

Supporting Preschoolers' Social-Emotional Development:
A Workshop for Head Start Teachers

Project Petition
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Statement of the Problem

Preschoolers' emotional skills are central to their ability to interact with others and to form positive relationships. Researchers and practitioners have described key social-emotional skills that children need as they enter school, including self-confidence, the capacity to develop positive relationships with peers and adults, concentration, persistence on challenging tasks, an ability to effectively communicate emotions, an ability to listen to instructions and be attentive, and skills in solving social problems (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006). Children's emotional responses to others communicate their openness and availability for social engagement. Once engaged in social contacts, children must learn to flexibly maximize and regulate emotional expression and experiences to meet both their own goals and others' expectations for their behavior (Spritz, Sandberg, Maher, & Zajdel, 2010).

Historically, the primary goal of the federally funded Head Start program was to enhance preschoolers' social competence. In recent years, the focus in Head Start has shifted to emphasize cognitive and school readiness skills in conjunction with the No Child Left Behind legislation. This has resulted in a greater emphasis in Head Start on early reading competencies and other cognitive competencies (Fantuzzo et al., 2007). This shift has generated concern by many early childhood advocates that the promotion of social-emotional competencies has been deemphasized in the Head Start curriculum and as a result children will be placed at greater risk for poor school adjustment.

Purpose of the Project

Head Start is the nation's largest federally sponsored early childhood program developed to serve at-risk, vulnerable, young children by promoting school readiness. Informed by a comprehensive developmental model, Head Start targets eight key domains of development to enhance readiness; these include language development, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, physical health, approaches to learning, and social and emotional development (Fantuzzo et al., 2007).

The policy debate about the primary focus of early childhood programs for at-risk preschoolers has prompted childhood research that examines the relationships between approaches to learning, social and emotional competencies, and early academic success. However, The Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA) Head Start currently has no curriculum specifically aimed at promoting social and emotional development for the children it serves. There are many curricula now developed to address social-emotional competence that can be utilized by SETA Head Start. The purpose of this project is to gather instructional tools and/or practices for the preschool classroom that will help SETA Head Start teachers support and promote social/emotional development for preschoolers. These tools and practices will be shared with SETA Head Start teachers in a workshop about social-emotional development.

Background/Significance of the Project

Head Start has recently shifted their focus to cognitive and school readiness programs (Spritz et al., 2010). Therefore, promoting social and emotional competence in Head Start programs is especially critical because of the high number of children in Head Start who exhibit socio-emotional difficulties. It is estimated that between 20% and 25% of Head Start children

display social and behavioral problems associated with low social competence, including poor social skills, aggression, oppositional behavior, and dependency (Spritz et al., 2010).

According to Hemmeter et al. (2006), there are multiple factors that potentially contribute to the development of child behavior difficulties. At the individual child level, early predictors of problem behavior include temperamental difficulties, aggression, language difficulties, aggression, language difficulties, and noncompliance. Family factors associated with problem behaviors in young children include maternal depression, harsh parenting, stressful family life events, limited social support, and family instability. Lastly, low-quality early childhood settings have been linked to poor child outcomes related to social-emotional development (Hemmeter et al., 2006). Such risk factors are more likely to be present among children in Head Start settings. As such this population may need more support for developing important social-emotional skills. The focus of this workshop will give teachers tools and ideas for identifying such problem behaviors and how to help support the child's needs through social-emotional understanding.

A developmental-ecological theoretical framework can be used to examine emotional and behavioral problems as a function of preschool classroom learning demands. Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological theory that assumes that there are multiple natural environment layers that influence child behavior. The microsystem is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with his or her immediate surroundings. Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. The microsystem exerts the greatest influence on children's behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). The preschool classroom is an important microsystem influence for young children. Each situation or learning opportunity in the classroom contains distinct cognitive and social demands that require

an abundance of complex skills and behavior. Teacher and peer social expectations, classroom rules, attention to tasks, appropriate play, and the establishment of friendship patterns are examples of some of these preschool classroom demands. Another microsystem includes a child's family. When situations from a child's home are severe enough it can affect the way the child behaves in school (Bultosky-Shearer et al., 2008). Home-school connections are an example of Bronfenbrenner's (1975) concept of mesosystem effects, or connections between Microsystems. A workshop using Bronfenbrenner's framework will help teachers become aware of how important the classroom environment and their relationship with their students is in predicting their students development.

