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Teacher Training for the Implementation of the Incredible Years at GFW Elementary School

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to determine whether training the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff would increase the social and emotional literacy of the children as well as the staff in the ECSE classroom . The four areas of training & research consisted of:

1. Increasing staff's positive attention, encouragement and praise while working as a team in the ECSE classroom;
2. Using incentives for the purpose of promoting positive attention in the classroom;
3. Using more proactive teaching techniques for the purpose of preventing behavior problems in the classroom, and
4. Increasing staff's proficiency in teaching social skills, problem-solving skills, and anger management skills.

The staff trainings served as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the Incredible Years (IY) Child Training Program called the Dina Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem Solving curriculum. This curriculum will be fully implemented in the ECSE classroom beginning in the fall, 2010. Focus groups and grounded theory methodology were utilized to collect and analyze the data.

Literature Review

The review of the literature focused on teaching approaches and how they influence children's behavior in the classroom. According to research studies, harsh and critical teaching approaches, a poorly managed classroom and failure to collaborate with parents contribute to escalating classroom aggression. These in turn facilitate the ongoing development of aggression, the child's poor attachment to the teacher and school, and eventual school dropout (Webster-Stratton, 2009). Training in effective classroom management strategies and curriculum related to promoting social and emotional literacy can not only reduce aggression and rejection, but can also contribute to children's enhanced social competence and stronger school bonding.

Methodology

Grounded theory utilized in this study is a qualitative research method in which the theory is developed from the data. Qualitative methods reflect an inductive mode of analysis or a process of moving from specific observations to a general theory. Focus groups were composed of the professional staff--three certified and two classified staff--who work in the ECSE classroom.

Weekly staff trainings and three focus groups were utilized to gain the perspectives from the participants including ways to positively impact the culture in the ECSE classroom. The focus groups strived to answer the research questions and learn about the ideas, perspectives, experiences, and attitudes from the staff and how those influence the climate of the classroom.

The focus groups were tape recorded, transcribed, & analyzed on three levels—First, the data was analyzed line by line; second, it was compared & contrasted to create categories or clusters; and third, the categories were moved from data analysis to concept & theory development (Byrne, 2001).

The trainings & research consisted of the topics in 1 & 3 and were also the areas of discussion during the focus groups. The topics in 2 & 4 will be included in future trainings and research as well as in the future recommendations and implications for practice sections.

Research Questions

1. Following the training in the IY program, did the teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff increase their positive attention, praise, & encouragement while working as a team in the ECSE classroom?

2. Following the training, were the teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff more proactive in preventing behavior problems in the ECSE classroom?

Focus Group 1 N=4	Focus Group 2 N=5	Focus Group 3 N=5
▪"I find myself thinking about how I word things with kids." ▪"I positively reinforce kids by giving them 1:1 time." ▪"Right after the trainings, I find myself thinking about being more positive & encouraging." ▪Nonverbal--head nodding, smiling. ▪"I've attempted to use more positive attention, praise, and encouragement....but I will need to be more creative with some of the children."	▪"I think I've tried to be more proactive; at least I'm thinking about it more now." ▪"Hearing positive reinforcement has made a difference in the children." ▪"I've been using words to encourage & letting kids know when they've done a good job." ▪"The positive language & the modeling is being noted by the kids." ▪Engaged eye contact, smiling, head nodding. ▪"The kids have responded well to words of encouragement and stickers."	▪"I would like to see more consistency; this is something everyone needs to do." ▪"When you give kids the social language, they are more apt to negotiate with one another." ▪"I think the trainings have helped me focus on what the kids are already doing that's right." ▪Nodding agreement with other participants' comments. ▪"It takes a team to work together & figure out what works."
Themes	**Themes**	**Themes**
▪Being more positive in interactions with kids. ▪Positively reinforcing kids. ▪Thinking more about staying positive in word choices with kids. ▪Positively reinforcing kids will encourage them to do the same.	▪Staff increasing their awareness of using positive behaviors. ▪Positive reinforcement by staff was observed in decreased child behaviors. ▪Increased use of encouragement with kids used in words & actions.	▪Focused more on giving positive attention, praise, & encouragement. ▪Focused more on what kids are doing right. ▪Becoming more aware of phrasing things in positive ways.

Data/Results

➢As positive behaviors increased in staff, negative behaviors in the ECSE children decreased.
➢The culture & climate improved as the staff further developed their skills.
➢A common language developed & enhanced the team environment.
➢Individually & collectively, the staff became more conscientious about their verbal/nonverbal interactions in the classroom.
➢Social Learning Theory developed through modeling, observational learning, and positive feedback.
➢The ECSE staff learned they possess several strengths.

Strengths

➢Utilized group interaction to produce data.
➢Participants directly involved in the research process.
➢Key players present in a comfortable environment.
➢Individual and collective perspectives gathered during conversation.
➢All participants were validated / encouraged to participate.
➢Common language and insight gained through group interviewing.

Limitations

➢Time / Schedules (Difficult to get key players together at same time).
➢Setting: Focus groups were in ECSE classroom while children played.
➢Participants required redirection to stay on topic.
➢Researcher inadequately trained in facilitating focus groups.
➢Observer dependency--results obtained may have been influenced by researcher.
➢Researcher / facilitator of focus groups known to the participants.

Conclusions

➢Improving teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff skills is effective in positively changing child behaviors in the classroom.
➢Building positive behaviors in teachers enhances the teacher/child relationship.
➢Increasing the use of positive attention, encouragement, and praise by staff decreases child behaviors.
➢When staff were guided beyond their comfort, they learned more about their strengths and their skills were enhanced.

Recommendations

➢Paid training time so IY program can have more thorough implementation.
➢Future training & research needs to focus on 2 & 4.
➢Video & audiotape the focus groups to obtain valuable nonverbal communication
➢Gain additional administrative support for the IY program.

Implications for Practice

➢When social work values & skills are applied in a classroom, growth & change occur through validating the strengths & perspectives of others.

➢GFW Elementary will benefit from the IY teacher training by building a more cohesive culture and climate in the ECSE classroom.

➢The belief that a child is the most precious of all human beings is the driving force and the philosophy behind the IY curriculum. In order for a child to withstand the emotional and social challenges as a teenager, a caring relationship between parents, teachers, and children is of the utmost importance.

➢Successful programs view children in the context of their communities, and relate to families in relation to their neighborhoods and communities (Schorr, 1997, *strengthening children and families).*

➢When a positive organizational climate is achieved, employees have increased satisfaction with their jobs and are more committed to the organization. This will enhance the culture and the climate of the school, the kids, and families served in the ECSE classroom at GFW Elementary School.

➢Future trainings & research will include the topics in 2 & 4.

References

References are available from the author upon request.