in society and that motivate people to interact with one another (Beaty, 1990). In addition to this observation, Bellanca (1992) discusses the importance of cooperation in the classroom. Early childhood years can provide the best opportunity for young students to fully develop the foundation of social skills which will ensure academic success and positive self-esteem in the later years (Bellanca, 1992).

Bellanca (1992) describes a world today that has an increasing number of children who come from single-parent, dual working-parent, or no parent homes. The lack of time and energy that these parents have for children causes special challenges. The time to assist, correct, model positive values, and encourage social skills is not available when the parents are struggling to keep food on the table. Too often television fills the hours for children, and with it the modeling of anti-social, anti-caring behaviors. Children may become confused and unclear, and learn little about social responsibility, mutual caring, respect, or cooperation.

"A well-conceived early childhood program ought to be saturated with social skill instruction and opportunity for the young students to practice as they play together"

(Bellanca, 1992, p. 203). Wittmer and Honig (1994) noted that until the late 1960s social development was seen as the core of the curriculum. During the past two decades emphasis was on cognitive skills, with social development only recently receiving renewed attention by educators.

Hartup's study (as cited in McClellan and Katz, 1992, p. 9) states that, "Indeed, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is *not* IQ, *not* school grades, and *not* classroom behavior but, rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children." Bellanca (1992) and Beaty (1990) agree on the necessity of teaching prosocial skills. As our world shifts from an individualistic social structure to a cooperative structure, the teaching of social skills takes on greater importance.

> Young children are not in the world alone. They are part of a family, a clan of relatives, a neighborhood, a community, a country, and a world of similar beings. To be an integrated member of the "human tribe," the young child needs to learn the tribe's rules of behavior from the beginning (Beaty, 1990, p. 129).

It appears that the young child should be developing prosocial behaviors in the context of the school. These behaviors predict the kinds of adults these children will become. They also will be crucial to the growth of a responsible society in the future.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

Three techniques were used to document the existence of children who have not acquired the desired prosocial skills in the targeted classrooms. Teacher observations were used with a checklist of selected behaviors. Student interviews were also used to gather information. Out of 16 students, 5 in the preschool were involved in this study over a 15 week period. The Kindergarten study included 5 out of 20, and the first grade study included 5 out of 26 students.

The Prosocial Behavior Checklist (PBC) (Appendix C) reflects frequency of desired behaviors by randomly selected students in the targeted preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms. The checklist elements include: taking turns; sharing toys/materials with others; taking turns when speaking; and using kind words to show concern for others in distress. The checklist is an informal instrument developed by the researchers. Results of the baseline observations are shown in Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

Students	Takes Turns	Shares Toys/Materials With Others	Takes Turns When Speaking	Shows Concern For Others
Jerry		I	I	
Aaron		I	I	II
Mark			I	I
Jordan				
Charles		I	I	

Figure 2.1 Prosocial Behavior Checklist use with Preschool Students, September, 1998.

Students	Takes Turns	Shares Toys/Materials With Others	Takes Turns When Speaking	Shows Concern For Others
Steven	II	III	III	I
Kari	III	III	I	I
Donald	I	IIII	II	II
Mark	III	IIII	I	I
Evelyn	IIII	II	II	II

Figure 2.2 Prosocial Behavior Checklist used with Kindergarten Students, September, 1998.

Students	Takes Turns	Shares Toys/Materials With others	Takes Turns When Speaking	Shows Concern For Others
Luke	I	II		
Katherine		I		
Keith	II	II		
Brandi		II		
Jon	II	II		

Figure 2.3 Prosocial Behavior Checklist used with First Grade Students, September, 1998.

The figures indicate sharing as the most frequently exhibited behavior among kindergarten and first grade students, while taking turns was observed most often in the targeted preshool classroom. Even those who did not interact with peers as often as other students, did share their toys and materials. Preschool children did not display turn taking while being observed in September. Showing concern for others with kind words was the least frquently observed behavior in the kindergarten classroom. Taking turns when speaking and showing concern for others with kind words were not noted in the first grade room.

The Prosocial Cognition Interview (PCI) (Appendix D) was administered to targeted students in each classroom. The instrument includes five illustrations (Character Education Institute, 1995) depicting various problematic peer-related situations. In each illustration one or more children want to attain a goal such as

acquiring an object or assistance of another child. Student responses to each situation were recorded by the researchers.

Results indicate brief responses given, such as "share," and "take turns." This pattern continued when difficulty in comprehending the problem situation was revealed in responses such as "outside," and "jump rope." Some children gave responses which did not address the picture. Inappropriate responses to the illustrations included, "Punch him," "Push them," and "I could knock him down." Appropriate responses were also noted by the interviewers. They included, "They need to be nice to him," "I would share it," "I don't know," and "That's a hard one." However, among the students interviewed, most responses given were brief and often were not relevant to the problematic situation presented in the illustration.

Probable Causes

Children in the targeted classrooms come from diverse family structures, including single-parent, divorced families sharing custody, and foster families. Research has shown that family composition has an effect on student achievement and behavior in school. Some families are struggling and simply do not have the time to model and encourage positive social skills.

Dual working parent families are becoming the norm. According to Jambor (1996), parents have less time to meet their children's needs and monitor their activities. The result is less guidance and prosocial influence. "Latchkey" children, confined to their homes, may be isolated from friends. Therefore, the trials and errors of learning essential social skills during play tend to be minimized.

