Master's Theses, Capstones, and Projects

8-28-2012

Narrative interventions as a strategy for reducing relational aggression among preschoolers

Dana Smith

Recommended Citation

Narrative Interventions as a Strategy for

Reducing Relational Aggression among Preschoolers

By

Dana Smith

A Graduate Field Experience

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

Urban Initiatives

At Cardinal Stritch University

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

2012

This Graduate Field Experience

Has Been Approved for

Cardinal Stritch University by

_____

(Advisor)

_____

(Date)

Abstract

As preschoolers develop social competence, they learn to play together and respect the emotions of their peers. The use of relational aggression (harming others by excluding or threatening to exclude them from social interaction) can hamper this development, negatively affecting both victims and perpetrators. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of two types of narrative interventions, bibliotherapy and photo-talks, on the use of relational aggression among preschoolers. During the intervention, four preschoolers participated in bibliotherapy and photo-talk sessions focused on four positive social skills: using feeling words, including others in play, sharing, and cooperating. Data were collected daily during the participants' 30-minute center time; instances of relational aggression, instances of targeted positive social behaviors, and the language used by the participants were recorded on tally sheets and in anecdotal notes. The results support the use of bibliotherapy and photo-talks to decrease relational aggression among preschoolers.

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

Children in preschool are just beginning to form friendships with peers and will try

different strategies in these new relationships. One strategy that has been shown to be

detrimental to all involved is relational aggression, excluding or threatening to exclude others

from social interactions. Although this type of behavior is frequently associated with teenagers,

children as young as three practice relational aggression in order to exclude peers. This action

research project introduced an intervention for relational aggression and studied its effects on

preschool children.

In this chapter, context is provided for the action research project. The first section will

introduce relational aggression and research-based solutions. The second section will describe

the school and the district, and the third section will provide an overview of the project.

Relational Aggression and Research-Based Solutions

In contrast to overt aggression, which injures others through physical force, relational

aggression injures others by excluding or threatening to exclude them from social interaction.

Research has shown that children as young as three use relational aggression to exclude peers

from play (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997). Examples of relational aggression used by

preschoolers include telling others, *You can't play,* and rolling eyes/making faces when asked to

work with a specific peer.

Such behaviors are at odds with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards' goals

for emotional and social growth (2011). According to the standards, preschool children should

develop social competence to be able to meet their own needs without hurting others. In fact, the

standards state that children should "engage in social interaction and play with others," and,

"engage in social problem solving behavior and learn to resolve conflict" (p.27). It is the responsibility of parents and educators to respond to relational aggression and teach children positive ways to interact with their peers.

One aspect of teaching social competence is providing students with the necessary language to express their needs and reflect on the needs of others. Research has shown that children with stronger language skills tend to have stronger social competence (Longoria, Page, Hubbs-Tait, & Kennison, 2009). Consequently, intervention strategies should be language-rich and encourage both expressive and receptive communication skills.

One such strategy is bibliotherapy. In bibliotherapy, participants read and discuss books with the hopes that they will identify with the characters or situation, share thoughts or feelings with the character, and gain insight from the character about how to deal more effectively with their own situation. Research has shown bibliotherapy to be an effective intervention for children who use physical aggression (Shechtman, 2003). This action research seeks to build on the use of bibliotherapy to use it as an intervention for relational aggression.

Photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) are another language-rich strategy that can be used in response to relational aggression. During a photo-talk, children look at and discuss photographs of themselves. Using this method, Serriere found that preschoolers are able to reflect upon social situations (2010).

The intervention implemented in this research combined photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) and bibliotherapy to promote discussion of relational aggression and positive social behavior in a preschool classroom. The following section will describe the school and the district in which the research took place.

Context of School and District

        This research took place in a large, urban school district in the Midwest. The district serves a diverse student body from prekindergarten through twelfth grade with 67% of the student population living in poverty. To address concerns about school climate and safety, the district adopted a universal behavior program in order to proactively teach positive behaviors at all grade levels in all schools.

        The school where the intervention took place is an elementary school with 844 students from K3 to fifth grade. The students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds including Latino, African American, Asian, and Multi-cultural families. As part of the district behavior plan, the school actively seeks to teach positive social behavior as related to its three key values: respect, responsibility, and safety. Despite these efforts, the school continues to have serious problems with student behavior resulting in high suspension rates and low student and family satisfaction with the school climate.

        The students who participated in this study, Taj, Vanessa, Pedro, and Melissa[1], were enrolled in a K3 classroom at the school. Like other students in the school, they too participated in the positive behavior program that taught the core values of respect, responsibility, and safety. However, relational aggression had been observed on several instances in their classroom. The following section will provide an overview of the action research project designed to reduce the use of relational aggression among preschool students.

---

[1] Names have been changed to protect the identity of participants.

Project Overview

A research-based intervention was designed to reduce relational aggression and increase positive social behavior in the preschool classroom described in the previous section. Like previous research (Crick et al., 1997; McEvoy et al., 2003), this project used teacher observations to record relational aggression. To reduce relational aggression, over a four-week period the teacher used an intervention strategy of bibliotherapy combined with photo-talks. As described in a previous section, both bibliotherapy and photo-talks have been shown to encourage reflection and bibliotherapy has been shown to decrease aggressive behavior (Serriere, 2010; Schectman, 2003; Amer, 1999). Each week, a positive social behavior was introduced and discussed with the use of picture books and photographs. The behaviors covered by this intervention consisted of: talking about emotions, including others, sharing, and cooperating. Throughout the intervention, the teacher collected data each day during the children's play center time. Instances of relational aggression and positive social behavior observed by the teacher or reported by a child were recorded. Additionally, the teacher took anecdotal notes of the children's behavior and language use. At the end of four weeks, the data were analyzed to evaluate if the intervention had an effect on the children's behavior.

Summary

The action research project presented in this chapter responded to the problem of relational aggression in a preschool classroom with two research-based methods of intervention: bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010). This intervention occurred over a period of four weeks in an urban school district. The following chapter provides the philosophical basis for this study by summarizing current research in the areas of relational aggression, the effects of relational aggression, language-rich interventions, and communication and behavior.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of narrative-based interventions on preschoolers' use of relational aggression. Research suggests that children as young as three use relational aggression to exclude other children from social interactions (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997). This exclusion is detrimental to both the victim and the perpetrator. One predictor of aggressive behavior is poor communication skills; children who struggle to express themselves and understand others tend to use more aggression. Accordingly, educators should choose methods of intervention that promote expressive and receptive communication skills. Some of these methods use narrative, promoting reflection and prosocial behavior through story telling (Amer, 1999; Gray, 1995; Serriere, 2010). The first section of this chapter addresses aggression in young children. The second section focuses on the academic and social effects of aggression. The third section explores the relationship between communication skills and aggressive behavior. Finally, the fourth section focuses on the use of narratives as an intervention.

Relational Aggression

In contrast with overt aggression, which injures others through bodily harm or threat of bodily harm, relational aggression injures others by damaging or threatening to damage peer relationships. Because relational aggression is harder to quantify and its effects are subtler, both researchers and educators tend to overlook its significance. The studies in this section support the existence of relational aggression among young children and explore trends in the expression of relational aggression.

While prior studies focused on older children, Crick et al. (1997) conducted the first study of relational aggression in preschool children. This study investigated four research questions. First, researchers wanted to know if relational aggression is distinct from overt aggression in preschool children. Another question was if teacher surveys and peer surveys about relational aggression would produce similar results. Additionally, researchers asked if relational aggression is more common among preschool girls than preschool boys. Lastly, researchers investigated if relational aggression in preschoolers was linked to poor social-psychological adjustment. Data were collected using teacher and peer reports designed for this study.

Sixty-five preschoolers participated in this study. They ranged in age from 3.5 years to 5.5 years and were a mixture of boys and girls. Seventy-three percent of participants were European American, 16% were Asian American, 5% were African American, 5% were Latino and 2% were American Indian. About half of the participants attended a full-day preschool while the other half attended part-time preschool.

To conduct their investigation, researchers first created a teacher survey to collect information about the participants; they named this tool The Preschool Social Behavior Scale— Teacher Form or the PSBS-T (Crick et al., 1997). The survey consisted of 23 statements. Eight of these statements addressed relational aggression; eight addressed overt aggression; four addressed prosocial behavior, and three addressed depressed affect.   For each statement, the teachers could choose an answer between 1 (never or almost never true for the child) and 5 (always or almost always true for the child). Because more than one teacher worked with each participant, all the teachers who worked with a participant collaborated to jointly fill out one PSBS-T for each participant. In addition to designing and administering a teacher survey, researchers designed a peer survey called The Preschool Social Behavior Scale—Peer Form;

PSBS-P (Crick et al., 1997). This survey consisted of 17 statements. Six statements measured overt aggression; seven statements measured relational aggression, and four statements measured prosocial behavior. To administer the survey to the peers of the participants, researchers used the picture-nomination procedure. Children took the survey one at a time and for each statement on the survey, children were asked to point to the pictures of three peers who matched these statements. Having collected data from teacher and peer surveys, researchers then analyzed the data to assess the validity of the new surveys, the distinctiveness of relational and overt aggression, the agreement between peer and teacher reports, gender differences in aggression, and the relationship between aggression and social psychological adjustment.

The first finding reported from this research was that relational aggression is apparent and is separate from overt aggression in children as young as 3.5 years of age. This was the first study to provide evidence of relational aggression in such young children. On both teacher and peer surveys, most children identified as aggressive were either overtly aggressive or relationally aggressive but not both. The second finding was that teachers and peers agreed to a moderate extent for both types of aggression (physical and overt) in girls while teachers and peers only agreed about overt aggression in boys. Both teachers and children identified the same girls as physically or relationally aggressive and the same boys as physically aggressive but teachers and peers disagreed about which boys were relationally aggressive. The third finding related to gender differences in preferred aggression types. According to teacher reports, girls were more relationally aggressive while boys were more overtly aggressive. The last finding of this research is that both relational and overt aggression were significantly linked to low peer acceptance and low levels of prosocial behavior. Children who were more aggressive were less likely to be accepted by their peers. While this study provided evidence of the existence of relational

aggression among preschoolers and its consequences, it also raised questions about the intermethod agreement between teacher and peer surveys, the necessity of other forms of data collection and possible links between gender and aggression.

In response to the previous study and others that raised similar questions, McEvoy, Estrem, Rodriguez and Olson (2003) explored the agreement between the three different methods of measuring aggression in preschool children as well as links between gender and aggression. This study had three purposes. The first purpose was to examine the occurrence of physical and relational aggression in preschool boys and girls, investigating a possible relationship between gender and aggression. The second purpose was to explore the correlations between the three methods assessing aggression (teacher surveys, peer surveys, and direct observation). The third purpose was to ascertain if all three methods consistently identify the same children as having high levels of aggression. Data were collected through the use of teacher surveys, peers surveys and direct observation.

The participants in the study were 59 preschoolers (34 boys and 25 girls) who attended eight different preschools. The mean age of the participants was 58 months. About 92% of the participants were white.

The procedure for this study consisted of three different parts. One part was the teacher survey. The head teacher for each classroom completed a Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form (Crick et al., 1997). This survey consists of 33 statements that require the teacher to rate the participant on a 5-point scale. From the results of this survey, researchers used six questions to create a physical aggression score for each participant and six questions to create a relational aggression score for each student. Another part of the study was the student survey, the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Peer Form (Crick et al., 1997). To administer this survey,

researchers showed familiar peers pictures of the participants and asked the peers to point to

classmates in response to questions like "Show me who says they will knock someone's stuff

over if they can't play with it" (Crick et al.,1997, p. 581). To score this survey, researchers

summed each child's nominations made by peers and then standardized for class size. The last

part of the study was direct observation of the participants by researchers. Each participant was

observed for a total of 60 minutes over a school week. Researchers did all observations during

indoor free choice time and recorded instances of physical aggression and relational aggression

using a partial interval system of 10 seconds. Physical aggression was recorded if a participant

kicked, hit, pushed, shoved, grabbed, threw toys , destroyed property or threatened to do any of

these things. Relational aggression was recorded if a participant used verbal or non-verbal

communication to exclude or threatened to exclude others from play. Researchers then analyzed

the results from all three methods of identifying physical and relational aggression.

