



PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN PRESCHOOL YEARS

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Abstract:

The individuals continue to live with the achieved skills and behaviors. The inefficiencies in these skills affect the acquisition of new skills, learning and quality of life. Social-emotional learning skills are the skills that are necessary in various areas from social life to academic life. Social-emotional learning skills can be improved through teaching of the desirable behavioral patterns, and also through the prevention of undesirable behavioral patterns. In this study, available prevention programs for the development of social-emotional learning in preschool years were examined. The five prevention programs titled as Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices, DARE to be You, High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, Second Step, and Zippy's Friends were handled. The aims, contents, and effects of these programs were reviewed. The results of the review showed that Al's Pals is a resiliency-based prevention program to risk factors such as violence and poverty, DARE to be You is a resiliency-based intervention program to later substance abuse while High/Scope Perry Preschool Program is an intervention program to abstain from school failure and other related problems. It was also revealed that Second Step is a violence-prevention program, and Zippy's Friends is a suicide prevention program. It was found that all of these programs are valid and effective in improving behaviors that negatively affect social-emotional learning of preschool children. It is clear that these programs can be used by proficient teachers and educators to support children's social-emotional learning skills as well as main objectives of the programs regarding prevention.

Keywords: preschool, social-emotional learning, prevention programs, Al's Pals, DARE to be You, High/Scope Perry, Second Step, Zippy's Friends

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1. Introduction

Preschool years are formative periods for the development of positive feelings towards one's self and others. Social and emotional situations in the preschool years have a powerful role on social relationships. The ability of having positive relationships with adults and with their peers is higher in emotionally and socially healthy children. On the contrary, children who are rejected, abused, and/or neglected can be faced with social-emotional and mental health difficulties (Trawick-Smith, 1997). There is an agreement on the importance of teaching children peaceful living, kindness, helpfulness, and cooperation. Parents especially agree that their children should learn skills including responsibility, cooperation, respect for others, self-discipline, friendship, optimism, honesty, tolerance, and courage. All the professionals, politicians, and parents agree with the efforts to reduce incidents of violence and uncivil behaviors that begin in the early years (Morrison, 2006). There are a variety of theoretical and experimental studies (e.g., Durlak, & Wells, 1997; Durlak et. al, 2011; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004) which indicate that the development of socio-emotional learning skills contribute to psychosocial and emotional development, academic success, mental health, and behavioral factors. Accordingly, social-emotional learning skills are critically important in improving children's lifelong learning (Zins et. al., 2004). As underlined by Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham (2004), social-emotional deficits become less amenable to intervention after the age of eight. The importance of the achievement of social-emotional learning skills in the preschool years for the foundation of later competence is highlighted (Masten, & Coatsworth, 1998).

Social-emotional competencies are influenced by the children's early learning environment (Joseph, & Strain 2003). Schools are ideal settings for encouraging children's competence. Schools serve as an assessment tool for the developmental changes and provide access to children for many years (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). Schools and families structure the social development, emotional skills and academic engagement of children (Elias et. al., 1997). When children participate in preschool intervention programs in the school, peers also become an important part of a child's social world. During the preschool years, children learn about the social world from peers when they actively participate with them (Catron, & Allen, 1993). Early intervention programs give some opportunities to get greater school success, decrease need for special education, and decrease delinquency. Intervention programs applied in the schools not only improve the lives of the children and families involved, but also result in additional advantages for the society (Essa, 2003; Zigler, Taussing, & Black, 1992). Nelson, Westhues, & MacLeod (2003) emphasized that prevention programs for preschoolers have positive impacts on children's social quality of life. It should be known that problems such as disruptive behavior disorders are associated with a variety of risk and protective factors operating within the family, school, and community. There is no doubt that the risk factors are effective on social-emotional

learning skills. There are three implications, which are related to identification of risk and protective factors. Gresham (2015) explains these factors as follows:

- 1) If it is possible to distinguish and quantify the risk and protective factors, it may be possible to maximize the effects of primary prevention.
- 2) If it is possible to identify the risk and protective factors, which affect multiple outcomes, then these factors might be addressed by interventions of primary prevention for maximum effectiveness.
- 3) If the risk and protective factors appear in multiple contexts, then the best practices of intervention should be constituted by interventions of multisystem primary prevention.