Decreased time with family increases parent stress. This, in turn may affect the social relationships between parent and child. Less time is available for parents to teach positive social skills, and therefore, fewer opportunities exist for children to benefit from positive modeling. These researchers have observed that children often enter school having already experienced conflict. "As the number of these students increases, the amount of attention that a teacher can give to the academic work in school diminishes. More time is spent on correcting negative behavior, stopping for interruptions, and managing conflicts" (Bellanca, 1992, p.201).

Social isolation is further increased by the use of electronic media. Children spending time alone turn to television, video games, and the computer for companionship. Jambor (1996) reports that children between 2 and 11 years of age watch an average of 28 hours of television weekly. By the end of elementary school, most children will have seen about 100,000 acts of violence. Bellanca (1992) and Jambor (1996) both refer to these media as "electronic babysitters." They agree that using the media serves as an escape from peer rejection and loneliness. It also serves as a substitute for actual social play and as a model for antisocial, anti-caring behaviors. Kubey and Czikszentmihalyi (as cited in Bellanca, 1992) express it this way:

> If a child wants to learn how adults learn to laugh, he or she needs only to copy the art of the put-down in today's situation comedies and cartoon shows. If a child wants to learn how an adult solves problems, he or she needs only to watch the horror movies and detective shows to master the arts of "shoot-em-

down" or "beat-em-up." Love and kindness? Cooperation? Just review the soaps. Mutual support or caring? Try "family" shows such as "The Simpsons" (p. 202).

These researchers have observed violence being used as a problem solving skill both in the classroom and on the playground. Use of this strategy seems to indicate violence is a viable method to resolve conflicts between people. Noddings (1995) describes our world as one in which violence among school children is at an unprecedented level. She argues that our children will not achieve even adequate academic success unless they believe that they are cared for and learn to care for others.

"As conflict and violence become more and more prevalent, can there be a more important goal than helping children learn to get along with others?" (Bhavnagri and Samuels, 1986, p.222). Researchers have implemented a variety of strategies to increase the use of prosocial skills. Modeling is the most frequently recommended technique. Wittmer and Honig (1994) emphasize that adults need to value, model, and acknowledge desired behaviors. The literature suggests other strategies are cooperative learning, creation of a peaceful classroom atmosphere, parent education, positive discipline, children's literature with the use of follow-up activities, and consistent proactive planning by the teacher.

These researchers plan to design and implement a program using children's literature with follow-up activities. The goal of this program is to increase prosocial skills in the targeted classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

For most children, a preschool class is their first systematic experience and opportunity to form new relationships with children their own age. Not all children enter preschool with social competencies to embark upon this challenge. Therefore, preschool teachers place a high priority on their goal of "promoting social development" in young children. They often incidentally and retroactively teach social cognition of peer-related concepts after a social conflict has ensued (Bhavnagri and Samuels, 1996, p. 324).

The importance of teaching social skills to children during their early childhood years is affirmed by other researchers. Kuykendall (1993) advocates teachers analyzing the tone of the classroom and the school to assess the use of courteous words and behaviors. Research suggests that children's behavior appears to be more strongly influenced by adult behavior than by words alone. Children may be more willing to imitate the behavior of people who exhibit consistency between words and deeds. They tend to identify with caring and warm people. Through this identification, children believe that they possess the same characteristics as the adult model. Thus, if

adults practice courteous behavior with children, they are helping to develop prosocial skills.

Teachers' efforts in building social skills can be enhanced by parent support. Swick (1997) discusses the importance of parent involvement with the schools. He reports that nurturing caring in children should be a priority goal and recommends several principles for building family and school involvement and bringing about a community of caring persons. He speaks about values and cites Caldwell's (1989) research that says the environment we create for our youngest citizens is the clearest signal of our beliefs and a starting point for creating a caring community. Race, religion, and other individual and cultural attributes serve as a source of strength in societies that value caring. Respect for human differences is nurtured when schools encourage people of all ages and cultures to be a part of the school environment and use them in meaningful roles. Conferences, home visits, group sessions, and journals all help to build strong parent-teacher relationships. Mentoring projects will connect parents and citizens with high risk children who need adult attention to succeed at school. By embracing children in nurturing ways, parents and schools are working together to model caring and decency.

Much has been written about creating a peaceable atmosphere in the classroom. Many children are exposed to violence on television, in their communities, and sometimes within their families. These children become accustomed to high levels of violence, and as a result are learning that violence is a viable way for people to resolve conflicts (Cellitti, 1998).

The importance of establishing a peaceful classroom atmosphere is noted by Edwards (1992). She feels an "envelope of trust, protection, and mutual regard" is necessary for children's growth in working cooperatively, solving problems, and increasing social skills. (p.43) Emphasized in her research is the creation of a safe place where diverse opinions are valued and where it can even be desirable to disagree with one another. Edwards encourages teachers to model the enjoyable side of conflict, not attempting to settle every dispute immediately. She feels a strong sense of community needs to be established, developing connected relationships and values within the school, neighborhood, and town so that the school becomes more than a place where children's cognitive, academic, social, and emotional skills are promoted. She believes the school can be a source of satisfaction to their basic sense of well-being.