The first finding reported by the researchers is related to the occurrences of the different

types of aggression and the gender of the participants. Researchers found boys to be more

relationally aggressive and more overtly aggressive than girls. The second finding reported by

the researchers is related to the correlation between the different methods of measurement.

Overall, researchers found that the results of the peer survey had the least correlation with the

other two methods of identification. Additionally, researchers found that there was higher

correlation when identifying physical aggression than when identifying relational aggression.

The third finding was that none of the children identified as most aggressive were identified by

all three methods. There was, however, more agreement between the teacher survey and the

direct observations. This study shows that there is not a very high level of intermethod agreement

among the three ways to identify aggressive behavior in preschool children. Consequently, the

researchers suggest that future studies use teacher surveys but then verify the results of the teacher surveys with direct observation.

Recognizing the difficulties of measuring relational aggression, Fanger, Frankel, and Hazen (2012) used microphones to record children at play. These researchers sought to investigate the different strategies used by children to exclude others. They hypothesized that peer exclusion takes many forms and that all children participate in some form of peer exclusion. The types of peer exclusion investigated include: direct exclusion (You can't play!), mitigated exclusion (This center is full.), ignoring, planning exclusion (Let's not play with her.), self-exclusion (If he is going to play with us, I am leaving.), and partial exclusion (We are playing princesses; you can be the servant.). Data were collected by observing preschool students during their outdoor playtime. The children wore wireless microphones, allowing the researchers to hear their conversations.

The participants in this study were 42 children with an age range of 4.5-6 years. The children were enrolled in a university lab preschool. The group was predominately white (83%) and middle class, with highly educated parents. Because of the nature of the university preschool, the children were accustomed to seeing observers in their play spaces.

To conduct this study, researchers observed each child twice for fifteen minutes during outdoor playtime. The child wore a backpack or a vest that was equipped with a wireless microphone. By using this equipment, the researchers were able to hear each child without interfering in his or her play. During the observation, three researchers watched and listened to the child; one researcher wrote a narrative of the child's behavior, while the other two researchers recorded any instance of peer exclusion. The instances of peer exclusion were then analyzed to reveal types of exclusion used by preschool children.

As they had hypothesized, the researchers found that preschool children use a variety of strategies to exclude others from play. The most common type of peer exclusion recorded in this study was mitigated exclusion, or exclusion disguised by a plausible reason. Also very common were direct exclusion, ignoring, and planning exclusion. The other types of peer exclusion were observed but not common. Additionally, the researchers found that 88% of the participants excluded or planned to exclude a peer at least once during the study. This research suggests that peer exclusion is a common form of relational aggression used by preschool students.

In review, these studies supported the existence of relational aggression among preschool children. They also explored methods of assessing relational aggression and investigated the relationship between aggression and gender. Additionally, these studies described relational aggression among preschoolers. The first to research relational aggression in preschoolers, Crick et al. (1997) found that relational aggression does occur among preschoolers and is different from overt aggression. Furthermore, they found that the individual children who use relational aggression are not the same children that tend to use overt aggression. Overall, the relationship between types of aggression and gender has not been firmly established. While Crick et al. (1997) concluded that girls tend to be more relationally aggressive while boys tend to be more overtly aggressive, McEvoy et al. (2003) found that boys were more overtly aggressive and more relationally aggressive than girls. What is clear is that both boys and girls use relational aggression. Knowing this, researchers also studied how to measure that aggression. After Crick el al. (1997) found that teacher and peers often disagreed about which children used relational aggression, McEvoy et al. (2003), concluded that peer reports are the least accurate measure of relational aggression. They recommended that researchers use teacher surveys in conjunction with direct observation to measure relational aggression. The use of wireless microphones was

introduced by Fanger et al. (2012) in a study that described the many forms of peer exclusion

employed by preschool children. Overall, these studies supported the existence of relational

aggression among preschool children regardless of gender and explored methods of assessing

relational aggression. Additionally, Crick et al. (1997) began to investigate the effects of

aggression and found that, like overt aggression, relational aggression is significantly linked to

low peer acceptance and low levels of prosocial behavior. Knowing that preschoolers engage in

relational aggression, it is imperative to know more about the effects of such aggression.

Effects of Aggression

While the effects of overt aggression are more noticeable, relational aggression also

harms preschool children. In addition to hurt feelings and exclusion from the peer group, the

victims of relational aggression may also experience psychological distress such as depression

and anxiety. The perpetrators of relational aggression, on the other hand, are often viewed as

mean or hostile. The studies in this section support the belief that relational aggression is

detrimental to both its victims and its perpetrators.

Focusing on the quality of peer play, the study by Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Mendez and

McDermott (2000), found a relationship between aggression and learning behaviors in preschool

children. The purpose of this study was to determine if the way a preschool child plays is

correlated with learning behaviors (motivation, attentiveness/persistence, and attitude) and/or

troublesome behavior (conduct problems, hyperactivity, and inattentive/passive demeanor). The

researchers had three hypotheses prior to conducting their research. First, they hypothesized that

positive play interactions would correlate positively with motivation, attentiveness/persistence,

and attitude and would correlate negatively with troublesome behavior. Additionally, the

researchers hypothesized that disruptive and aggressive peer play interactions would correlate

positively with classroom behavior problems and negatively with the three learning behaviors. Finally, they hypothesized that withdrawn peer play would correlate positively with inattentive/passive classroom behavior and correlate negatively with learning behaviors, particularly attention and persistence. Data were collected through the use of teacher rating scales. The teacher of each participant filled out rating scales about that child's interactive peer play, learning behaviors and patterns of troublesome behavior (three rating scales in total). All of the rating scales used were standardized measures that had been shown to be reliable.

The participants in this study were 556 preschool children enrolled in 14 different Head Start centers. The age range of the participants was 44.8-71.8 months. Eighty-seven percent of the participants were African American and there was an equal distribution of gender.

This study was based solely on the rating scales completed by teachers. The teacher of each participant completed three rating scales about the participant at the end of the school year (a time when the teachers were highly familiar with each child). The researchers then analyzed the data from the rating scales to find correlations.

Overall, this study showed that interactive peer play is related to other aspects of classroom function. Peer play was shown to correlate to learning behaviors and classroom behaviors in the three hypothesized patterns. First, children who demonstrated positive peer interactive play had more positive learning behavior and less troublesome behavior than children who were less engaged in peer play. Secondly, children who demonstrated disconnected peer play were also classified as inattentive and passive by their teachers and showed low levels of motivation. Finally, children who participated in high levels of disruptive peer play were also viewed by their teachers as having high levels of conduct problems and hyperactivity in other classroom activities. This study indicates that according the teacher rating scales, the way a

child plays in the classroom is related to that child's academic function. In other words, if

relational aggression affects the play of children, it also affects their learning behavior. On one

hand, the children who are disruptive during play (possibly the perpetrators of relational

aggression), are also disruptive in the classroom. On the other hand, the children who withdraw

from play (possibly the victims of relational aggression), also withdraw from learning activities

and show lower levels of motivation.

Although studies such as the one by Coolahan et al. (2000) indicate that aggression is

detrimental to children, often teachers do not intervene in cases of relational aggression.   The

study conducted by Conner and Fraser (2011) investigated the effects of a two-part intervention

on a group of preschool children and the effect of receiving no intervention on a similar group of

students. The purpose of this study was to measure the social-emotional growth of preschool

students who participated in an intervention and compare that growth to preschool students who

did not participate in any intervention. The children in the intervention group participated in a

curriculum to learn social-problem solving skills while their caregivers participated in a program

to learn parenting skills. The authors recorded two hypotheses related to their investigation. First,

they hypothesized that parents who participated in the group parenting class would make greater

gains in parenting skills, communication, bonding, supervision and developmental expectations.

Second, they hypothesized that children who participated in the social-problem solving classes

would grow in social competence, positive peer relations, school performance and behavior.

Data were collected using play-based interviews with puppets and family surveys completed by

familiar social workers.

The participants were 67 (35 male and 32 female) three and four year-old children who

attended preschool in an urban area and their parents. Seventy-seven and nine tenths percent of

the participants were African American. The four preschools that participated were located in high-risk neighborhoods. One of the participating preschools had a high population of Spanish-speaking Latino students and families. Programs and materials were provided in Spanish for these participants. The participants were randomly assigned to either an intervention group or a control (waitlist) group. The baseline assessment did not show any differences between these two groups.

After completing both aspects of the baseline assessment (puppet interview and family survey), the intervention group began to participate in two programs. The children in this group received two social-problem solving lessons per week for 14 weeks. The parents in the intervention group attended parenting classes once a week for 14 weeks. Each class lasted 45 minutes. The investigators designed the parent program to educate families about parenting skills, communication, bonding, supervision and developmental expectations. During this time, the control (waitlist) group did not receive any interventions. After the completion of the intervention, the puppet interview and the family survey were re-administered to both the intervention and the control group.

The researchers found that social-skill intervention paired with parent education significantly reduced aggressive behavior in preschool students. Parents in the intervention group demonstrated significant improvements in bonding, supervision, communication and developmental expectations. Compared to their performance before the intervention, the children in the intervention group demonstrated less aggressive behavior while their peers in the control group demonstrated more aggressive behavior; children who received no intervention became more aggressive with time. This study suggests that one effect of relational aggression is more

relational aggression; once children begin to use relational aggression toward each other, the use of relational aggression will increase over time.

In summary, these studies examined the effect of relational aggression on both victims and perpetrators. Coolahan et al. (2000) found a strong relationship between the behavior of a child during peer play and the learning behaviors of that same child. Children who withdraw from peer play as a result of relational aggression tend also to withdraw from academic tasks and demonstrate less motivation while children that disrupt the play of others through the use of relational aggression tend also to disrupt learning activities. The study by Conner and Fraser (2011) found that children who use aggression and do not participate in any sort of intervention would most likely become more aggressive over time. Considered together, these two studies suggest that relational aggression in a preschool classroom leads to maladaptive learning behaviors that will become more serious over time. In light of these serious effects, it is immediately apparent that preschool teachers must plan and implement interventions to decrease relational aggression. A crucial step in planning an intervention, however, is considering the root causes of the behavior. The following section will examine the relationship between communication and behavior.

Communication and Behavior

In planning interventions for relational aggression, the linguistic nature of this kind of aggression must be considered. Unlike overt aggression, which tends to be physical, relational aggression relies heavily on verbal and non-verbal communication. In exploring the relationship between communication and behavior, the research in this section supports the hypothesis that children with strong communication skills are less likely to use and be victims of relational aggression.

Longoria, Page, Hubbs-Tait, and Kennison (2007) investigated the relationship between a child's social competence and his or her language ability. Social competence is an individual's ability to positively interact with others while also meeting personal goals. Behaviors such as problem solving, perspective taking, and sharing are considered part of social competence. The authors hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between social competence and language ability. Data were collected using two standardized assessments of language and a standardized teacher rating scale of social competence.

The participants in this study were 116 kindergarten students (52 females and 64 males) with a mean age of 4.81 years. The sample, which was drawn from rural Midwestern communities, was 78% white, 15% Native American, 3% African American, 1% Hispanic, and 4% multi-ethnic. The average monthly income of the children's families was $1250.

The study consisted of evaluating each child's receptive and expressive language and social competence through the use of standardized measures. In order to test receptive language, the researchers administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (Dunn & Dunn, 1981). To test expressive language, the researchers administered the McCarthy Scale of Children's Abilities (McCarthy, 1972). Additionally, the researchers evaluated each child's social competence by asking teachers to complete a questionnaire, the California Preschool Social Competency Scale (Levine, Elzy, & Lewis, 1969). Having assessed the participants' receptive and expressive language, as well as their social competence, the researchers evaluated the results to explore a relationship between language and social competence.