Bulotsky-Shearer et al. (2008) have argued that routine classroom situations reveal three reliable and unique situational dimensions: problems in structured learning, problems in peer interaction, and problems in teacher interactions. This approach shifts identification of the problem from the individual child to the broader classroom context, which means that teachers need to re-focus their attention on what they can do for a child expressing social/emotional developmental deficits beyond simply making referrals for mental health services. Currently, the only professional social-emotional training given to any SETA Head Start employee is to the social services specialists. Head teachers are then told to refer any child expressing behavioral difficulties to those specialists who then create a Child Study Team (CST). Head Start will utilize the CST process as the first level of assistance for children who need classroom intervention in the Head Start program, prior to a referral for special services. The CST is a regular education function of planning alternative instructional strategies for children. Participants in the CST meeting should be knowledgeable about the child. Child Study Team members may include but are not limited to parents/guardians, program officers, head teacher, associate teachers, family

services worker, special education field technician, content coordinators, social worker, consultants, education specialists, school district staff or other agency staff as needed (<http://headstart.seta.net/cst.htm>). The CST will then meet to generate strategies for helping the child socially and emotionally. The focus of the meeting is to develop recommendations or classroom assistance for the child through Head Start resources (<http://headstart.seta.net/cst.htm>). The problem with the CST is that the primary teacher, whom the child typically spends a majority of their day with, may not be properly trained in social-emotional development. If perhaps the teachers were to attend a workshop on how to support preschoolers' social-emotional development and had their own tools and instructional practices to refer to, there may not be the need for the referrals in the first place or at least the number of referrals generated could decrease.

A critical step in designing interventions for young children is identifying the outcomes that can be expected as a part of that intervention. Intervention practices address the needs of children who are at risk and target interventions for children who present the most persistent challenges (Hemmeter et al., 2006). Hemmeter et al. (2006) created The Teaching Pyramid (see figure 1), a model of classroom strategies for promoting the social-emotional development of all children while addressing the needs of children who are at-risk for or who have challenging behavior. This model has been used to generate effective curricula for reducing problem behavior and increasing academic learning time among preschool-aged children (Hemmeter et al., 2006). The bottom foundational tier of the Teaching Pyramid consists of "building positive relationships with children, families, and colleagues" (Hemmeter et al., 2006). The second tier is "designing supportive environments"(e.g., walls of classroom could have pictures of different types of emotions); the third tier is "social emotional teaching strategies"(e.g., reading children's

stories where the character is in a situation where he or she is having a hard time with a friend or peer and they use conflict negotiation to work out their problem could be one teaching strategy); and the top tier is "intensive individualized interventions"(Hemmeter et al., 2006). The proposed project focuses on the first, second, and third tiers of this model through development of a workshop that helps teachers in facilitating the development of positive relationships with their students, setting up environments that are supportive of social emotional competence, and providing resources for engaging in effective teaching strategies to promote social emotional competence.

At the child level, social-emotional interventions should target children's ability to communicate their emotions in appropriate ways, regulate their emotions, solve common problems, build positive relationships with the peers and adults in their environments, and engage in and persist in challenging tasks. These types of behaviors are essential for preparing children for social and academic success as they transition from early childhood settings to formal schooling (Hemmeter et al., 2006).

When it comes to the needs of Head Start children, they need routines, positive environments, and consistent, dedicated teachers. These special needs of children in Head Start will be addressed in the workshop along with tools and ideas for supporting those children's needs. The preschool classrooms of these children may be the only positive environments these particular children have in their lives. This is all the more reason why Head Start teachers need support and new instructional practices to help support the social-emotional development in their preschool students.

Research suggests that building positive teacher-child and parent-teacher relationships is beneficial for children's adjustment and social emotional competence (Hemmeter et al., 2006).

Likewise, there is a link between curricula and classroom environment and children's social competence. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to develop materials for a workshop designed for SETA Head Start teachers to give them skills in promoting emotional understanding through a positive environment and encouragement of positive relationships.

