


Summer 2015

Impact of a Teacher Training Program to Increase Informative Praise and Decrease Commands and Negative Comments

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IMPACT OF A TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM TO INCREASE INFORMATIVE
PRAISE AND DECREASE COMMANDS AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS

A Specialist Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

By
Lauren Binford

August 2015

IMPACT OF A TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM TO INCREASE INFORMATIVE
PRAISE AND DECREASE COMMANDS AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank God for instilling in me the skill sets necessary, and blessing me with the opportunity, to attend graduate school and pursue my career as a school psychologist. I would also like to extend a sincere appreciation to my thesis chair, Dr. Elizabeth Lemerise. She has provided continued guidance and support during this process. Without her knowledge and expertise this study and project would not have been possible. I would also like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Carl Myers and Dr. Elizabeth Jones. Not only have they provided support during this research process, but they been mentors throughout my three years of graduate school as I prepare to begin my career as a school psychologist.

I have also been blessed with a wonderful support system. My father, Paul Binford, has instilled in me the importance of my education, performing to my fullest capabilities, and becoming a woman of character. My mother, Kim Binford, has provided encouragement to pursue my dreams and has served as a mentor in working with children in special education. I would like to thank my brother, Aaron Binford, for being a constant source of laughter and comedic relief throughout my education career. I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation to my grandparents who have gone above and beyond in their support for me. They have always put others before themselves and their unconditional love for me is an exemplar of that. I also would not have made it to this point without my friends in my cohort, who continually keep me grounded and have helped me continue to persevere through difficult times. I am a better person because of each and every one of you.

CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Method.....	12
Results.....	17
Discussion.....	21
References.....	25
Appendix A: IRB Letter.....	30
Appendix B: Schedule of Training.....	32
Appendix C: Incredible Years Training Materials.....	33

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Observation and Training Layout.....	13
Table 2.Total Teacher Feedback by Wave: Circle and Center Time.....	17
Table 3.Total Teacher Feedback by Wave: Circle Time.....	18
Table 4. Total Teacher Feedback by Wave: Center Time.....	20

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August 2015

47 Pages

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Research has found that many children who come from a low socioeconomic background often begin their schooling careers behind most students. Head Start programs around the nation are utilized to close the gap in achievement, by providing those students with the educational support necessary to prepare them for future schooling. However, when assessed with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Head Start programs have been found to be weaker in the area of Instructional Support. As a result, teachers are falling short in the way they provide feedback, incorporate higher thinking skills, and foster language development. In order to strengthen the instructional support component, research has supported the utilization of professional development to foster ways of incorporating informative praise which then encourages the desired behaviors and provides a rich language model for children

This study was designed to provide professional development to Head Start teachers in order to increase informative praise and decrease commands and negative comments utilized by teachers. An increase in the number of general praise statements and informative praise statements used directly after the training was administered was found. However, as time progressed, the amount of praise decreased back to the levels before the training was given. It was also found that negative comments and commands decreased continuously throughout all observations after the training.

Introduction

School Readiness

There is a significant achievement gap between students who are from economically advantaged backgrounds as compared to students from economically disadvantaged homes. Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a significant role in a child's readiness for school. Evans (2004) reported that children who come from economically disadvantaged homes read less, watch more television, have lower quality diets, and often attend lower quality daycare. Other risk factors associated with low-income families include poor nutrition and physical health (Brooks-Gunn, Britto, & Brady, 1999). As children prepare for schooling, their brains are going through a sensitive time of expansion and growth. When children experience the above risk factors, neurological development can be compromised (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Hart and Risley (1995) conducted a longitudinal study that found that children who live in less-privileged homes are likely to hear 30 million fewer words by the age of three than those who live in higher income home environments. Low SES families often have less access to books and other resources that aid in early-literacy skills. Smith and Dixon (1995) reported that children who come from impoverished homes, who are under the age five, often have less exposure and meaningful interactions with printed material as compared to middle-class children. Middle class parents often have more opportunities to converse with their children and also have the resources to aid in early vocabulary development such as reading books with their children. This lack of opportunities places low-income preschoolers at an extreme disadvantage when entering school, as literacy skills are developed through communication with others and exposure to vocabulary.

Sawchuk (2009) reported that when children are behind in their early-literacy skills they are unable to close the academic gap with their peers in elementary school. Therefore, preschool is a critical point in time when children can be instilled with the academic and social-emotional skills necessary to enter kindergarten and subsequent schooling.

School-readiness is a vital component for a positive school outcome. Typically those who are behind in school readiness, prior to entering elementary school, are children who fall into the category of high-risk populations. It was found that children who are exposed to multiple poverty-related risks are more likely to experience behavior problems and to be less socially competent and emotionally self-regulated than children who come from economically advantaged environments (West, Denton, & Reaney, 2001). Unfortunately, these children continue to fall behind in academic achievement and social competence and the gap continually widens as these children continue throughout their schooling careers (Huffman, Mehlinger, & Kerivan, 2000).