Cellitti (1998) discusses several strategies for creating a peaceful classroom. To create the environment, teachers must first provide an atmosphere in which adults model peaceful interactions and mutual respect at all times. Learning materials should be free from gender, racial, and other stereotypes. Taking turns, sharing, and other peacemaking skills are developed by caring adults who build on daily incidents such as disagreements about turns with toys. Collecting items for a food drive or making cards for nursing home residents are examples of ways to involve children in community projects. These activities encourage children to develop a sense of understanding and empathy for others. Cellitti reports that families become involved when teachers talk about how the children use social skills and how they are learning to respect others.

Information about conflict resolution, anti-bias activities, and classroom interactions can be exchanged along with the progress report at conference time.

In addition to incorporating peace into daily routines, teachers may want to set up a peace center where children can read, listen to music, and practice their conflict resolution strategies. The space should be comfortable and decorated with children's artwork or pictures of the children engaged in activities in the center. Also included may be pictures and posters depicting human diversity. Using a few positive rules about expectations for behavior, teachers can teach children the steps to conflict resolution. The steps include allowing each child to explain what happened, summarizing what each child has said from both points of view, considering solutions from both children, and helping the children choose a solution (Cellitti, 1998).

According to Cellitti (1998), peace concepts are effective only when they make sense to children. Working on development of these skills is a daily process. They should be included in routines and incorporated into all academic areas. Children's understanding about the similarities and differences among individuals, families, and communities will be broadened when volunteers share their heritage through visits, photographs, and artifacts. Regularly incorporating ethnic foods and real clothing into the play area will help children to realize all people are unique individuals within a particular culture. Lessons that deal with social problems, such as writing letters about trash on the playground, will help children learn appropriate ways to deal with those issues. Science activities concerning recycling, taking care of the ocean, or animal life help to promote children's caring and social responsibility. Books that portray people

from diverse cultures engaging in friendly, peaceful behaviors can greatly enhance children's knowledge of others. "Teachers have daily opportunities to increase children's abilities to communicate, respect each other, resolve conflicts, and accept social responsibility-skills they will carry into adulthood" (Celletti, 1998, p.22).

Kreidler (1994, 1996) suggests that children have an innate capacity for kindness, but like all abilities these instincts must be developed in an environment that nurtures and appreciates them. Teachers will help children's understanding of kindness and caring by defining and discussing the words. Halls and bulletin boards designed with caring themes may encourage children to think of others. According to Kreidler, careful planning before the school year begins will enable teachers to create a caring classroom environment. He suggests choosing character education themes to focus on each month, creating a picture file showing a diversity of people to use for discussions, decorations, or story starters, and planning ahead for successful conflict resolution and parent communication.

Katz (1996) speaks of developing practices that not only help children enhance self-esteem, but focus on the needs of others as well. The author explains that classroom decorations and activities should applaud children for their interests rather than encourage self-congratulation. Children should be directed to turn their attention outward and are more likely to achieve real self-esteem from experiences that provide meaningful challenges.

Bernat (1993) states that teachers should teach peace. This must begin in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and consideration toward everyone. The environment

needs to be a safe and good place with respect and consideration being modeled. Children need to be guided to understand the effects of their actions. Two rules were established: (a) Don't hurt anybody, (b) and use words to settle problems. Using these rules, the teacher instructs children with the proper words to use to create peace in times of conflict.

Rogers and Ross (1986) believe that social development is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum, essential if children are to become socially competent adults. The researchers report several strategies that will encourage positive social interaction among children. Those include providing activities in which students can interact with minimal adult supervision, observing social skills used and then grouping students with diverse skills, helping students increase verbal communication skills needed to interact with their peers, and suggesting specific behaviors and ideas to some students. Providing immediate feedback assists in the acquisition of the desired social skills.

Honig and Pollack (1990) conducted a brief and simple classroom intervention to increase prosocial interactions among children. The researchers were looking for sharing, helping, and cooperating behaviors during their observations. Second grade children in the intervention group and the control group were given a brief lecture by a psychologist on "Why We Should All Be Good Citizens." The intervention group was then told that they would receive stars for every kind or helpful act they performed. The star rewards would lead to a party after four weeks. The children met each day to report their own prosocial acts and to verify those of other children. There was a

significant increase in prosocial acts in the treatment classroom. The researchers concluded that tangible reinforcement and social encouragement can help to increase prosocial behaviors. The study also showed that preaching prosocial behavior is not an adequate method to increase skills.

According to Hartup and Moore (1990), "Good peer relations are developmental forerunners of good adaptations in later life."(p.15) Their findings suggest that interpersonal relations among children serve as the context for acquisition of social skills. They are resources for cognitive and emotional growth and serve as models to be used in forming other relationships. However, determining whether a child is at risk in socio-emotional development requires combining developmental and family-related factors. When designing and implementing early childhood programs, it is imperative to take into account these developmental dynamics.

One method of encouraging positive social behaviors is through cooperative activities. Goffin (1987) feels that young children need to experience cooperative activities in a supportive environment with minimum adult intervention. Children begin to recognize others' viewpoints and become aware of the effects of their own behavior. "Cooperative activities can be recognized when two or more active players share mutual goals, make decisions, share ideas and materials, negotiate and bargain, coordinate actions to accomplish their goals, and evaluate their own progress" (Goffin, 1987, p. 78). Teachers need to give support to these activities by giving verbal instructions on social interactions and by modeling cooperative behaviors.