The researchers found a positive relationship between both receptive and expressive language and social competence. In other words, children with a better command of language

were found to have more social competence. This suggests that communication skills are part of social competence.

One aspect of communication is understanding another person. This understanding includes recognizing others' emotions. Belacchi and Farina (2010) investigated a preschooler's ability to identify emotions in relation to his or her participation in aggressive behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine the roles preschoolers assume when faced with bullying and investigate the relationship between those roles and emotional comprehension. To collect data, the researchers used two assessments; the children took a test of emotional comprehension while their teachers completed questionnaires about each child's social behavior in bullying situations.

The participants in this study were 188 preschool children (102 boys and 86 girls) from three public schools in Italy. The children ranged in age from 3 to 6 years and, according to the researchers, came from diverse economic backgrounds.

The procedure for this study included two assessments: a test of emotional comprehension, and a questionnaire about bullying behavior. The test of emotional comprehension was administered individually and consisted of 19 items. For each item, researchers asked the student to look at an illustration and listen to a story. After listening to the story, the student was asked to point to the face that best represented the emotional outcome of the story (happy, sad, angry, scared or ambivalent). In scoring this assessment, the researchers categorized each participant's performance into three categories: external understanding, mental understanding and reflective understanding. Also, Teachers completed a questionnaire for each child, indicating how often they observed certain behaviors (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never). The items on the questionnaire were analyzed in order to score each student's

participation in bullying, categorizing students as having prosocial roles (defenders, mediators, or consolers), hostile roles (bullies, assistants, or reinforcers), outsider roles (not involved), or victim roles (victims of bullying). After administering and scoring both assessments, researchers analyzed the data to evaluate the relationship between bullying and understanding emotions.

The researchers found two correlations between emotional comprehension and participation in aggressive behavior. First, they found a positive correlation between emotional understanding and assuming prosocial behavior in an aggressive situation. In other words, this study found that children who understand and recognize emotions are more likely to act as defenders, mediators or consolers when faced with bullying. Additionally, researchers found a negative correlation between emotional understanding and the roles of victim and outsider. This suggests that children who are victims or outsiders of bullying have difficulty recognizing and understanding emotions, an aspect of communication.

One way to build a child's communication skills is through conversations. Dunn, Brown, and Beardsall (1991) explored the relationship between a child's early conversations about feelings and that child's later ability to understand the emotions of others. They hypothesized that three-year-old children who had more conversations about feelings with their mothers and siblings would perform better on a test of social sensitivity at age six. Data were collected through audio taped and transcribed conversations as well as a standardized assessment of social sensitivity.

The participants were 41 children who were 3 years old at the beginning of the study. Each child lived with his or her mother and an older sibling in an urban area of England. In the second phase of the study, the children were revisited at the age of 6.5 years.

This investigation occurred in two phases. The first phase took place when the children were 3 years old. During this phase, the children were visited twice in their homes at a time when the child, his or her mother, and the sibling were present. During these visits, researchers asked the mothers and children to carry on normal routines. Each visit lasted one hour, during which the researchers audio recorded the conversations that occurred. These conversations were later transcribed and coded for frequency of conversations about emotions and the kind of emotions discussed. The second phase of the investigation occurred years later when the children were 6.5 years old. At that time, the each child's ability to identify the emotions of others was assessed using the Rothenberg Test of Social Sensitivity (Rothenberg, 1970). The children listened to tape-recorded scenarios that represented four different emotions—happiness, anger, anxiety and sadness. While the children listened to the scenarios, they were also presented with photographs of a human face depicting the appropriate emotional state. The children were asked to identify how the actor felt at the beginning and the end of the scenario. Researchers then compared the data about each child's family conversations about emotions and his or her scores on the test of social sensitivity.

The researchers found a correlation between family conversations about feelings and a child's later ability to identify the emotions of others. Children who discussed feelings more often with their families at age three were better able to identify the emotions of others at age six. The same was true for children who discussed a wide variety of feelings. This research suggests that early conversations about emotions may affect a child's social sensitivity later in life.

In summary, theses articles supported a relationship between communication skills and social behavior. Langoria et al. (2007) found a correlation between language skills and social competence; the better a child was able to understand and produce language, the more social

skills that child was found to have. Additionally, Belachi and Farina (2010) found that children

with a strong ability to understand other's emotions were more likely to defend others from

bullying. One way to encourage children's communication skills is through conversations. Dunn

et al. (1991) found that very young children who have family conversations about feelings were

more likely to understand the emotions of others later in life. These studies emphasize the

importance of communication skills in promoting positive social behavior. The following section

will explore different types of language-rich interventions.

Narrative-Based Interventions

Narrative-based intervention is a language-rich method teachers can employ to decrease

relational aggression. With preschool children, narrative-based interventions can be used to

promote discussion and reflection about prosocial behavior. The use of stories is appealing to

teachers because it can occur naturally during the school day as part of story time or another

subject area. Additionally, stories promote receptive and expressive language skills. Children

enjoy this method because stories capture their attention and encourage their imagination. The

studies in this section explore the use of narrative as an intervention including Social Stories

(Gray, 1995), bibliotherapy, and photo talks (Serriere, 2010).

Social Stories are short, simple stories that explain and instruct on appropriate social

behavior; they have been used as a positive intervention for individuals with autism and other

development delays since the 1990s (Gray, 1995). The study by Benish and Bramlett (2011)

investigated the effects of Social Stories on aggressive behavior and positive peer interactions in

preschool children with no developmental delays. Data were collected primarily through the use

of direct observations. Researchers used the Preschool-Observation Code (Bramlett, 1990) to

observe and record negative physical interactions, negative verbal interactions, positive physical

interactions and social interactions with peers. Additional modes of data collection included a behavior assessment survey completed by a teacher and a screening assessment to identify developmental delays.

The participants in this study were three 4-year-old students enrolled in a Head Start program. One participant was a girl and two participants were boys. All three participants attended the same school but they were in two different classes. Based on the results of the screening evaluation, all participants were assessed to be developing within the average range for motor development, knowledge concepts, and language. According to the teacher rating scale for behavior, all participants scored in the at-risk or clinically significant range for aggression prior to the intervention. Classroom teachers identified the typically troublesome setting for each participant. One participant was most aggressive upon arrival to the classroom; one participant was most aggressive during small group instruction, and one participant was most aggressive during centers activity time.

Researchers used an ABC multiple baselines design. Each phase lasted five school days. In the baseline (A) phase, researchers observed the participants for 30 minutes each day in each participant's typically troublesome setting, recording aggressive behavior and positive peer interactions. During the baseline phase, researchers made two books for each participant. One book, the neutral book, was not a Social Story. The other book was a Social Story developed for the individual needs of each participant. The next phase was the neutral book (B) phase. In this phase, the teacher or paraprofessional read the neutral book on a daily basis to each participant five minutes before the participant engaged in the previously identified troublesome setting. The researchers then observed the participants for 30 minutes after the book reading and recorded aggressive behavior and positive peer interactions. The Social Story (C) phase followed the same

format as the neutral book (B) phase but the teacher/paraprofessional read the participant's

Social Story rather than the neutral book. Two weeks after the intervention phase, researchers

observed participants again to assess maintenance of behavioral change.

The first finding in this study relates to frequency of aggressive behavior. All three

participants demonstrated a decrease in aggressive behavior (negative physical or verbal

interactions) during the Social Story phase as compared to the baseline. For two participants, the

Social Story intervention was significantly more effective than the neutral book in decreasing

aggressive behavior. For the other participant, the neutral book and the Social Story had the same

effect of moderately decreasing aggressive behavior. After the intervention was withdrawn,

during the follow-up observation, all three participants demonstrated a much lower frequency of

aggression than they demonstrated during the baseline observations. The second finding of this

study relates to the frequency of positive peer interactions. All three participants demonstrated

gains in positive peer interactions (positive physical interactions and social interactions with

peers) during the social story phase of the research. Two of the participants continued to have

higher-than-baseline levels of positive peer interactions after the intervention was withdrawn.

However, one of the participants returned to his baseline level. Overall, this study provides some

evidence that Social Stories may be an effective intervention for preschool children who do not

have developmental delays. Results of this study show that Social Stories can reduce aggressive

behavior and increase positive peer interactions in this population. One criticism of this method,

however, is that Social Stories approach change from a purely behavioral perspective and do not

encourage reflection on the root causes of the behavior nor do they change the thought process

behind the behavior.

In contrast to Social Stories, which focus on replacing the problem behavior with a socially acceptable behavior, bibliotherapy is an intervention that encourages individuals to reflect on their feelings and the feelings of others. During bibliotherapy, books are read and discussed with the hopes that the readers/listeners will identify with the characters or situation, share thoughts or feelings with the character, and gain insight from the character about how to deal more effectively with their own situation. Amer (1999) investigated the use of bibliotherapy in pediatric nursing. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as part of a child's treatment for diabetes or short stature. Amer (1999) researched three questions. (a) When children read fiction, will they discuss their own feelings? (b) What themes will the children discuss? (c) Can the themes children discuss help in their treatment? Data were collected by interviewing each participant after he or she read the selected book. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions and prompts with follow-up questions as appropriate to elicit more information. The questions asked about family, school, the book, the child's experience with his/her condition and managing feelings. The interviews were transcribed and coded as themes emerged in the participants' responses.

The participants in this study were 27 children receiving treatment from a pediatric endocrinologist for diabetes or short stature. Nine of the participants were boys and 18 of the participants were girls. Both diabetes and short stature can be emotionally challenging because both conditions can limit a child's activities and make that child noticeably different from his or her peers.

The researcher chose age-appropriate works of fiction that included the themes of diabetes or short stature (depending on the child's condition). Each child was given a book to

read; after reading the book, each child participated in an interview with the researcher. The interviews were transcribed and coded.

Amer (1999) found that cognitive bibliotherapy promotes open discussion with children about their diabetes or short stature. The most striking finding of the research was that the participants openly discussed their feelings after reading the book. Most participants immediately shared their own experiences when asked about the book. The prominent themes that arose in the interviews were the children's development of compensatory attributes, responses to teasing, and management of diabetes. The researcher stated that open discussions about these themes are important for building relationships and sharing information about treatment. Although Amer (1999) was working in a medical environment, the research questions would also be relevant for work in education; children may be more likely to discuss their experiences with and feelings about relational aggression after reading books with similar themes.

While the previous study suggested that children would discuss their feelings and experiences after reading fiction with similar themes, Shechtmann (1999) extended the knowledge about bibliotherapy by investigating the use of bibliotherapy in the school setting and its effects on aggressive behavior. This study had two purposes. First, the researcher wanted to document the effect of small group bibliotherapy on children's aggression. Secondly, the researcher wanted to analyze the behavior of the participants during the small group bibliotherapy sessions over time. Data were collected in two ways. A short version of the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (1991) was completed by both the participants and the teacher in order to measure aggression before and after the bibliotherapy intervention.

Additionally, the researcher recorded and analyzed the bibliotherapy sessions to document five types of verbal response: self-disclosure, responsiveness, empathy, insight, and aggression.

The participants in this study were ten eight-year-old boys from the same fourth grade class in Israel. Of the ten, six were identified as highly aggressive and the other four were added to make heterogeneous small groups. The ten children were divided into two groups, intervention and wait list. The intervention group contained three aggressive participants and two non-aggressive participants.