Inability of social-emotional skills means children who do not know and do not use social-emotional skills consistently and appropriately. Social-emotional skills performance deficits describe that a child knows how to use a social skill, but does it inconsistently. The deficit of social-emotional skill acquisition also describes a situation in which a child does not sufficiently know the skill or how to use it appropriately. In this way, excessive problem behaviors interfere with a child's performance of learned social-emotional skills (Gresham, 2015; Gresham 2018). Prevention programs also contribute to reducing the impact of risk factors and negative life events, while strengthening protective processes (Miller, Brehm, & Whitehouse, 1998). The results of many researches (e.g., Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004; McMahon et. al., 2000; Miller-Heyl, MacPhee, & Fritz, 1998; Mishara, & Ystgaard, 2006; Schweinhart et. al., 2005) showed that early childhood prevention programs that serve the purpose of developing the desired skills and behaviors have a significant impact on the target skills and behaviors.

The process of developing target skills and behaviors includes the process of developing different skills and behaviors in the direct or indirect way. For example, the development of emotional well-being is dependent upon growth in sub-domains including (1) awareness, acceptance, and expression of emotions, (2) coping skills, (3) personality integration, and (4) building values. The development of awareness, acceptance, and expression of emotions can be developed through children's interactions with teachers who model the acceptance of emotions and openly share their feelings. Coping skills can be fostered by using creative play situations to identify and resolve emotional conflicts. Learning personality integration is possible from teachers who model respect for differences in people. The activities in outdoor play environment also have an important role at this point. The main building task is to help children become individuals who are empathic, caring, and trusting, and who regard others and give value to all the life. Specific activities based on these skills are to support the development of values (Catron, & Allen, 1993). Another an example is that the self-control skill has indicators including (1) control of impulses, (2) tolerance of frustration, (3) the ability to postpone immediate gratification, and (4) the initiation of a plan that is carried out over a period of time (Puckett, & Black, 1992). These steps have a crucial role in the development of the self-control skills of children.

The key to help children has more resistance against truancy, drugs, dropping out of school, violent gangs, and teen pregnancy is the promotion of social-emotional competence effectively (Elias et. al., 1997). A meta-analysis by Nelson, Westhues, & ManLeod (2003) summarized that there are positive short, medium, and long-term effects of preschool prevention programs on various outcome domains. The identification of prevention programs for the development of social-emotional learning in preschool will contribute to figure out these effects. These processes are expected to provide guidance to researchers and practitioners studying on the social-emotional learning. It is thought that informing about these programs by reviewing such studies will contribute to preschool field literature from theory to practice on social-emotional learning.

1.1 The Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted for the purpose of examining the available prevention programs for the development of social-emotional learning in preschool years. In accordance with this purpose; the aims, contents, and effects of these programs were reviewed. The five prevention programs titled as *Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices*, *DARE to be You*, *High/Scope Perry Preschool Program*, *Second Step*, *Zippy's Friends* were handled. These available programs were explained respectively and then conclusion and future directions were presented.

2. Prevention Programs Examined in the Study

Al's Pals- Kids Making Healthy Choices is a universal prevention program for early childhood ages children, which was developed by Wingspan in the late 1990s (Wingspan, 1999). This program is designed for children aged-three-to-eight, for particularly those at risk because of the factors such as violence and poverty. Al's Pals is the systematic application based on the all components included teacher training, classroom curriculum, and parent education. The classroom program was developed for the promotion of social-emotional competence in young children by improving the abilities of teachers to establish educatory environments of classroom and to promote development of resilience-related behaviors in children. The first aim of this intervention program is to increase the protective factor of social-emotional competence in children aged three to eight by means of a 46-lesson resiliency-based prevention curriculum implemented by trained teachers in a variety of settings (childcare centers, preschools, early childhood classrooms, etc.). The other aim of the program is to decrease the risk factors for antisocial and aggressive behaviors.

This curriculum was developed to provide real-life situations that promote health-promoting concepts and build prosocial skills. In this context, a trained classroom teacher leads two Al's Pals lessons per week (each of them keeps on approximately 15-20 minutes) on the condition that the process is over a 23-week period. Each lesson was designed in order to take the advantage of the developmental needs of young children for being active, having fun, and using their imagination.

Lessons include two-three interesting activities (such as puppet led discussions, role-plays, guided creative play, brainstorming, and purposeful use of music, artwork, books, pictures, and movement). Three original puppets (named Al, Ty, and Keisha), reinforce the prosocial behavior and express clear norms in which the use of violence, alcohol, and drugs is not acceptable. They lead lively discussions and activities designed to help children practice getting along well with others in addition to making healthy/safe choices. Additionally, twelve original songs, set to music ranging from pop/soul to reggae to rock, rap, and country, capture Al's Pals prosocial concepts and serve as another tool for infusing Al's Pals messages into the classroom environment and the school, as well as into the home. Al's Pals teachers play a facilitative role in helping empower the personal/social skills of the children that act as the protective reaction against risk (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004; Wingspan, 1999).