Vaughan (1996) reports that many social skills need to be taught, and this can be done using cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that is used to teach both academic skills and social skills at the same time. Types of social instruction include tolerance, empathy, respect, and concern. When working in cooperative groups, children must focus their attention away from themselves and work in a way that is fair to all. Positive interdependence is achieved by structuring the task for a common purpose, by distributing resources to be used, by the assigning of roles, and by the structuring of the physical environment (Bhavnagri and Samuels, 1996).

Vaughan's (1996) evaluation of cooperative learning indicates that it is a strategy which will result in positive outcomes. Despite the researcher's reservations about using the strategy with young "egocentric" children, she noted positive effects that developed from the study. The positive effects included a decrease in competition; an increase in ability to communicate through active listening, appropriate questioning, and waiting for turns; an increase in tolerance and respect for others; and a quieter, more productive classroom environment.

"A well-conceived early childhood program ought to be saturated with social skill instruction and opportunity for the young students to practice as they play together" (Bellanca, 1991, p. 11). He states that the ideal program would have some modeling, guided practice, and constructive feedback in cooperative social skills. He advocates a direct instruction transfer model which includes a hook or set, a lesson, practice, reflection and discussion, opinion recognition and celebration, and transfer. He also feels that social skills are as important as the academic skills a child learns.

The role of teachers in developing children's social skills was reported by Hartup and Moore (1990). They found that providing high-quality time for children to play and interact informally with companions, along with teacher guidance during this time, as being very important. The researchers found that teachers cannot use a more effective strategy than positive reinforcement in the form of smiles, hugs, compliments, and other indicators of adult approval to increase friendly peer interaction. Verbal exchanges as alternatives to physical aggression, generosity, and cooperativeness have also been increased with the use of positive reinforcement. Reinforcement for these acceptable behaviors is often followed by a decrease in the incidence of their less acceptable counterparts (unfriendliness, physical aggression, selfishness, and uncooperativeness). While Lepper and Greene caution against the overuse of these reinforcers, and Patterson cautions against reinforcing coercive behaviors, it is still felt to be the most effective strategy teachers can use to increase social skills (Hartup and Moore, 1990).

Reading literature has always helped people understand social relationships. Social, moral, and ethical issues embedded in stories allow listeners to generate hypotheses, cultivate multiple perspectives, and recognize strategies for solving problems presented. Literature expands children's experiences (Bhavnagri and Samuels, 1996).

Researchers agree that children's literature can be most effective when linked to the reader's social and personal experiences. Prosocial competencies can be taught by using books and activities about peer relationships on the playground according to

Hart, McGee, and Hernandez. Lamme, Krogh, and Yachmetz agreed that using literature-based moral education with elementary school children can promote social skills (Bhavnagri and Samuels, 1996).

. Carefully selected children's literature used with well-asked questions can help to increase children's prosocial skills. McMath (1989) suggests that when teachers read children's literature, they are models for sharing. When the books contain characters who portray helping, sharing, and cooperating, they become models for these skills. As the children are guided through planned discussion, they can relate the skills to their own lives.

A study investigating the effects of children's literature and related activities on preschoolers' social cognition of peer relationships was conducted by Bhavnagri and Samuels in 1996. After developing a thematic unit to promote understanding of peer relationships in young children entitled, "Making and Keeping Friends," the researchers designated one class of 22 children to be the experimental group. The class was read 15 stories containing peer interaction concepts, followed by activities to reinforce these concepts. This program was carried on for one academic year. A comparison group of 22 children was read stories on themes other than peer relationships. Before beginning the reading and activity program, the Social Knowledge Interview (SKI) for kindergarten children (Asher and Renshaw, 1981; Asher, Renshaw,and Geraci, 1980) was administered to students as a pretest and posttest. The books read to the experimental group addressed one or more of the following peer-related issues: taking turns, sharing, helping, cooperation, group entry, initiating and maintaining friendships,

resolving object conflict, causal thinking, consequential thinking, alternative thinking, empathy, and role and perspective taking. Repeated readings of each story assisted in eliciting comments from students and allowed for greater understanding. The researchers read to small groups of students to assist in verbal interaction and comprehension. Children were encouraged to think of a variety of peer-related strategies to resolve the plot. After reading and discussion, group activities were developed including dramatic play, cooking, mural-making, and music.

Results of this study support the hypothesis that children's participation in literature focusing on peer-related issues plus follow-up activities can contribute to children's enhanced social cognition as measured by the SKI. Because children in the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher relationship-enhancing strategies than children in the comparison group, the program was considered highly successful. Those children also were able to transfer the use of the prosocial skills to other contexts. Among the limitations noted were whether the children would apply their social cognition to actual life experiences, thus changing their own behavior. Another concern was that the evaluation dealt with immediate, not long-term gains.

Project Outcome

As result of the implementation of a children's literature-based intervention during September, 1998 to January, 1999, the researchers hypothesize that children in the targeted preschool, kindergarten, and first grade will increase their acquisition of desired skills as noted on the Prosocial Behavior Checklist (Appendix C). Data on the checklist will be gathered using observations. Interviews will be conducted to establish

behavioral strategies used by the children.

In order to test the hypothesis, the following processes are necessary:

1. Organize an intervention program to increase prosocial skills.
2. Assess children's background knowledge on prosocial behaviors.
3. Select quality children's literature and identify behavioral strategies.
4. Read stories aloud and provide follow-up activities.