First, the researcher administered the short version of the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (1991) to the participants and their teacher to determine each participant's aggression prior to the intervention. The intervention program consisted of ten 45-minute sessions of small group bibliotherapy. In these sessions, the five participants met with two special education teachers who had been trained in bibliotherapy. Each session introduced a piece of art (short stories, poems, films and pictures) associated with aggression. Themes in the art included anxiety, fear, frustration, power, rejection, humiliation, unfairness, boredom, and helplessness. Each session started with an ice-breaking activity, followed by listening to the story/poem or looking at the film/picture. After experiencing the art, the participants were led in group activities or discussions connecting the art to their lives. The wait list group did not receive any intervention. After all ten sessions, the children and their teacher completed the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (1991) again to measure aggression after the intervention.

The researcher found that the scores for all children in the intervention group dropped on both self and teacher reports indicating decreased levels of aggression. The average score for the participants in the intervention group based on the teacher report dropped from 62 points pre-intervention to 29 points post-intervention, while the self-report score dropped from 36 points

pre-intervention to 26 points post-intervention. The scores of the children in the wait list group

did not change. This suggests that participation in small-group bibliotherapy is an effective

intervention to reduce aggression in children. The researcher also studied the verbal responses of

the participants during the bibliotherapy sessions. Aggressive verbal responses were high in the

first few sessions but decreased consistently during the intervention. While aggressive responses

during group decreased, constructive responses increased. The author linked this positive change

to the use of bibliotherapy because the art presented complex issues in a non-threatening way.

Often, the participants expressed their feelings by using the titles or characters from the art as a

metaphor. This suggests that the children identified with the characters in the art, which allowed

them to understand themselves and others and express their feelings. Furthermore, the decrease

in aggressive behavior indicates that through reflection and discussion, children can change their

own behavior.

Serriere (2010) took the idea of reflection and change one step further by studying the

ability of preschoolers to reflect on the social conditions of their classroom and propose

alternatives. The purpose of this study was to determine if preschool students are capable of

being involved in the process of wondering about, envisioning alternatives and questioning the

public life. In a process she called photo talks, Serriere (2010) invited preschoolers to discuss

photographs of themselves taken during play and recorded these conversations. Picture talks

(Serriere, 2010) differ from bibliotherapy because children are included not only in discussion

and reflection but also in the creation of a story.   Data were collected using digital photography,

field notes of observations, and audiotaped conversations.

The participants in this study were 14 preschool students (8 boys and 6 girls) enrolled in a

university preschool that serves the children of faculty and students as well as community

members. Eight of the participants were native English speakers and six were English language

learners. Translators were used to facilitate the inclusion of English language learners.

The first step of this research was to take pictures of the participants during free play.

The researcher tried to make this process as unobtrusive as possible by not using a flash and by

keeping the camera on a tripod. In the process of photographing the students, the researcher

sought to capture all the students, not only those that were most verbal or otherwise prominent in

the classroom. Moments of social cohesion, deliberation or tension were the subjects of the

photographs. After taking photographs, the researcher uploaded them onto a computer in slide-

show format. The second step of the research was to invite the children to view and discuss the

photographs. One child at a time was invited to view the photographs with the researcher. The

child controlled the forward button on the computer so that he/she was in control of the amount

of time spent looking at each photograph. While the child viewed the photographs, the

researcher used open-ended questions to engage the child in conversations about each

photograph. Some of the questions asked by the researcher led the children to consider the

fairness and equality of their actions. Through these conversations, the children created stories

about what was happening in the photographs.   Although the researcher did not pass judgment

on the scenes portrayed in the photographs during her conversations with students, she did take

the stance that fairness and equality are more worthwhile than oppression and dominance.

During these discussions, the children typically looked at five to seven photographs before losing

interest and talked to the researcher for about three minutes. These conversations were

audiotaped and analyzed later to identify themes of the conversations.

Upon analyzing the conversations, it was evident to Serriere (2010) that the preschoolers

were able to reflect on their behavior and envision alternatives. In contrast to Social Stories

(Gray, 1995) and bibliotherapy, photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) empower children by involving them in both the creation of a narrative and in the reflection on that narrative.

In review, these studies showed that there are different ways to use narrative as an intervention and each method provides its own degree of empowerment for the participants. The first method discussed was Social Stories (Gray, 1995). Social Stories are simple stories that have been used as a positive behavior intervention for individuals with autism and other development delays since the 1990s (Gray, 1995). The study by Benish and Bramlett (2011) suggested that Social Stories (Gray, 1995) reduced aggressive behavior in preschool children. One problem with Social Stories (Gray, 1995), however, is that they exclude the child from reflection on his or her behavior; adults identify a problem behavior and provide an appropriate alternative without involving the child in the process. Although this approach may be effective in changing behavior, it does not provide the child with the thought process or critical thinking skills to solve problems in the future. In contrast, bibliotherapy encourages children to reflect on their feelings and experiences with the expectation that reflection will lead to change. During bibliotherapy, children read or listen to books to gain insights about their own feelings and experiences. The study by Amer (1999) found that bibliotherapy does encourage children to discuss their feelings and experiences openly. Shechtmann (1999) expanded the knowledge about bibliotherapy by showing that participation in bibliotherapy lead to self-reflection and decreases in aggressive behavior in elementary school children. The same study also showed that books and other works of fiction provide children with a common language for discussing their own experiences. Considered together, the studies by Amer (1999) and Shechtmann (1999) show that when children read books and identify with the characters, they can reflect on their own behavior and even change negative behavior patterns. Taking the idea of self-reflection and

change one step further, Serriere (2010) introduced the idea of photo talks. In photo talks,

preschool children were able to create narratives about themselves based on photographs. These

narratives often included aspects of reflection and envisioning social change. Photo talks

(Serriere, 2010) involve children in both the creation of and the reflection on a narrative. By

combining bibliotherapy with photo talks (Serriere, 2010), a teacher would provide children with

new vocabulary and perspectives while also encouraging children to tell their own stories in a

self-reflective way.

Summary

In summary, these studies support the existence of relational aggression among

preschoolers, indicate that this aggression has negative effects, suggest a relationship between

communication skills and aggression, and explore different methods of language-rich

intervention. The first to research relational aggression in preschoolers, Crick et al. (1997) found

that relational aggression does occur among preschoolers and is different from overt aggression.

Furthermore, they found that the individual children who use relational aggression are not the

same children who tend to use overt aggression. Overall, the relationship between types of

aggression and gender has not been firmly established. What is clear is that both boys and girls

use relational aggression. Knowing this, researchers also studied how to measure that

aggression. After Crick el al. (1997) found that teacher and peers often disagreed about which

children used relational aggression, McEvoy et al. (2003), concluded that peer reports are the

least accurate measure of relational aggression. They recommended that researchers use teacher

surveys in conjunction with direct observation to measure relational aggression. A new method

of studying relational aggression with wireless microphones was introduced by Fanger et al.

(2012) in a study that described the many forms of peer exclusion employed by preschool

children.   Overall, these studies supported the existence of relational aggression among preschool children regardless of gender and explored methods of assessing relational aggression. Additionally, Crick et al. (1997) began to investigate the effects of aggression and found that, like overt aggression, relational aggression is significantly linked to low peer acceptance and low levels of prosocial behavior.

Knowing that preschoolers engage in relational aggression, it is imperative to know more about the effects of such aggression on both victims and perpetrators. Coolahan et al. (2000) found a strong relationship between the behavior of a child during peer play and the learning behaviors of that same child. This study is significant because it suggests that children who withdraw from peer play as a result of relational aggression would also withdraw from academic tasks and demonstrate less motivation, while children that disrupt the play of others through the use of relational aggression would also disrupt learning activities. The study by Conner and Fraser (2011) found that children who use aggression and do not participate in any sort of intervention would most likely become more aggressive over time. Considered together, these two studies suggest that relational aggression in a preschool classroom leads to maladaptive learning behaviors that will become more serious over time. In light of these serious effects, it is immediately apparent that preschool teachers must plan and implement interventions to decrease relational aggression. A crucial step in planning an intervention, however, is considering the root causes of the behavior.

Various studies have shown that communication skills are linked to children's social behavior. Langoria et al. (2007) found a correlation between language skills and social competence; the better a child was able to understand and produce language, the more social skills that child was found to have. Additionally, Belachi and Farina (2010) found that children

with a strong ability to understand others' emotions were more likely to defend peers from

bullying. One way to encourage children's communication skills is through conversations. Dunn

et al. (1991) found that very young children who have family conversations about feelings were

more likely to understand the emotions of others later in life. These studies emphasize the

importance of communication skills in promoting positive social behavior.

One way to improve communication skills related to behavior is through narrative-based

interventions. Narrative-based interventions fit naturally into the school day because they use

stories to promote reflection and behavioral change. Three types of narrative-based interventions

were discussed: Social Stories (Gray, 1995), bibliotherapy, and photo talks (Serierre, 2010). The

first method discussed was Social Stories (Gray, 1995). Social Stories are simple stories that

have been used as a positive behavior intervention for individuals with autism and other

development delays since the 1990s (Gray, 1995). The study by Benish and Bramlett (2011)

suggested that Social Stories (Gray, 1995) reduced aggressive behavior in preschool children.

One problem with Social Stories (Gray, 1995), however, is that they exclude the child from

reflecting on his or her behavior; adults identify a problem behavior and provide an appropriate

alternative without involving the child in the process. Although this approach may be effective

in changing behavior, it does not provide the child with the thought process or critical thinking

skills to solve problems in the future. In contrast, bibliotherapy encourages children to reflect on

their feelings and experiences with the expectation that reflection will lead to change. During

bibliotherapy, children read or listen to books to gain insights about their own feelings and

experiences. The study by Amer (1999) found that bibliotherapy does encourage children to

discuss their feelings and experiences openly. Shechtmann (1999) expanded the knowledge

about bibliotherapy by showing that participation in bibliotherapy lead to self-reflection and

decreases in aggressive behavior in elementary school children. The same study also showed that books and other works of fiction provide children with a common language for discussing their own experiences. Considered together, the studies by Amer (1999) and Shechtmann (1999) show that when children read books and identify with the characters, they can reflect on their own behavior and even change negative behavior patterns. Taking the idea of self-reflection and change one step further, Serriere (2010) introduced the idea of photo talks. In photo talks, preschool children were able to create narratives about themselves based on photographs. These narratives often included aspects of reflection and envisioning social change. Photo talks (Serriere 2010) involve children in both the creation of and the reflection on a narrative. By combining bibliotherapy with photo-talks (Serriere 2010), a teacher would provide children with new vocabulary and perspectives while also encouraging children to tell their own stories in a self-reflective way.

Considered together, the studies presented in this chapter support research on narrative-based interventions that include self-reflection for preschoolers that use relational aggression. The next chapter will present the procedures for the study including a description of the participants, the procedures, and the data collection.

Chapter Three

Procedures for the Study

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the use of two narrative-based interventions -- bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) -- as a means of decreasing relational aggression and increasing positive social behavior in preschool students. The study investigated the following questions:

- When picture books with positive social themes are read aloud and discussed with preschool students, do those students decrease their use of relational aggression? Do those students increase their use of positive social behavior?

- How do preschool students apply information from narrative-based interventions to their own social problem solving?

This chapter includes a description of the case study participants, the intervention procedures, and data collection methods.

Description of Case Study Participants

Participants in this study included four students who attended the same K3 Head Start classroom in an urban elementary school in a large, midwestern city. Of the four participants, two were African American and two were Latino; two were females, and two were males. The mean age of the participants was 4.5 years old. All participants were finishing their first year of preschool and would be entering K4 the following year.

These four students were selected based on teacher reports of their play behavior prior to the intervention. The framework provided by Coolahan et al. (2000) and detailed in Table 1 was used to choose participants with diverse peer interaction styles. One participant tended to have a

positive peer interaction style, one tended to have a withdrawn peer interaction style and two

tended to have disruptive peer interaction styles.