The Al's Pals curriculum has a teacher's kit containing supplies of all needed materials and gives clear instructions on how and in what order to conduct the lessons. The interactive training combines theoretical background with practical skill building, introducing teachers to how to apply the concepts of resiliency, risk, prevention, and protective factors, and the ways to foster social-emotional growth in early childhood-age children. Moreover, Al's Pals offers unique methods to communicate its content to parents and a parent education program that is integrated into the school-based curriculum. Fourteen lessons have parent letters that explain what is being taught in the curriculum and offer activities for parents to do at home with their children to reinforce what is being learned in school. Sets of parent letters are provided in the kit, ready for distribution, saving teachers' time from having to prepare copies and ensuring that the information is presented in an appealing way. The kit also contains information messages from school to home (namely eight-colorful-Al-a-grams) that acknowledge children's demonstration of positive behaviors (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004). Studies that examined the effects of Al's Pals program showed that the children who participated in the Al's Pals intervention program had a greater social-emotional competence and better coping skills than the children who did not participated in the intervention. The children who participated in the Al's Pals intervention had a better position in terms of aggressive, antisocial, and other problem behaviors. Furthermore, it was emphasized that children obtain positive prosocial behaviors, social skills, coping skills and social interaction by means of the Al's Pals intervention in the early childhood period (Eisenberg et. al., 1993; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). In another study that was conducted in Head Start classrooms, Al's Pals intervention program produced positive effects on behavior problems, social competence and independent functioning (Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004). It can be concluded that the Al's Pals intervention program contributes to social-emotional learning skills of children in the preschool period.

The other program called as **DARE to be You** includes preschool activities for children aged from 2^{1/2} to 5. This program consists of several volumes (one for children in grades K-2, another for grades 3-5 and a final volume for grades 6-8). All volumes contain developmentally appropriate materials and activities for each age group. DARE

to be You is an early prevention program to promote the resiliency of the youth to subsequent problem behaviors such as use of drug, through delivering training to both children and parents for the purpose of supporting effective child rearing, problem solving, and self-efficacy. The activities for preschool children were specially designed to use in connection with a concurrent parent program in family component; however, they are possible to use in any setting. While children participate in activities related to self-esteem for instance, parents are delivered workshops related to self-esteem, as well.

The program focuses on the developmental attainments of children and the aspects of parenting that contribute to children resilience to subsequent substance abuse (such as effective child nurturing, social support, parental self-efficacy, and problem-solving skills). In the program, puppets show a variety of behaviors which may be exhibited by children in a classroom (including hitting, sharing etc.) and puppet sketches also show how anyone can make friends, learn to be less aggressive, and use positive friendship skills. Preschoolers experience the different skills in role-play using puppets (Miller-Heyl, MacPhee, & Fritz, 1998).

The results of an experimental study conducted by Miller-Heyl, MacPhee & Fritz (1998) show that DARE to be You program is focused on the children aged 5 to 10, their parents, and/or community professionals. DARE to be You program was provided in a training of 15-18 hours for multi-agency teams that deliver the youth with services. This community training emphasized specific areas such as decision-making, problem-solving skills, conflict management, and responsibility for one's behavior and self-esteem for oneself and other persons. The results of the study showed that there was a consistent increase in democratic child-rearing practices as well as a corresponding decrease in harsh discipline. The results also showed that parent satisfaction with social support increased while problem behavior of children declined.

The short-term and long-term impacts of high-quality preschool education program for young children who live in poverty have been identified by another scientific early childhood intervention program called the **High/Scope Perry Preschool Program**. David Weikart and his colleagues developed the program from 1962 until 1967 in the Ypsilanti, Michigan, and the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program was conducted by the school district for the young children for the purpose of helping them abstain from failure in school and other relevant problems (Schweinhart et. al., 2005). The high-quality educational approach of the High/Scope Perry Preschool program bases on an active learning model, which highlights the social and intellectual development of the participants. The preschool provided education to children for a period over two years, from Monday to Friday, 2.5 hours a day. The proportion between the staff and the children was one adult per five or six children at the same duration, which ensured a visit by the teachers to the families of the children at home every week for 1.5 hours. In addition to the preschool program, the parents involved in small group meetings with other parents and received home visits for 1.5 hours each week (Parks, 2000).