Action Plan for the Intervention

I. Organize intervention program

- A. obtain approval from building principal
- B. prepare parent permission letters to be distributed at initial parent meeting
- C. randomly select five students from each class for assessment
- D. determine length of observation period

II. Assess children's background knowledge

- A. observe children's interaction with peers
- B. note observations of selected children on the checklist
- C. interview selected children to obtain baseline information

III. Select literature and activities

- A. create/obtain a list of desired subjects and titles
- B. collect the books

C. review the literature

D. organize literature by topic

E. choose appropriate titles based on needs observed

F. review and select follow-up activities related to the topics

IV. Read stories aloud and provide follow-up activities

A. read stories to classes frequently

B. ask open-ended questions to elicit discussion

C. encourage children to make connections between stories and their own lives

D. plan for repeated readings and further discussion

E. use multiple books to explore topics

F. reinforce peer relationship concepts through follow-up activities

G. provide a book list to parents for expansion of children's experiences

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, the children's interaction will be observed again in January, 1999. Behaviors observed will be noted on the Prosocial Behavior Checklist. Interviews with selected children will be conducted to develop a complete understanding of their growth in designated skill areas. This growth will be plotted on graphs for comparative purposes.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase prosocial behaviors of targeted preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students. These behaviors are noted on the Prosocial Behavior Checklist (PBC), developed by the researchers. The intervention consisted of selection of children's literature based on the students' needs, reading and discussion of the literature, and follow-up activities.

In order to accomplish this objective, a step-by-step process was used. Approval was sought from the building principal. Parent permission letters were written and distributed to parents after an initial parent meeting in each of the targeted classrooms. When permission was received, five students from each class were randomly selected for participation in the research project. It was scheduled to begin in mid-September, 1998.

Assessment of children's background knowledge was a necessary component of this project. Selected students were observed interacting with peers, and observations were noted on the PBC. This was done for a one-week period. In addition, the students were interviewed individually by the classroom teachers to obtain baseline

information relative to how they would react to various social situations. The Prosocial Cognition Interview (PCI) was developed by the researchers, based on illustrations chosen from Character Education Institute. Student responses to those questions were recorded by each teacher.

After reviewing the results of both observations and student interviews, the researchers chose literature which addressed the areas of greatest need. Books were collected and organized by topic for convenience of the user. Each researcher created follow-up activities to enhance learning. Several weeks after obtaining parental permission for students' participation in the program, reading and follow-up activities began.

Stories were read aloud several times each week. As the researchers read each book, open-ended questions were asked to elicit discussion among students and to highlight prosocial skills. In addition to using these techniques when reading books specifically chosen for use in this project, when other literature was read in the targeted classrooms, desired behaviors were noted and discussed. During the course of the school day, researchers took advantage of opportunities to teach prosocial behaviors in an informal setting.

A book enjoyed by the preschool classes was The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear by Don and Audrey Wood. This story is about a mouse who tries everything he can think of to protect his luscious strawberry from a hungry bear. The narrator of the story (who is actually the bear) coaxes the mouse into sharing the strawberry, which finally the mouse politely does. After the shared reading

of the story, the researcher brought out a plate of strawberry fruit snacks. A discussion about sharing and manners followed. The children were then given a turn to share the snacks with the child sitting beside them. The researcher modeled the appropriate question, "Would you like a strawberry snack?" and a polite reply, "Yes, thank you." The most difficult part of the lesson for the children was having to wait until asked before taking the treat. The researcher observed a variety of responses to the activity. Several children were hesitant, but offered the snack as guided. Other children reached for the snack before it was offered, and did not say "Thank you." The lesson appeared to be successful. The structured format provided the children with guided practice, and the repetition was helpful for many of the children who are inexperienced in verbal conversation with peers.

A traditional story read by the preschool researcher was The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone. In the story, the little hen worked hard to plant and harvest her wheat, make the flour, and bake it into bread. Not one of her animal friends would help her, although she gave them many chances. When the bread was finished, the hen asked, "Who would like to eat the bread?" Of course the animals all wanted to share, but she did not. Using stick puppets, the children then dramatized the story, repeating the most repetitive parts of the text. Retelling the story with puppets helped the children to learn the story, and the message it provided. Learning to interact through story dramatization is a lesson in itself in turn taking. The Little Red Hen also provided a clear message about helping one another and sharing. The discussion that followed indicated that most children felt the animals were not caring for, or helping each other.

The researcher noted several responses that indicated their understanding of the story, such as, "They didn't help do the work," and "They were lazy." The researcher asked the children if they could think of a way for the animals and the hen to share the bread and be happy together. Ideas offered included,"Help her," and "Carry the flour." One boy said, "If they want to share the bread, they should share the work!"

Targeting development of helpful and caring behaviors, the kindergarten researcher read How Leo Learned to be King by Marcus Pfister. This is the story of a lion who was not respected by the other animals in his quest to be king. Only after showing his concern for others and enlisting their cooperation to work together, did this king of beasts become admired. After its reading, students brainstormed ways in which to be helpful to others. Then they traced their hands while discussing giving a "helping hand" to friends and family. The colorful hands were taken home and parents were asked to note ways in which their children were helpful. When responses were received, a class mural was created in the form of a wreath of helping hands, indicating acts of kindness given. This wreath has become an integral part of the classroom, with the teacher referring to it often as helpful, caring behaviors are being encouraged.