Table 1	
Types of Peer Interaction per Coolahan et al. (2000)	
Peer Interaction Style	Characteristics of that Style
Positive Peer Interactions	• Helping and comforting other children • Encouraging others to join play • Helping to settle conflict
Disruptive Peer Interactions	• Not taking turns • Starting fights and arguments • Demanding to be in charge • Destroying others' belongings • Disrupting the play of others
Withdrawn Peer Interactions	• Hovering outside of a play group • Refusing to play when invited • Wandering aimlessly during play times

Taj, the first participant in this case study, was an African American male who was 4

years and 8 months old. According to teacher observations, Taj tended to take turns when

playing, resolve conflicts peacefully, and play with a variety of his classmates. Other children

consistently sought out Taj as a playmate. Taj was an example of a child who tended to use a

positive peer interaction style.

Vanessa, the second participant in this case study, was a Latina female who was 4 years

and 8 months old. According to teacher observations, Vanessa tended to demand to be in charge,

only play with certain playmates, and exclude others from play. Although most children would

try to play with Vanessa, many complained that Vanessa would not play with them. Vanessa

was an example of a child who tended to use relational aggression and a disruptive peer

interaction style.

Pedro, the third participant in this case study, was a Latino male who was 4 years and 5

months old. According to teacher observations, Pedro tended to start fights, destroy others' work

and disrupt the play of other children. Other children commonly complained that Pedro physically hurt them or destroyed their work. Pedro was an example of a child who tended to use overt aggression and a disruptive peer interaction style.

Melissa, the fourth participant in this case study, was an African American female who was 4 years and 4 months old. According to teacher observations, Melissa tended to play alone and watch others play. Melissa rarely played with other children without the help of an adult. Melissa was an example of a child who tended to use a withdrawn peer interaction style.

In the next section I will describe the procedure used to increase students' positive social skills and decrease the use of relational aggression.

Procedure

This study took place over four weeks, four days per week for a total of 16 days at the end of the school year. Each week, a different positive social skill was introduced and supported through bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010).   As illustrated in Table 2, a new positive social behavior was introduced through a picture book each week. The books used in the intervention were recommended by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning as popular, engaging books with embedded messages about social emotional skills (Hemmeter, 2012). A list and description of the books used can be found in Appendix A: Books Used for Bibliotherapy. Week one focused on using words to describe feelings; week two focused on inviting others to play; week three focused on sharing, and week four focused on cooperation.

Table 2
Weekly Positive Social Skills and Bibliotherapy Texts

	Positive Social Skill	Bibliotherapy Texts
Week 1	Using words to describe emotions	*My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss
Week 2	Including others	*Big Al* by Andrew Clements
Week 3	Sharing	*The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister
Week 4	Cooperation	*Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown

Each day, the students participated in a 15-minute, whole group lesson in their classroom. Both the bibliotherapy and the photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) occurred during normal school hours and were part of whole-group instruction during story time. The bibliotherapy portion of the intervention occurred during the first three days of each week while a photo-talk (Serriere, 2010) occurred on the fourth day of each week. Table 3 provides a condensed summary of weekly activities.

As illustrated in Table 3, each week followed the same basic schedule. The first day of each week was spent preparing the students to listen to and understand the book: key ideas were introduced; the students examined the illustrations, and there was a discussion about how the ideas from the book would relate to the children's lives. On the second and third day of each week, the book was read aloud in an interactive style with a focus on the problem and solution in the story. The students were encouraged to make connections between the book and their own lives. On the fourth day of each week, the students summarized the story and participated in a photo-talk (Serriere, 2010).

Table 3
Intervention Schedule for Each Week

	Type of Narrative Intervention	Description of Activities
Day 1	Bibliotherapy (Introduction to Book)	-The positive social skill is introduced and discussed. -Students are introduced to the weekly text and encouraged to examine and discuss illustrations.
Day 2	Bibliotherapy (Read Beginning of Book)	-The positive social skill is reviewed and students are encouraged to discuss its application in their lives. - Students begin listening to the weekly text and are encouraged to focus on the problem the text presents. - Students are encouraged to relate the text to their own lives.
Day 3	Bibliotherapy (Read End of Book)	- The positive social skill is reviewed and students are encouraged to discuss its application in their lives. - Students continue listening to the weekly text and are encouraged to focus on the solution the text offers. - Students are encouraged to relate the text to their own lives.
Day 4	Photo-Talk	- Students are asked to briefly summarize the bibliotherapy book. - A photograph of children in the class relating to the positive social skill is shown and discussed. - Students are encouraged to think critically about practicing the positive social skill in the classroom.

During the photo-talk (Serriere, 2010) portion of the intervention, digital photographs of children in the class were presented on the computer for all of the students to examine and discuss. Each week, the photographs aligned with the positive social behavior presented and discussed in the bibliotherapy book. Week one's photographs showed students' faces with various emotions; week two's photograph featured students including others; week three's photograph showed students sharing; and week four's photograph portrayed students cooperating. Before a photograph was displayed to the whole group, the individuals pictured had a chance to preview the photograph and were asked permission for the photograph to be shown.

Each photo-talk (Serriere, 2010) followed the same protocol. First, the photograph was presented for all of the students to examine. Then, the students pictured in the photograph had the opportunity to tell about what was happening in the photograph. Next, the conversation was opened to the whole group with the teacher guiding the conversation through questioning. The questions prompted the students to discuss what was occurring in the photograph, how the photograph was similar or different from the featured book, and what could have happened next. Finally, students were asked to connect the positive social skill depicted in the photo to their own life experiences.

Throughout the intervention, data were collected through observation, tally sheets, and anecdotal notes. The following section consists of a description of data collection.

Description of Data Collection

Data were collected through direct observation each day of the intervention (16 total days). Two kinds of data were collected: quantitative and qualitative. To collect quantitative data, the participants were observed each day during their 30-minute center time. If an instance of relational aggression or one of the targeted positive social behaviors (using feeling words, including others, sharing, and/or cooperating) was observed or reported by a participant or a peer during the 30-minutes of center time, it was recorded on a tally sheet. An example of these tally sheets can be found in Appendix B: Data Collection Tally Sheet. The information from these tally sheets was analyzed to determine the frequency of relational aggression and positive social behaviors each week.

In addition to the frequency of relational aggression and positive social behavior, anecdotal notes were taken to record students' discussions during bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serreiere, 2010) as well as to record the ways in which students interacted with one another and

the ways students solved social problems. This data, which largely describes student behaviors and language, is qualitative in nature. These anecdotal notes were analyzed to identify patterns in student behaviors and language use.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the use of two narrative-based interventions -- bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) -- as a means of decreasing relational aggression and increasing positive social behavior in preschool students. Four K3 students participated in the study, each representing a different tendency in social play behavior. Over the course of four weeks, the students participated in daily interventions consisting of bibliotheraphy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010). The themes of these interventions were using words to describe feelings, including others, sharing and cooperating. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through direct observation using tally sheets and anecdotal notes. The results of this study are presented in chapter four.

Chapter 4

Results

The following results were compiled after four K3 students completed a four-week intervention that used picture books and photographs of the students to present positive social behavior and discourage relational aggression. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the use of two narrative-based interventions -- bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) -- as a means of decreasing relational aggression and increasing positive social behavior in preschool students. Throughout the intervention, quantitative and qualitative data were collected through direct observation. Tally sheets were used to record acts of relational aggression or targeted positive social behaviors. Anecdotal notes were used to record descriptions of students' behavior and language. This chapter presents the data gathered during the interventions and is organized into five sections: relational aggression, positive social behaviors, the perpetrator of relational aggression, the victim of relational aggression, and language use.

Relational Aggression

According to anecdotal notes, relational aggression took many forms in the classroom. Four basic categories of relational aggression observed during the study are verbal, physical, blatant and subtle. Most acts of relational aggression belonged to two or more categories. For instance, if Student A tells Student B that she will not be invited to her birthday party, that is an example of relational aggression that is both verbal and blatant. Table 4 provides examples of relational aggression observed during the study.

Table 4	
Examples of Relational Aggression	
Verbal Relational Aggression	• "Student A can be my sister and Student B can be my aunt. Student C can't be in the family." • "This game is full."
Physical Relational Aggression	• Arranging chairs at a center so that one student is sitting by herself. • Student A pulls Student B away from Student C.
Blatant Relational Aggression	• "We are princesses but you can't be one." • Student A rolls eyes and grumbles when Student B chooses the same center.
Subtle Relational Aggression	• Inviting some but not all peers to play a game. • Student A cuts out photographs at the art center and distributes them to all female classmates except Student B.

Direct observation was used to record the daily number of acts of relational aggression each student committed. Acts of relational aggression observed by the teacher or reported by a peer were recorded on a tally sheet. Figure 1 shows the weekly number of acts of relational aggression committed by each student. Overall, the students decreased their use of relational aggression. In week one, a total of nine acts of relational aggression were recorded while in week four, one act of relational aggression was recorded.
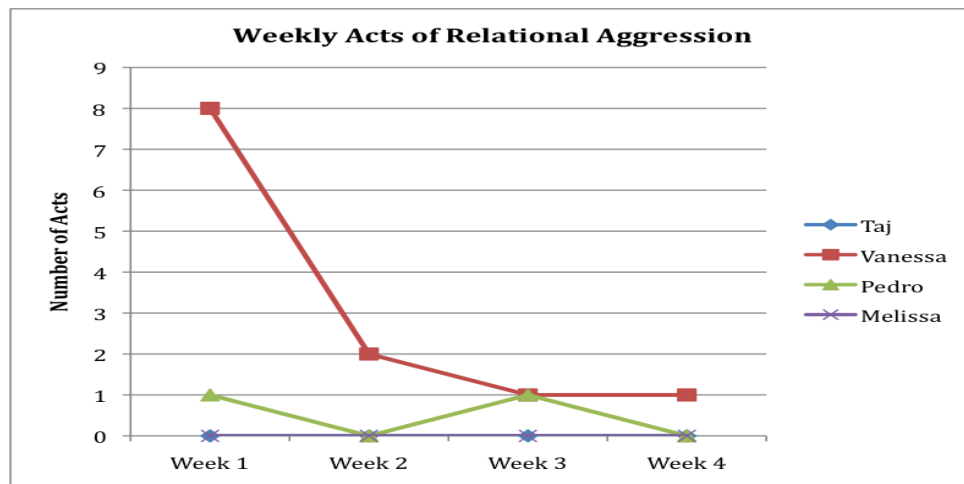

Figure 1. Weekly acts of relational aggression. This graph shows the number of acts of relational aggression committed by each student each week.

As Figure 1 suggests, one participant committed the majority of the acts of relational aggression. Throughout the course of the investigation, Vanessa committed a total of 12 acts of relational aggression while Pedro committed two acts and Taj and Melissa committed no acts of relational aggression. Figure 2 illustrates that Vanessa committed 86% of the acts of relational aggression recorded during the study.
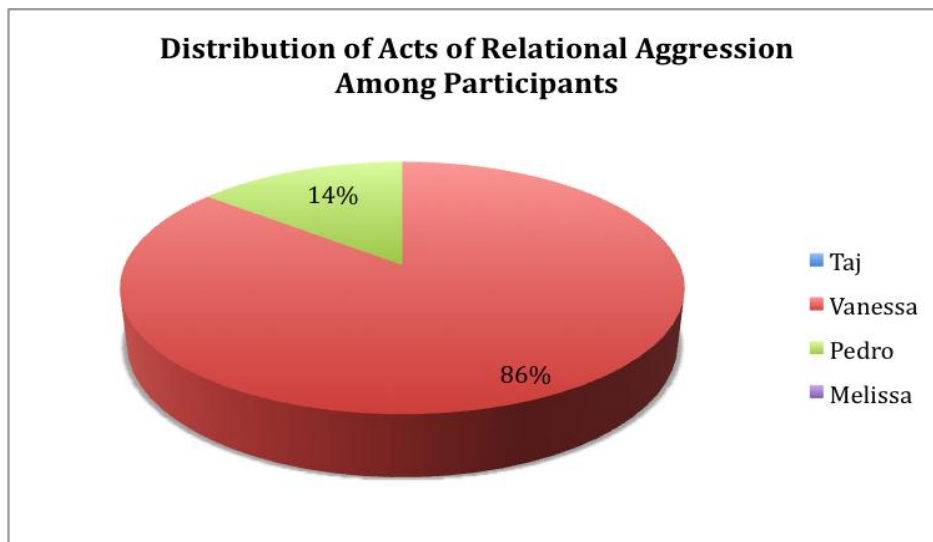

Figure 2. Distribution of acts of relational aggression by participants. A total of 14 acts of relational aggression were recorded during the study; this chart shows the distribution of those acts among each participant.