Research further suggests that social-emotional interventions target children's ability to communicate their emotions in appropriate ways, regulate their emotions, solve common problems, build positive relationships with the peers and adults in their environments, and engage in and persist in challenging tasks (Bulotsky-Shearer et al, 2008). These types of behaviors are essential for preparing children for social and academic success as they transition from early childhood settings to formal schooling (Hemmeter et al., 2006).

The proposed workshop project focuses on evidence based practices for promoting social and emotional competence in young children. Based on current research, six instructional practices/tools have been found to promote social and emotional development in Head Start preschools: (a) curricular interventions, (b) play, (c) reading children's literature with topics of socialization and/or emotion regulation, (d) family/parent involvement, (e) environment/atmosphere, and (f) positive student-teacher interactions (Hemmeter et al., 2006). These practices will provide the basis for the proposed teacher workshop.

Methods

Design of the Project

The researcher will design and present a workshop for SETA Head Start teachers designed to promote teachers' understanding of children's social and emotional development. The workshop will be a training on social-emotional development: What is social-emotional

development? The specific topics to be outlined in the workshop include: peer relationships, social problem solving, and conflict negotiation. Specific, evidence based strategies SETA Head Start teachers can implement in their classrooms will also be discussed in three different areas: (a) facilitation of positive relationships, (b) establishment of positive classroom environment, and (c) activities targeting specific social emotional skills and concepts.

Population of Interest

Head and associate teachers from SETA Head Start in the Sacramento area are the target population of the workshops and will be recruited for participation in the needs assessment survey and attendance at the workshop. SETA currently has no curriculum for children with behavioral issues, therefore a workshop can benefit these teachers and give them the tools they need to feel confident in promoting emotion understanding in their students.

Development of Workshop Materials

Development of workshop materials will begin with a review of research literature on children's social and emotional development, published curricula, and other preschool-based trainings and workshops. Literature on adult education and adult learners will also be essential to provide comprehensive training to the teachers. Next, the researcher will create and distribute a needs assessment survey to all SETA Head Start teachers. The survey (see Appendix A) will consist of Likert items and open ended questions designed to gather teachers' input about possible content for the workshop. The survey will allow teachers to express what they feel they need support with when promoting social-emotional development in the classroom. The surveys will be distributed to all SETA Head Start sites and given to each teacher to complete and return to their site supervisors by February 15th. The researcher will then gather and analyze the survey responses to help generate materials and activities to be presented in the workshop.

Consistent with the Pyramid Model, the workshop will be organized around three major topics: (a) creating a positive classroom environment, (b) the importance of teachers' relationships with their students, and (c) curriculum and practices that promote social development and emotional competence. The emotional competence section of the workshop will include information on emotion understanding, emotional regulation, and empathy in preschoolers. The goal of this project is to have the teachers leave the workshop feeling inspired and motivated to create a positive environment in their preschool classrooms and feel prepared when dealing with children who have social/emotional developmental delays. They should also leave the workshop feeling having more understand of what social-emotional development is.

Information from several other sources will be included in the workshop. For example, The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) questionnaire is a standardized instrument for children aged two to five that measures child protective factors as well as screens for behavioral concerns. The DECA is a tool to better understand a child's behavioral and social strengths and needs as well as to determine when further assessment is necessary, focusing on whether or not a child is at a level of social/emotional competence typical for his/her age. A benefit to using this tool is that it is already one used by administrators of early education programs and has been normed on a representative sample of children in the United States. The instrument is sensitive to children's cultural backgrounds and is standardized, valid and reliable. A limitation of using this instrument is that teachers vary in their opinions of what they feel should be marked as "bad behavior" and "good behavior." In the workshop I will be using this instrument as a way to address specific examples of deficits in a child's emotion understanding and then have the teachers come up with ideas on how they can help a child with similar deficits in their own classrooms.

The Desired Results Developmental Profile for preschool (DRDP-PS) will also be used to refer to the specific measures in the "Self and Social Development" domain. The California Department of Education (CDE), Child Development Division (CDD) has established the Desired Results System to improve program quality in early care and education programs across the state. The DRDP-PS is tool used by SETA Head Start to assess the children in various areas of development. For purposes of this training the first domain will be examined: self and social development. In this domain, measures 1-12 measure the child's social development and social competence using a rating scale starting with "exploring," then "developing," "building," and the highest rating is "integrating." As the child progresses in each measure they can move up, for example, from "exploring" to "developing" or they can also regress down from "developing" to "exploring." Once the teachers have a better understanding on social-emotional development by attending this training they will be able to efficiently and appropriately complete the first domain in the DRDP-PS.