Cooperation, friendship, helping, and sharing behaviors were the focus of It's Mine by Leo Lionni. In this story three selfish frogs want to keep everything to themselves until a toad advises them to share and live in harmony. During a flood, the toad exhibits his true friendship and the frogs learn the importance of cooperation. To reinforce the importance of cooperation, students were shown how to make a paper chain. After each student made a chain of four links, the researcher asked what we

could do with all the short chains. "Put them together," and "Make a long one," were the responses. The short chains were joined and students decided to display the new long chain above the chalkboard. The chain has become a concrete example of caring behaviors, with links added as students exhibit targeted prosocial behaviors each week.

Since listening was one of the problem areas in the first grade class, the researcher chose to read Listen Buddy by Helen Lester. In this story Buddy Rabbit learned to listen after his encounter with the Scruffy Varmint. After listening to the story, the children formed a fishbowl around two students. One of the students was told that he shouldn't listen to the other student who was telling about a weekend experience. When the two students role played a second time, the listener was to focus carefully on the speaker. The class then brainstormed ideas for two T charts which were titled Poor Listening and Good Listening. Children were to think about how each example of listening looked and how it sounded. The teacher discarded the Poor Listening T chart and made a poster from the Good Listening chart. Next the children were assigned to cooperative goups to illustrate the skills on the poster. The illustrated poster was hung in the listening corner as a constant reminder of good listening skills.

Cooperation was the emphasis in the book Swimmy by Leo Lionni. The story told of small fish working together to protect themselves from larger fish. After a discussion about cooperation and sharing, children were put into cooperative groups to create pictures of the large fish formed by all the small fish in the story. Each group had to plan and make backgrounds with paint and torn paper. Then they had to decide

how they would make the fish to complete the picture. The group work gave the children practice in working together to create a product. The children demonstrated some good problem solving skills as they worked on their projects.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, the behaviors were noted on the PBC, and the PCI was readministered to the targeted students during the second week of January, 1999. The resulting PBC findings were compared to the initial findings in September, 1998. A comparison of these results is presented in Figure 4.1.

Students	Takes turns		Shares Toys/Materials With others		Takes Turns When Speaking		Shows Concern For Others	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Jerry		II	I	I	I	II		III
Aaron		I	I	II	I	II	II	III
Mark		I		I	I	I	I	II
Jordan		I				I		
Charles		I	I		I	I		I

Figure 4.1 Comparison of PBC Results for Targeted Preschool Students, September, 1998 - January, 1999.

Students	Takes turns		Shares Toys/Materials With others		Takes Turns When Speaking		Shows Concern For Others	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Steven	II	II	III	III	III	II	I	III
Kari	III	II	III	III	I	II	I	II
Donald	I	III	IIII	III	II	II	II	IIII
Mark	III	II	IIII	III	I	II	I	III
Evelyn	IIII	III	II	II	II	III	II	III

Figure 4.2 Comparison of PBC Results for Targeted Kindergarten Students, September, 1998 - January, 1999.

Students	Takes turns		Shares Toys/Materials With others		Takes Turns When Speaking		Shows Concern For Others	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Luke	I	I	II	II		I		
Katherine		II	I	I		I		II
Keith	II	I	II	III		II		I
Brandi		I	II	I		I		
Jon	II	I	II	IIII		I		

Figure 4.3 Comparison of PBC Results for Targeted First Grade Students, September, 1998 - January, 1999.

The data appear to suggest that the intervention had a positive effect on the acquisition of social skills as measured by the PBC. Observations of the preschool class showed slight increases in all five categories of the PBC. In the taking turns category, each targeted child was observed exhibiting the behavior at least once. During the September data collection period, this skill was not observed in any of the children. Showing concern for others was the area where children displayed the most improvement. The kindergarten class results revealed an increase in all observed behaviors: taking turns; sharing toys and materials; taking turns when speaking; and showing concern for others with kind words. The greatest increase was in showing concern with kind words. All of the observed behaviors increased in the first grade class, also. The greatest increases occurred in taking turns when speaking and in showing concern for others with kind words which were not noted during the initial observation.

In addition to the PBC, the Prosocial Cognitive Interview (PCI) was used to assess social skills. Responses given in January, 1999 compared to those given in September, 1998 reflect the following: more complete, detailed answers; greater interaction between characters in interview situations; and greater involvement of the student in solving the problem.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, children in the targeted preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms did experience an increase in prosocial behaviors. Caring, kind behaviors showed the greatest gain. During the

initial observations, children were having more difficulty taking turns. Games that involved taking turns were not even started. One boy was heard to say, "Do it yourself. I don't want to do it." Children were not interested in working together or in playing together. During an art project, one child said, "I can't, I can't." No one responded or made any attempt to help him. When the researcher observed in January, children were still having some problems with taking turns; but they used strategies to solve the problem. They told each other quietly that they had missed turns and waited patiently for their turns. Sometimes they played rhyming games to select children to take turns. They were able to see that taking turns was a valuable skill. When children had difficulty with art projects, others showed empathy.