Considered together, Table 4, Figure 1, and Figure 2 suggest three findings. First, during the investigation, relational aggression occurred in many forms. Additionally, the total number of instances of relational aggression decreased during the intervention. Also, one student was responsible for the majority of relational aggression in the study. Next, data collected about the targeted postive social behaviors will be presented.

Positive Social Behavior

The intervention focused on four positive social behaviors: using words to describe emotions, including others, sharing, and cooperating. Annecdotal notes suggest that students

used all of these prosocial behaviors during the intervention. Examples of these behaviors are

show in Table 5.

Table 5	
Examples of Positive Social Behavior	
Using Words to Describe Emotions	• "I'm sad because I want to play with both friends." • "I'm excited. My nana comes today."
Including Others	• "Let's all build build the zoo." • "Come help me with these puzzles."
Sharing	• Students take turns with glue. • "You can use this one (watering can). I don't need it."
Cooperating	• Four children work together to move a heavy box. • When one child spills beads at the art center, other children help pick up.

Throughout the intervention, tally sheets were used to record teacher observed and peer

or participant reported instances of these four targeted positive social behaviors. Figure 3 shows

the weekly number of the targeted postive social behaviors recorded for each participant. During

the intervention, all participants increased their use of the targeted postive social behaviors. In

week one, a total of eight acts of targeted positive social behavior were recorded while in week

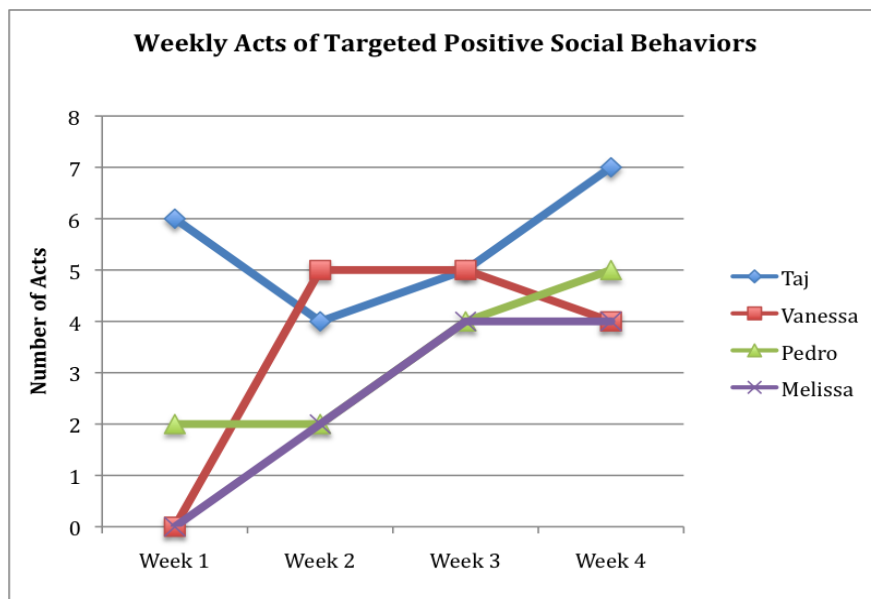four, a total of 20 acts of targeted postive social behaviors were recorded.

Figure 3. Weekly acts of targeted positive social behaviors. This graph shows the number of acts of the targeted positive social behaviors committed each week.

As Figure 3 suggests, all students used the positive social behaviors and all students

increased their use of these behaviors during the intervention. Vanessa and Melissa increased

their use of the postive social behaviors from zero instances in week one to four instances each in

week four. Pedro increased his use of positive social behaviors from two instances in week one

to five instances in week four. Taj also increased his use of positive social behaviors although his

increase was less significant—from six instances in week one to seven instances in week four. It

should be noted however, that Taj tended to use more positive social behavior than his peers at

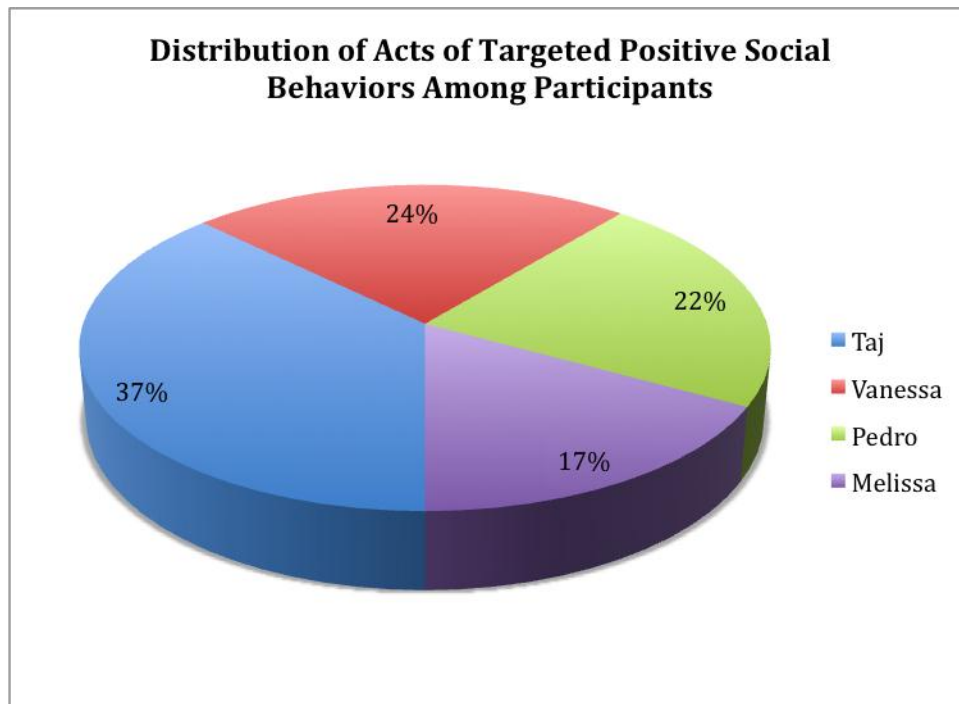the beginning of the intervention.

Figure 4. Distribution of acts of targeted positive social behaviors among participants. A total of 59 instances of positive social behavior were recorded during the study; this chart shows the distribution of those instances among the participants.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of acts of targeted positive social behavior among the

participants. Although Taj had the least increase in his number of targeted positive social

behavior, he did commit more acts of this behavior than the other participants. Figure 4 also

suggests that all of the participants used the positive social behaviors. This was unlike relational

aggression, which was predomenetly used by one participant.

Another trend in positive social behaviors was the increasing tendency for participants or

peers to report instances of positive social behavior. For example, in week three, Vanessa

reported to the teacher that she shared puzzle pieces with another child; in week four, Taj

reported to the teacher that he cooperated with other students to clean the block area. Figure 5

illustrates this trend. Each week, the number of child-reported instances of positive social
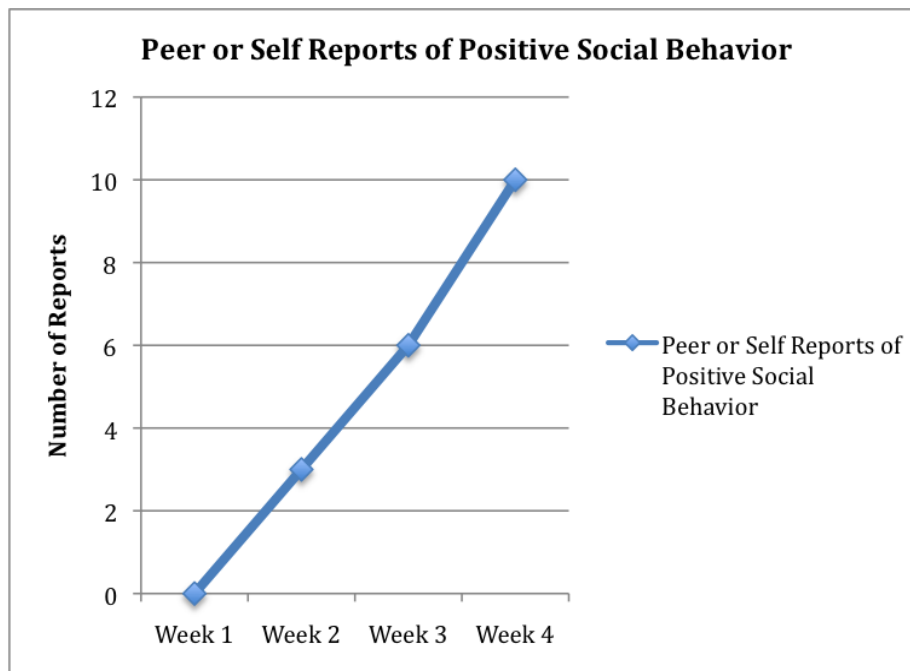
behavior increased.

Figure 5. Peer or self reports of positive social behaviors. This graph shows the number of times
the participants themselves or a peer reported positive social behavior to the teacher.

In Summary, the data collected about postive social behavior suggest that during the

course of the intervention, all participants increased their use of positive social behavior. Unlike

relational aggression which was largely used by one participant, positive social behavior was

used by all the participants. Additionally, throughout the course of the study, children reported

more instances of positive social behavior. Next, the behavior of one child, Vanessa, who frequently use relational aggression will be considered.

Perpetrator of Relational Aggression

At the beginning of the intervention, Vanessa used relational agression very frequently. As positive social behaviors were introduced and discussed, Vanessa began to use less relational aggression. Figure 6 compares Vanessa's use of relational aggression and her use of positive social behaviors throughout the intervention. Her behavior changed the most from week one to week two; from eight acts of relational aggression to two acts of relational aggression and from zero acts of positive social behavior to five acts of positve social behavior.
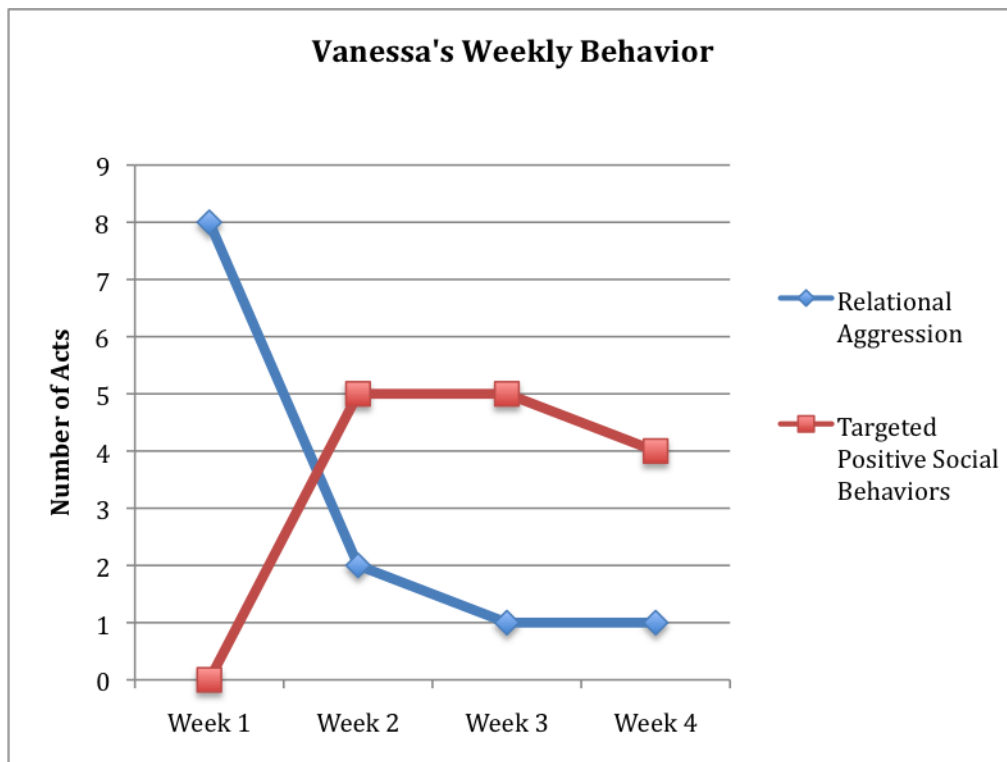

Figure 6. Vanessa's weekly behavior. During the intervention, Vanessa's use of relational aggression decreased while her use of positive social behaviors increased.