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program has demonstrated other several positive outcomes including a significantly lower rate of delinquency and crime as well

as a decrease in welfare dependency and teenage pregnancy. The program has shown significant positive effects on academic achievement, prosocial behavior, employment, income, and family stability (Parks, 2000). Specifically, children participating High/Scope Perry Preschool Program had positive experiences in school, had positive relationships with their families and had higher self-esteem scores when they graduated from high school (Luster, & McAadoo, 1995).

In a longitudinal study conducted by Schweinhart et al. (1985), the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program was offered to children for two years when they were from three to four years old and this program's outcomes were evaluated when these children were 19 years old. The results indicated the beneficial effects of The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program in improving scholastic placement and achievement during the school years, and in increasing the rates of high school graduation, and employment. Similarly, Schweinhart (2003) presented that The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program had impacts on the children in terms of their school readiness and their later academic success, economic achievement in their early adulthood, and decreased numerous detentions throughout their lives. In another study conducted in recent years by Schweinhart (2010) made the cost-benefit analysis and determined that this preschool program was the sizable investment for society, with a great positive value for either one or two years of preschool education. Therefore, the High/Scope Perry Preschool program produces long-term effects in the domains of health, education, family relationships, economic life, and positive social-emotional behavior. According to these results, it can be concluded that Perry Preschool program is a high-quality preschool program contributing to social development of the children in childhood and their academic success, economic performance, and decreasing in the crime into the adulthood (Schweinhart et. al., 2005).

The Second Step is called violence-prevention program designed for children ranging from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade by an important nonprofit organization named Committee for Children in the early 1990s. Second Step is designed to decrease impulsive and aggressive behavior as well as to increase prosocial behavior. This universal classroom-based curriculum is focused on reducing impulsive and aggressive behavior in children by practicing a problem-solving strategy and reducing angry behavior in children by identifying angry feelings and using anger-control techniques. In addition, it is focused on increasing ability of children to identify the feeling of others, take the perspectives of others and respond to others empathically. Hence, this program supports children's academic success and reduces problem behaviors through promoting their social-emotional competence and learning skills in empathy and anger management.

The Preschool/Kindergarten version of the Second Step consists of three parts such as empathy (12 lessons), impulse control (10 lessons), and anger management (6 lessons) for a total of 28 lessons if used once a week. The empathy unit contains some activities for children in order to ensure that they recognize, experience, and respect the feelings of the others. The skills of learning and practicing problem-solving skills are within the body of the impulse control unit, and the anger management unit

emphasizes on recognizing angry feelings and anger-reduction techniques. The body of the lessons includes warm-up activities (physical exercises and games, songs, puppetry), story and discussion, role-plays or activities (Committee for Children, 1989, 2002).

The Second Step provides also video-based lessons, skill-step posters to display in classrooms and throughout the school and a family overview video to engage parent support. The most accepted characteristic of the pre-kindergarten curriculum can be “slow-down snail” and “impulsive puppy”, in which impulse control skills are taught using two puppets. The Second Step training program included a one-day teacher workshop and a half-day workshop for non-instructional school staffs. The training for teachers focuses on delivering lessons for children skill development and improving the environmental context in which those skills are expected to be used. This program has several specific instructional practices such as modeling; cueing, coaching, and reinforcement for sustain generalization of social-emotional skills (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2001). Moore, & Beland (1992) determined an increased in violence prevention knowledge and skills in preschoolers through the Second Step program. In addition, a study conducted by McMahon et al. (2000) referred that preschoolers and kindergartners participated in the Second Step program gained significant outcomes based on the decrease in problem behaviors. According to these findings, it can be said that the Second Step program has a positive effect on the social-emotional learning skills of preschool children.

The school-based mental health promotion program entitled **Zippy’s Friends** was also developed for preschool and first/second grade children. The program was at the beginning developed by a non-profit organization, called Befrienders International, involved particularly in prevention of suicide. The main purpose of the program is to deliver a training effective in coping skills by means of enlarging the repertoire of the children for coping skills and the abilities of the children to adapt their coping patterns to different situations. The program also teaches social-emotional learning skills such as exercising self-control, recognizing and expressing feelings, exercising self-control, dealing with conflict situations, and self-assertiveness (Mishara, & Ystgaard, 2006). This program is based upon the conceptual framework of Lazarus and Folkman (As seen in Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that is widely adopted to expand appropriate ways of coping for different situations and explain the relationship between coping mechanisms.