Several variables could have affected the outcome of this study. Within each classroom, ages and skill levels vary greatly. Developmentally, students range from egocentric preschoolers to emerging altruistic kindergarteners and first graders. Children are generally more quiet, more hesitant to interact, and often appear to be somewhat apprehensive early in the school year. During the post observation period, one researcher noted most frequent displays of concern were shown between two children who are twin brothers. Another researcher noted the five targeted first grade children going to the "peace table," one vehicle used to achieve an increase in positive social skills at the school. They quietly sat down and talked with each other while taking the required steps for conflict resolution. At the end of the discussion, they agreed they needed to take turns. They shook hands and went back to their work.

The researchers recommend the gathering of data be done using different criteria. Observations netted limited data relative to students' use of specific behaviors. The checklist could include observations of negative, inappropriate acts. The goal would be to observe fewer of these behaviors after the intervention. Another recommendation is to have a longer observation period which could lead to an increase of data collected, as could observation of the entire class instead of merely five students.

In addition to the immediate benefits to the children, the intervention may have the additional benefit to the school and to the entire school district. Many of the students in the targeted classrooms will attend other district schools in the future. Their acquistion of desirable social skills will enable them to work and learn in a more productive manner. Within the targeted school, the researchers have shared the findings of their study as well as their resources which could lead to further development of prosocial skills among students throughout the school and district.

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Appendix A

SAINT·XAVIER·UNIVERSITY

Field-Based Master's Program

Saint Xavier University and SkyLight
Field-Based Master's Program

To: School Administrators

From: Program Research Staff

Date: September, 1998

Candidates for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership are required to identify a local educational issue and to design a project to address that issue, with a view to improving educational practice. The candidate listed below has designed an action research project and summarized that design in the attached preliminary abstract. You are encouraged to review this document and share any questions or comments you might have with the degree candidate. Members of the program staff are also available should you have further questions.

Please indicate, on the form provided, that you are aware and approve of the purpose and scope of the proposed project. The form may be returned to the candidate who will forward it to the university. Our best wishes for a successful school year, and we look forward to meeting you at the Research Exhibitions in May, 1999.

Sincerely,

J. Timothy Leonard, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Saint Xavier University
773-298-3209

Lynn Bush, Ph.D.
Director, FBMP
Saint Xavier University
773-298-3159

Degree Candidate:_____

I have been made aware of the purpose and scope of the candidate's Action Research Project, and I approve of its implementation.

_____
Signature of School Official Date

Appendix B

September, 1998

Dear Parent:

I am enrolled in a field based Master's Program at St. Xavier University. As part of my course work, I will be working on a research project during the 1998-99 school year with two other classroom teachers from [The] Elementary School. We have chosen to focus on increasing social skills through the use of children's literature. Before the study, in September, and after the study ends in December, we will be observing and interviewing the children. Information collected will be held in strictest confidence. If you are willing to let your child be a part of my study, please sign below. If you wish to speak to me about this research project, I can be reached at [The] Elementary School, 672-2647. Thank you so much for your cooperation.

Mrs. Cheryl Black
Mrs. Jackie Seeman
Mrs. Linda Trobaugh

I give permission for my child to be a part of the research project at [The] Elementary School from September - December, 1998.

Child's Name_____

Parent
Signature_____Date_____

Appendix C

Prosocial Behavior Checklist

Students	Takes Turns	Shares Toys/Materials With others	Takes Turns When Speaking	Shows Concern For Others

Appendix D

Prosocial Cognition Interview

1. This boy is playing with a car. You want to play with the car now. What would you do? (shares toys and materials)

2. This boy is being teased by these big kids. What would you do to help him? (shows concern)

3. These children are playing. You are watching. You would like to play with them. What could you do to play with them? (taking turns)

4. The mashed potatoes are sitting on the table. Everyone would like some. What can they do so they can eat them? (taking turns when speaking)