As the intervention progressed, Vanessa used less relational aggression and more postive social behaviors This suggests that the intervention was a successful way to decrease Vanessa's use of relational aggresssion and increase her use of positive social behaviors. The next section

discusses the data gathered about a student, Melissa, who was often the victim of relational

aggression.

Victim of Relational Aggression

When an act of relational aggression occurred during the intervention, the perpetrator and

the victim were recorded in the tally sheet. The section above dicusses the results for the

participant who most often commited acts of relational aggression. This section presents the

results for the child who was most often the victim of relational aggression. Figure 7 compares

the total acts of relational aggression to the acts of relational aggression that were aimed at

Melissa, excluding her from social interaction. As Figure 7 suggests, Melissa was the victim of

50% of the relational aggression observed during the intervention. Even as the total amount of

relational aggression decreased in weeks two, three , and four, Melissa continued to be

victimized at a high rate.

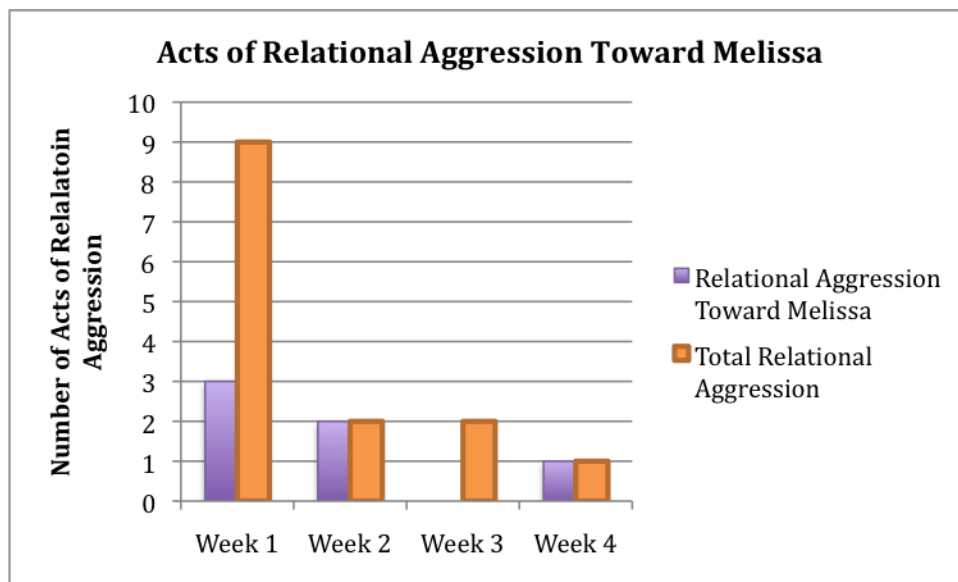*Figure 7.* Acts of relational aggression toward Melissa. This graph compares the total acts of
relational aggression to acts of relational aggression toward Melissa demonstrating that Melissa
was victimized at a high rate.

Another finding about Melissa is evident in Figure 2 and Figure 4. Melissa exhibited the

fewest acts of postive social behavior and exhibited no acts of relational aggression. Melissa was

not using either of these strategies as often as other participants. Annecdotal notes suggest that

Melissa tended to spend time playing by herself or hovering outside of a group of playing peers.

In several instances, Melissa was invited to join play and apparently wanted to, but quickly

became disengaged from the playgroup. For example, in week three, Melissa was invited to join

a fast-paced tag game; she began playing but did not keep up with the group and after less than a

minute, reported to the teacher that nobody would play with her. This suggests that Melissa is

less proactive in her social interactions than her peers. In summary, the data indicate two

findings about Melissa: she is often the victim of relational aggression and she is not as proactive

in her play behaviors as are her peers.

The next section examines the language used by students during bibliotherapy, photo-

talks (Serriere, 2010) and in interactions outside of the intervention.

Language Use

Throughout the intervention, annecdotal notes were used to record the language of

students during bibliotherapy, photo-talks (Serriere, 2010), and everyday interactions. Table 6

presents examples of language use in these situations. During bilbiotherapy, it was very common

for students to refer to their experiences at home and in the classroom. Likewise, during

everyday interactions, the students would often refer to the concepts being taught during the

intervention and would sometimes refer to the bibliotherapy text itself. This suggests that

students were able to apply the positive social behaviors presented and discussed during

bibliotherapy to their everyday social lives.

Table 6 Language Use	
During Bibliotherapy	• "I feel sad, kind of like brown, when my sister won't play with me." (While Reading *My Many Colored Days*) • "Outside I play by myself. Nobody plays with me. I'm like Big Al but, I don't cry." (While Reading *Big Al*) • "Sometimes you don't want to share something. If you are playing in the house and you have the camera, you don't want to give the camera to somebody else. Then, other kids do not want to play with you. If you do share, you will have friends." (While Reading *The Rainbow Fish*)
During Photo-talks	• Student A: "I was mad because I did not have the cars." Student B: "Frustrated is like mad because frustrated…. he is frustrated that he can't find the cars." (During Week 1 photo-talk) • "When I asked Vanessa to play with us I was being a helper, she maybe was lonely playing before." (During Week 2 photo-talk)
During Everyday Interactions	• "I am sad that you won't play with both of us." (During Week 1 Center time) • "You have all the glue, you have to share. The rainbow fish shares." (During Week 3 Center Time) • "Look, we are working together! We'll make soup to share" (During Week 4 Center Time)

While Table 6 presents examples of spontaneous, non-prompted, student speech, the

language used during bibliotherapy was also used by the teacher to facilitate social problem

solving. The following example is a discussion between the teacher and Pedro after Pedro had

told another student that she couldn't play with him.

Teacher: What did you just tell [student a]?

Pedro: I don't want to play with her. I am just playing with [student b].

Teacher: Hmmm. This reminds me of what happened to Big Al. What do you remember

about Big Al?

Pedro: The other fish wouldn't play with him. He was sad and cried big tears in the

ocean.

Teacher: How do you think [student a] is feeling?

Pedro: She maybe is crying. Ok, she can play with us. I'll go tell her.

This dialogue illustrates the teacher's use of language and concepts from the bibliotherapy texts to encourage social problem solving among the students. It suggests that the bibliotherapy texts provided a common language that could be used in social situations. In conlusion, the language used by students and the teacher during the study indicate two findings: students were able to connect the intervention to their everyday experiences and the language from bibliotherapy texts was used for social problem solving.

Summary

In summary, the results of this study suggest that bibliotherapy and photo-talks can decrease the frequency of relational aggression used by preschoolers while increasing the frequency of positive social behavior. Overall, the use of relational aggression decreased during the intervention while the use of the targeted positive social behaviors increased. There was one student who committed the majority of acts of relational aggression. However, this students' use of relational aggression decreased when her use of positive social behavior increased. Likewise, there was one student who was often the victim of relational aggression. Although her use of positive social behaviors increased during the study, she continued to be more withdrawn than her peers. Finally, languague use during the investigation suggests that the students were able to apply the concepts from the intervention to their everyday lives. These results were presented in

Chapter four. Chapter five will connect this case study to existing research, explain the results,

discuss strengths and limitations, and recommend further research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

This study examined the impact of bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) on the use of relational aggression among preschoolers. Children as young as three use relational aggression to exclude others from social interactions. By reacting to relational aggression and providing alternatives, adults help children develop the skills needed to maintain positive relationships. Consequently, this action research aligns with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (2011) in the domain of social and emotional development. Specifically, this research addresses the following standards:

- Understands and responds to others' emotions.

- Engages in social interaction and plays with others.

- Engages in social problem solving behavior and learns to resolve conflict. (p. 26-27)

The results of the study suggest that bibliotherapy and photo-talks can decrease the frequency of relational aggression used by preschoolers while increasing the frequency of positive social behavior. This chapter will connect this study to existing research, explain the results, discuss strengths and limitations, and recommend further research.

Connections to Existing Research

This research was initiated in response to the relational aggression that I observed in my classroom; on a daily basis I noticed my students telling each other, "you can't play." Indeed, research has shown that children as young as three use relational aggression to exlude others from social interaction (Crick et al., 1997). In my classroom, this exclusion took many forms. Sometimes, I would overhear children planning not to play with another child. Other times, I would see a child pout and leave a play center if a specific peer tried to join that center. Related

research has shown that preschool children use a variety of methods to exlude others from play including direct exclusion, mitigated exclusion, planning exlusion and ignoring (Fanger et al., 2012).

The immediate effects of relational aggression in my classroom were obvious. On one hand, the excluded children often had hurt feelings and ended up playing by themselves . On the other hand, the children that excluded others seemed to have difficulty maintaining positive relationships. Furthermore, research about play behavior has shown that the way a child plays is related to that child's learning behavior (Coolahan et al., 2000). This suggests that a child who is excluded from play may withdraw from academic activities, while a child who uses relational aggression to disrupt play may also disrupt academic activities. Because of the nature and the consequences of relational aggression in my classroom, I decided to plan an intervention that would discourage relational aggression by encouraging positive social skills. Other research has shown that interventions that teach positive social skills reduce aggressive behavior in preschool students (Conner and Fraser, 2011).

I planned the intervention with regard to previous research that had shown the connection between communication skills and behavior. As demonstrated by Longoria et al. (2007), there is a positive correlation between language skills and behavior; children with better language skills tend to show better social behavior. Specifically, research has shown that children who understand and can discuss emotions are more likely to demonstrate positive social behavior (Belacchi and Farina, 2010). Consequently, in planning the intervention for this action research, I chose to concentrate on language-rich intervention methods that would promote discussion about emotions.

The intervention that I implemented consisted of two language-rich methods: bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010). During bibliotherapy, I read specifically selected books out loud to the students and encouraged discussion of these books. Other research has shown that reading fiction promotes discussion of personal feelings and experiences (Amer, 1999). Indeed, I found that my students willingly discussed their experiences and feelings during bibliotherapy sessions. Previous research had also shown that participation in bibliotherapy can decrease the frequency of aggressive behavior (Shechtmann, 1999). This corresponds with the results of my action research, which suggest that students decreased their use of relational aggression while participating in bibliotherapy. In addition to using bibliotherapy to promote discussion about feelings and positive social behavior, I also conducted photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) as part of the intervention. During the photo-talks, the students reflected on their behavior and often made connections between the photograph and the bibliotherapy book. This is consistent with other research that has shown that preschoolers can use photographs of themselves and peers to reflect on their behavior (Serriere, 2010).

In the following section, the results of my action research will be explained.

Explanation of Results

The results of this action research, which are presented in chapter four, are organized into five sections: relational aggression, positive social behavior, the perpetrator of relational aggression, the victim of relational aggression, and language use. In this section, the results will be examined, explained, and analyzed in light of other research.

During the course of the research, many instances of relational aggression were observed. It was found that relational aggression could be verbal or non-verbal as well as blatant or subtle. This is consistent with earlier research that found preschool children to use a variety of methods

to exclude others from play (Fanger et al, 201). Just as preschool children can use several

strategies to achieve other communicative goals, they also demonstrate flexibility in their use of

relational aggression.