Once I have gathered enough literature on social-emotional development and the needs assessments have been gathered I will conduct the training on social-emotional development. After the training I will ask participants to evaluate the workshop and materials, and use this information to modify future workshops (see Appendix B).

Previous Experiences

In my four years of experience teaching Head Start preschoolers I have become aware of the growing number of children who are being referred to mental health services for their "bad behavior." When I first started working for SETA Head Start as a substitute I was going from site to site and seeing a variety of teachers and teaching methods. I found that a majority of

teachers did not appear to know how to handle students with behavioral challenges. As I moved up to an associate teacher and then to a lead teacher for SETA Head Start I found myself becoming immersed in the DECA and the referral process. It felt like every new student I had was going to be referred for mental health services when in reality I just needed to look at what I was doing wrong or what I was not doing in my classroom. I began with the environment and made some dramatic changes in my classroom layout, structure, and routines. I made a huge difference in my preschoolers social/emotional development by simply changing their environment to be more positive.

In the CHDV 242 course, I was able to explore my interest in social/emotional development in preschoolers through a literature review assignment. I began finding articles on ways to promote social/emotional development in preschool and outcomes in preparation for elementary school for Head Start students. This literature review allowed me to generate ideas to help motivate and help my co-teachers at SETA.

Dissemination

Based on the evaluations collected after the workshop I would hope to create and present more workshops to other Head Start programs and other preschool programs that face behavioral challenges in the classroom. The findings and materials from this project will be of interest to other preschool teachers and mental health specialists. The evaluation of my workshop will be shared with the program officers and teacher mentors to use as a future reference for another workshop regarding social/emotional development. I hope the workshop may be used as means to conduct research on the effectiveness of preschool curriculum centered on the promotion of children's social and emotional competence and Kindergarten readiness.

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Figure 1. The Teaching Pyramid Model



Figure 1. "The Teaching Pyramid: A Model for Supporting Social Competence and Preventing Challenging Behavior in Young Children," by L. Fox, G. Dunlap, M.L. Hemmeter, G. Joseph, and P. Strain, 2003, *Young Children*, 58(4). Pp. 48-53.

Appendix A.
Needs Assessment Survey

Please indicate your position (circle one): Teacher Associate teacher

How many children are enrolled in your classroom? _____

Do you have difficult children in your class? If yes, how many? _____

What do you find most challenging about children's behavior in your classroom?

I would like additional support in the following areas (circle as many as you like):

Managing my time Lesson planning Discipline Creative projects with children

Praising/Rewards Organization Multitasking Being flexible

Classroom floor plan Communicating with parents Computer knowledge

Promoting parent involvement Transitions Promoting social-emotional development

Please consider your own professional development growth, current site, and your teaching goals as you respond to questions 1 – 10 (check one box for each):

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Most Important
1. Leadership/supervision				
2. Assessment				
3. Cognitive development				
4. Social-emotional development				
5. Physical development				
6. Parent involvement				
7. Educational technology				
8. Teacher-child interactions				
9. Relationships between co-teachers				
10. Learning environment				

Appendix B. Workshop Evaluation

1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
The presenters appeared knowledgeable about the topic					
The presenters were well prepared for the workshop (materials and time)					
I learned something new from the workshop					
I feel inspired and excited to try the new tools/ideas in the classroom					

1=Poor 2=Fair 3=Average 4=Good 5=Excellent

	1	2	3	4	5
Value of presentation in meeting your needs					
Expertise of presenter					
Presentation techniques of the presenter					
Your learning experience					
Usefulness of handouts or other "take aways"					
Clarity of objectives					
Active involvement of participants in learning experience					
Timeliness of the material presented					
Use of practical examples					
Overall rating of session					

Would you recommend this workshop to others (circle one): Yes No

Why or why not?

What guidance could you give the presenter to improve this learning experience?

What did you learn today that you are most likely to try?

In what other topics are you interested?