The Zippy’s Friends includes in 24 sessions (lasting approximately 50 minutes) that are conducted each week by teacher. The program contains various activities and discussions in each session, and it is built on six illustrated stories, which contain a group of young children and a pet insect named Zippy. The sessions of the program include in six modules and each module focuses on four particular themes. The goal of the first module is to enhance the abilities of the children to recognize negative feelings and to identify coping strategies to deal with such feelings (the themes of the sections are feeling angry/annoyed, feeling sad-happy, feeling nervous, and feeling jealous). The goal of the second module is to improve the abilities of the children to communicate their feelings (the themes of the sections are feeling angry/annoyed, feeling sad-happy,

feeling nervous, and feeling jealous). The goal of third module is to improve abilities of the children to resolve conflicts (the themes of the sections are how to make friends, dealing with loneliness and rejection, how to keep a friend, and how to resolve conflicts with friends). The goal of fourth module is also to improve the abilities of the children to conflict resolution (the themes of the sections are how to recognize good solutions, bullying, solving problems, helping others resolve conflicts). In addition, the goal of fifth module is to improve the abilities of the children to come with change and loss (the themes of the sections are change and loss are part of life, coping with death, visit to a graveyard, benefits of change and loss). Finally, the goal of sixth module is to improve the abilities of the children to use a several coping strategies in different situations (the themes of the sections are adapting to new situations, how to help others, different ways to cope, and celebrating together) (Mishara, & Ystgaard, 2006).

An experimental study conducted by Mishara & Ystgaard (2006) showed that Zippy's Friends was effective in improving the abilities of the children to cope with daily adversities, expanding social skills and reducing behavior problems. Results of this study also indicated that Zippy's Friends program improved the overall social atmosphere of the classrooms and contributed teachers to learn how to cope with their own problems better. Additionally, Wong (2008) evaluated the impacts of the Zippy's Friends program on the coping strategies of kindergarten children. This study found that the children participating in the program increased their emotion-focused coping strategies (try to relax, stay calm etc.) and behavior-focused coping strategies (do work around the school, think about it etc.). The author emphasized that the program helped the teacher have a better understanding of children's emotional needs. Monkeviciene, Mishara, & Dufour (2006) stated that first grade students who had participated in the Zippy's Friends during the kindergarten period, were better in adaptation to school in behavioral and emotional terms, adopted more different and more appropriate coping strategies, and reacted more positively to the new school environment. The results of another study conducted on kindergarten children by Rodker (2013) emphasized that Zippy's Friends contributes to parent satisfaction as well as children's academic competence and social skills. As summarized by Monkevičienė (2014), the research indicates that the Zippy's Friends program facilitates establishment of more friendly, more peaceful interpersonal relations and increased attention of the teachers/parents in development of social-emotional competence of the children.

3. Conclusion and Future Directions

In this study, the prevention programs for the development of social-emotional learning in preschoolers, Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices, DARE to be You, High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, Second Step, and Zippy's Friends, were reviewed. It was determined that Al's Pals is a resiliency-based prevention program to risk factors such as violence and poverty, and DARE to be You is a resiliency-based intervention program to later substance abuse. Additionally, High/Scope Perry Preschool Program is an intervention program to abstain from school failure and other related problems

while Second Step is a violence-prevention program and Zippy's Friends is a suicide prevention program. It was seen that these programs called prevention programs had a significantly positive effect on the main focal point skills and behaviors. The results of the theoretical and experimental studies based on these programs indicated that AI's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices, DARE to be You, High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, Second Step, Zippy's Friends are critically important programs in the development of the social-emotional learning skills in the preschool years. It can be said that an important way of developing of social-emotional learning skills is to prevent social, emotional and/or behavioral disorders by these kind of programs.

As a result of the study, it is recommended that teachers, practitioners, researchers and even families can use these kinds of programs to develop the preschool children's social-emotional learning skills. Interventions in the early ages are all-important steps in the development of social-emotional learning skills and in the prevention of disorders of children. Starting from early ages, great efforts must be made for both prevent children's emotional-behavioral disorders and develop their social-emotional learning skills. It is suggested that several different activities and methods (such as art, music, play, story, and role-play) should be included within the scope of the social-emotional learning training programs. Moreover, it will be useful to evaluate the results of such studies in future program development. In future studies, effects of social-emotional learning intervention programs on common emotional-behavioral disorders in the childhood such as separation anxiety, eating disorders, isolation, over dependency, and anxiety disorder can be researched.

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