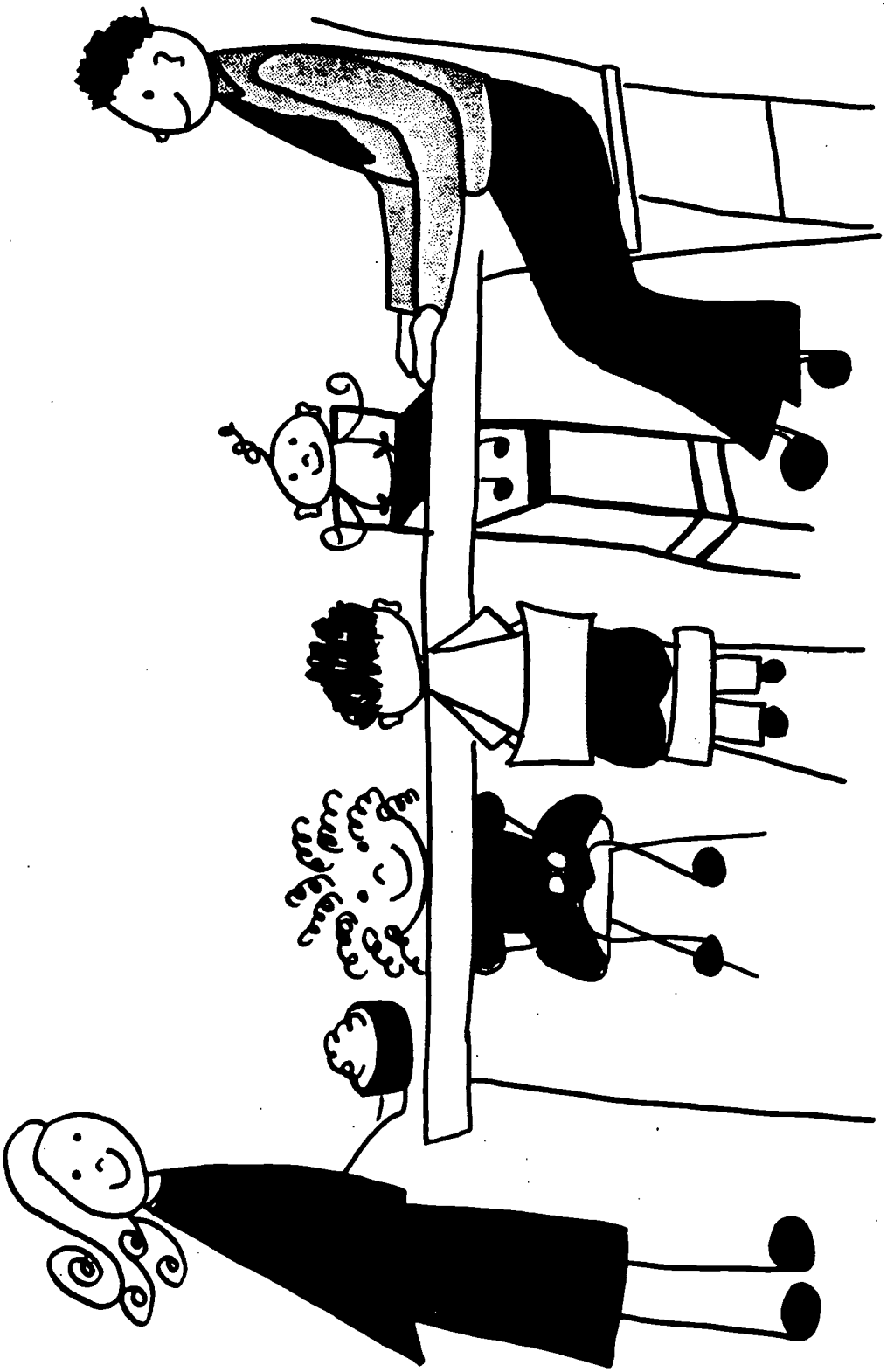
5. These children are painting. This girl has paints. This boy has no paints. What could he do so that they can both paint? (sharing materials)

Appendix D

Appendix D

Appendix D

Appendix D



57

56

Appendix D

Appendix E

Bibliography of Books Read in this Study

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Appendix F

Prosocial Skills Lesson Plan

Targeted Skill:_____

Stage 1 - Literature base (hook/set):

Stage 2 - Teach the Skill (materials, procedure):

Stage 3 - Practice (reinforcement):

Stage 4 - Evaluation and Reflection:

Appendix G

Dear Parents,

As our class continues working to increase social skills, we are listening to some wonderful stories and participating in fun and meaningful follow-up activities.

Today, we listened to How Leo Learned to be King by M. Pfister, the story of a lion who learned to help others and share their friendship. As a follow-up activity, we discussed how we can give a "helping hand" to others.

During the next week, please note when your child does or says something to help or be kind to a friend or family member. Please write those kind words and actions on the attached paper and return it to school by Monday, November 30th. We will discuss them in class and make a wreath of helping hands to display our understanding of this concept.

Thanks so much for your assistance!

Mrs. Seeman

Appendix H

Dear Parents,

Attached is a list of children's literature which has been read to students in our classes during the past few months. Our students have enjoyed reading and discussing these stories, as well as participating in follow-up activities with their classmates and family members.

You may wish to check out some of these titles from your local public library and enjoy them with your child, as we have enjoyed them here at school.

Thank you for your assistance and encouragement in this project. We have seen significant changes in students' helpful, caring behaviors in the classroom, and hope you have observed the same at home.

Mrs. Cheryl Black
Mrs. Jackie Seeman
Mrs. Linda Trobaugh

Books Read

Berenstain, S. & J. - Lend a Helping Hand

Bogacki, R. - Cat and Mouse

Bonsall, C. - It's Mine!

Bourgeois, P. - Franklin is Bossy

Bourgeois, P. - Franklin's New Friend

Bridwell, N. - Clifford's Good Deeds

Carle, E. - Do You Want to Be My Friend?

Carlson, N. - How to Lose All Your Friends

Chapman, C. - Pass the Fritters Critters

Clements, A. - Big Al

Cohen, M. - Best Friends

Cohen, M. - Will I Have a Friend?

Galdone, P. - Little Red Hen

Gilchrists, G. - Selfish, Selfish Rex

Goley, E. - Caring

Gretz, S. - It's Your Turn, Roger

Hallinan, P.K. - That's What a Friend Is

Heine, H. - Friends

Hutchins, P. - The Doorbell Rang

Lester, H. - Listen Buddy

Lionni, L. - It's Mine!

Lionni, L. - Swimmy

Metzger, S. - I'm Not Your Friend (Dinofours)

Pfister, M. - How Leo Learned to Be King

Pfister, M. - The Rainbow Fish

Rogers, J. - Best Friends Sleep Over

Root, P. - One Duck Stuck

Suzan, G. - The Lion and the Mouse

Wildsmith, B. - Lazy Bear

Winthrop, E. - Katherine's Doll

Wood, D. & A.- The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear

Zoehfeld, K. - Pooh's First Day of School

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