The overall frequency of relational aggression decreased during the intervention. In week

one, a total of nine acts of relational aggression were recorded while in week four, one act of

relational aggression was recorded. This is consistent with Shectmann's finding that children

who participated in bibliotherapy decreased their use of aggressive behavior (1999). The

decrease in relational aggression suggests that the intervention used in this study is an effective

way to reduce relational aggression in preschool students.

While there was a decrease in relational aggression, there was an increase in the overall

frequency of the positive social behaviors (using feeling words, including others, sharing, and

cooperating). In week one, a total of eight acts of targeted positive social behavior were recorded

while in week four, a total of 20 acts of targeted postive social behaviors were recorded. These

results correspond to earlier research in which preschool children increased their social skills as a

result of intervention (Conner and Fraser, 2011). This suggests that reading picture books and

using photographs to discuss positive social behaviors does increase preschoolers' use of these

behaviors.

Another trend in positive social behaviors was the increasing tendency for participants or

peers to report instances of positive social behavior. Each week, the number of child-reported

instances of positive social behavior increased. One explanation for this phenomenon is an

increased awareness of these behaviors; as children read books about using feeling words,

including others, sharing, and cooperation, they became more aware of these behaviors.

Awareness alone, however, does not explain the children's tendency to report to the teacher;

children are aware of many things that they do not tell the teacher. In addition to being aware of the behaviors, it seems like the children understood that the behaviors were important to the classroom. This suggests that the intervention made children more aware of postive social behaviors and encouraged the children to value these behaviors.

Another finding of this study was that one child tended to use more relational aggression than other children. Vanessa committed 86% of the acts of relational aggression recorded during the study. In an earlier study, children identified as aggressive were either physically aggressive or relationally aggressive but not both (Crick et al., 1997). Vanessa is an example of a child who uses relational strategies for aggression and she uses these strategies more often than her peers do. As the intervention progressed, Vanessa used less relational aggression and more postive social behaviors. This suggests that the intervention was a successful way to decrease Vanessa's use of relational aggresssion and increase her use of positive social behaviors.

While Vanessa tended to implement a large amount of relational aggression, Melissa tended to often be the victim of such aggression. Melissa was the victim of 50% of the relational aggression observed during the intervention. Additionally, Melissa demonstrated the least amound of proactive behavior; compared to her peers she used less positive social behavior and no relational aggression. In effect, Melissa tended to be very withdrawn and spent most of her time playing by herself or watching others play. This study did not establish that relational aggression caused Melissa to become shy, but consistent exclusion by her peers has most likely shaped some of Melissa's withdrawn behavior. According to Coolahan et al., a child who demonstrates withdrawn play behavior will most likely be a passive student (2000). Consequently, Melissa's difficulties in interacting with her peers may influence her academics. During the intervention, Melissa's use of positive social behavior did increase but it remained

below the levels of her peers. Perhaps Melissa would have benefited from reading and discussing books about proactively joining play.

The last finding of this research relates to language used by students during the intervention. During bilbiotherapy, it was very common for students to refer to their experiences at home and in the classroom. Likewise, during everyday interactions, the students would often refer to the concepts being taught during the intervention and would sometimes refer to the bibliotherapy text itself. This suggests that students were able to apply the positive social behaviors presented and discussed during bibliotherapy to their everyday social lives. This is consistent with earlier research in which participants in bibliotherapy expressed their feelings and experiences using the titles or characters from books as a metaphor (Shechtmann, 1999). In this intervention, the texts used for bibliotherapy provided a shared language that the students and teachers could use to talk about feelings and behavior.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) can decrease the frequency of relational aggression used by preschoolers while increasing the frequency of positive social behavior. In the following section, the strengths and limitations of this research will be discussed.

Strengths and Limitations

As discussed in the previous section, the results of this study suggest that bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) can decrease preschoolers' use of relational aggression and increase their use of positive social behaviors. This section will examine the strengths and limitations of the research. One strength of the intervention was its foundation in research-based strategies. Both bibliotherapy and photo-talks had been successfully used with preschool children to encourage discussion and change behavior. Another strength of the intervention was its

connection to state standards. Not only does the intervention directly target the domain of social and emotional development, it also incorporates language and books so that teachers can simultaneously meet literacy standards. Because of its alignment to state standards, this intervention can be easily incorporated into the school day.

There were, however, limitations to this study. One limitation was the method used for data collection. Because data were collected based on teacher observations, it is likely that specific behaviors went unnoticed. Additionally, the case study format with a small participant pool prevents generalization of results to a larger population. Finally, the format of the intervention targeted children who use relational aggression as opposed to children who are victims of relational aggression. In the following section, some of these limitations will be addressed and recommendations will be made for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the limitations explained in the previous section, it is possible to make recommendations for future research about relational aggression among preschoolers. One potential area for future research is the area of data collection. Early research about relational aggression relied on teacher reports and direct observation (McEvoy et al., 2003). More recent research, however, has used wireless technology, listening to children's conversations and recording instances of relational aggression (Fanger et al., 2003). To collect the best information, more research is needed about best practices in data collection.

An additional recommendation for future research would be to expand the pool of participants. This study collected data for only four participants. It would be interesting to note if the trends observed in these four participants would also be found in a larger population. Moreover, incorporation of a larger sample would make findings more universally useful.

Also, future research should consider roles of students in the classroom. This research found one child that used the majority of relational aggression and another child who was often a victim. Other studies have also found children to take certain social roles (Crick et al, 1997; Coolahan et al., 2000). Given these roles; it would be interesting to investigate if certain methods of intervention work better for certain children. For example, what kind of intervention would best empower a victim of relational aggression?

Another recommendation would be to study the relationship between social problem solving and language. Specifically, how does language use change during an intervention? Research has shown that conversations can change a child's emotional understanding (Dunn et al., 1991). Likewise, anecdotal notes from this research suggest that children's language began to reflect the language used in bibliotherapy and photo-talks (Serriere, 2010). It would be interesting, however, to systematically collect data about his phenomenon. In summary, further research is recommended with a larger pool of participants in the areas of data collection, interventions for victims of relational aggression, and language use during interventions.

Summary

The results of this study suggest that combining bibliotherapy with photo-talks (Serriere, 2010) is an effective intervention to decrease relational aggression and increase positive social behavior among preschoolers. Throughout the intervention, instances of relational aggression decreased while instances of positive social behavior increased. Although there were limitations to this research, it does offer a research-based and standards-based strategy to be used in creating a positive classroom culture. Future research could extend this strategy for use in a larger population. By reducing relational aggression in the classroom, educators will create safer classrooms and help all children progress in their social and emotional development.

Appendix A

Books Used for Bibliotherapy

Title and Author of Book	Description of Book	Positive Social Skill Embedded in Book
My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss illustrated by Steven Johnson and Lou Fancher	A colorful, rhyming book that presents a wide range of emotions as colors and animals.	Feeling Words
Big Al by Andrew Clements illustrated by Yoshi	Big Al is a fish who wants to make friends but the other fish are scared of him and will not be his friend. Big Al feels very lonely until the day he gets a chance to rescue the other fish and they recognize him as the friendly fish that he is.	Including Others
The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister	The rainbow fish is the most beautiful fish in the ocean because of his sparkling scales. When he refuses to share his scales with the other fish, however, they will not play with him. Rainbow fish is lonely and sad until he shares his scales with the other fish.	Sharing
Stone Soup by Marcia Brown	When hungry visitors come to a village, the villagers first want to hide all their food. The visitors show them that by working together, everybody can combine what they have and make a delicious soup.	Cooperation

Appendix B

Data Collection Tally Sheet

Tally Sheet for **Targeted Positive Social Behaviors** (Using feeling words, including others, sharing, and cooperating)		
Date:		
Initials of Participant	**Teacher-Observed Positive Social Behaviors**	**Peer-Reported Positive Social Behaviors**

Tally Sheet for **Relational Aggression** (Verbal, Non-Verbal Exclusion or Threatened Exclusion of Others)		
Date:		
Initials of Participant	**Teacher-Observed Relational Aggression**	**Peer-Reported Relational Aggression**

References

Achenbach, T.M. (1991). *Manual for child behavior checklist/4-18 and 1991 profile.*

    Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Department of Psychiatry.

Amer, K.. (1999). Bibliotherapy: Using fiction to help children in two populations discuss

    feelings. *Pediatric Nursing, 25*(1), 91-95.

Belachi, C., & Farina, E. (2010). Prosocial/hostile roles and emotion comprehension in

    preschoolers. *Aggressive behavior, 36*, 371-389.

Benish, T.M., & Bramlett, R.K. (2011). Using social stories to decrease aggression and increase

    positive peer interactions in normally developing pre-school children. *Educational*

    Psychology in Practice,27(1), 1-17.

Bramlett, R.K., & Barnett, D.W. (1993). The development of a direct observation code for use

    in preschool settings. *School Psychology Review, 22,* 49-61.

Brown, M. (1947). *Stone soup.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Trade Sales.

Clements, A., & Yoshi. (1997). *Big Al.* New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Conner, N.W. , & Fraser, M.W. (2011). Preschool social-emotional skills training: A controlled

    pilot of the making choices and strong families programs. *Research on Social Work*

    Practice, 21(6), 699-711.

Coolahan, K., Fantuzzo, J., Mendez, J., & McDermott, P. (2000). Preschool peer interactions

    and readiness to learn: Relationship between classroom peer play and learning behaviors

    and conduct. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*(3), 458-465.

Crick, N.R., Casas, J.F., & Mosher, M. (1997). Relational and overt aggression in preschool.

    Developmental Psychology,33(4), 579-588.

Dunn, J., Brown, J., & Beardsall, L. (1991). Family talk about feeling states and children's later understanding of others' emotions. *Developmental Psychology, 27*(3), 448-455.

Dunn, L.M., & Dunn, L.M. (1981). *Peabody picture vocabulary test: Revised manual for forms L and M.* Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

Fanger, S.M, Frankel, L.A, & Hazen, N. (2012). Peer exclusion in preschool children's play: Naturalistic observations in a playground setting. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 58*(2), 224-254.

Gray, C.A. (1995). Teaching children with autism to "read" social situations. In K.A. Quill (Ed.), *Teaching children with autism; strategies to enhance communication and socialization* (pp. 219-241). Albany, NY: Delmar.

Hemmeter, M.L. (2012). Book list: Using books to develop social emotional development. Retrieved from: http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html.

Levine, S., Elzey, F.F., & Lewis, M. (1996). *Manual for the California preschool social competency scale.* Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Longoria, A.Q., Page, M.C., Hubbs-Tait, L., & Kennison, S.M. (2009). Relationship between kindergarten children's language ability and social competence. *Early Child Development and Care, 179*(7), 919-929.

McCarthy, C. (1972). *Manual for the McCarthy scales of children's abilities.* New York: Psychological Corporation.

McEvoy, M.A., Estrem, T.L., Rodriguez, M.C., & Olson, M.L. (2003). Assessing relational and physical aggression among preschool children: Intermethod agreement. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 23*(51), 51-61.

Pfister, M. (1992). *The rainbow fish.* New York, NY: North South Books.

Rothenberg, B. (1970). Children's social sensitivity and the relationship to interpersonal competence, intrapersonal comfort and intellectual level. *Developmental Psychology, 2,* 335-350.

Serriere, S.C. (2010). Carpet-time democracy: Digital photography and social consciousness in the early childhood classroom. *The Social Studies, 101*(2), 60-68.

Seuss, D., Johnson, S., & Fancher, L. (1996). *My many colored days.* New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Shechtman, Z. (2003). Bibliotherapy: An indirect approach to treatment of childhood aggression. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 30*(1), 39-53.

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Steering Committee. (2011). *The Wisconsin model early learning standards: Birth to first grade* (Bulletin No. 01078). Madison, WI: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.