Head Start's Role in Improving School Readiness

Head Start was first established in 1965. The purpose of Head Start is to provide an all-inclusive developmental program for children from low SES families. The program has focused on meeting the nutritional, mental health, social, and educational needs of families with preschool children (Hammer, Farkas, & Maczuga, 2010). Head Start welcomes children from a variety of educational and cultural backgrounds. It is through this educational program that some preschoolers are receiving the skills necessary to be ready for their schooling career.

Attending high-quality institutions for early childhood education, like Head Start, is important for children beginning their schooling careers. Barnett (2011) found that

children who attend institutions like Head Start are more likely to have success in school than those who do not participate in these types of programs. Although, these programs are beneficial they often fall short of the standard necessary to optimize academic, social, and developmental gains for preschool age children (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009).

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is used to assess the educational and social-emotional climate of the Head Start classroom. Zan and Donegan-Ritter (2014) reported that the CLASS is an instrument used to “assess and quantify aspects of classroom quality that are described as process variables related to how teachers implement curriculum and interact with children in ways that support children’s social and academic performance” (p. 94). The CLASS is divided into three different domains of teacher-child interactions: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. The Emotional Support domain specifically looks at the ways a teacher creates and encourages a positive classroom environment through his/her interactions with students. The Classroom Organization domain takes into account classroom routines and procedures, and the overall management of children’s behavior in the classroom setting. The Instructional Support domain includes the methods teachers use in order to carry out teaching the curriculum and the ways teachers foster overall cognitive and language development.

Historically it has been found that, when assessed with the CLASS, prekindergarten classrooms often fall short in the areas of Instructional Support (e.g., Early et al., 2005). The Instructional Support aspect of the CLASS takes into account concept development and quality of feedback, which are the ways teachers provide

feedback, incorporate higher thinking skills, and foster language development. In two large national studies that included 705 prekindergarten classrooms, it was found that most classrooms scored in the high range on Emotional Support, but much lower on Instructional Support on the CLASS (Early et al., 2005). In order to ensure that children are well prepared for formal schooling, improving the Instructional Support domain in Head Start classrooms is vital. The ways teachers provide feedback in the form of praise, commands, and/or negative comments can provide a more complex language model for children, which is included as a vital component of the Instructional Support domain.

Hamre (2014) stated that classrooms that are scoring in the low range for Instructional Support are spending more time engaging in, “rote instructional opportunities focused on memorization and recall or free-play activities without adults interacting systematically to enhance children’s thinking and learning” (p. 225). Therefore, it is important to focus on increasing the quality of instruction that children have access to in early education. Mashburn et al. (2008) concluded that efforts to improve the quality of pre-kindergarten should primarily focus on high-quality emotional and instructional interactions that children experience in the classroom. There are several strategies that can be implemented in order to accomplish this; however, focusing on improving the quality of teacher-child interactions and incorporating informative praise in the classroom setting are thought to be particularly beneficial.

Williford, Maier, Downer, Pianta, and Howes (2013), conducted a study with a diverse sample of children, many of whom came from low-income and ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds similar to children who attend Head Start programs. Through this study it was found that, students in preschool classrooms who are usually

engaged in the tasks at hand or with teachers and peers, made gains in their expressive language skills when the teacher was able to provide a stimulating environment through his/her interactions with the student. This research specifically emphasizes the importance of the teacher-child interaction. Children experienced gains in literacy and language skills when a teacher interacted with the children in the classroom in ways that were organizationally, emotionally, and instructionally responsive.

The quality of teacher-child interactions is a critical component in early education and is strongly related to the learning and development of preschool age children. In a study conducted by NICHD on early childcare and youth development, children were followed from the time they were born until they were in their adolescence (Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, Steinberg, & Vandergrift, 2010). This study found that when children had preschool teachers who were more responsive to their students, these children were more likely exhibit higher cognitive and academic achievement and experience fewer behavioral problems during their adolescent years. A teacher can be responsive to a student's needs in many ways; however, utilizing informative praise statements can be particularly beneficial for children in the early education setting. Informative praise is a statement that specifies the nature of the behavior that is being praised. This provides an opportunity to expose children to behavioral expectations and additional vocabulary at an early age. Therefore, the experiences that children have in their early educational settings can have lasting effects and can place them on a positive course for the rest of their academic career.

Effects of Praise on Behavior and Language Acquisition

An important component of high quality early childhood programs involves the ways in which teachers utilize praise to enhance language modeling and have a positive impact on behavior. According to Hester, Hendrickson, and Gable (2009), praise is defined as a “verbal statement that follows a target behavior...the general intent is to provide positive feedback, encourage, and support the occurrence of the target behavior” (p. 515). They go on to say that praise is an opportunity for teachers to provide feedback in a positive manner that fosters and strengthens the desired behavior. Although this provides a general idea of the definition of praise, there are also multiple variations of praise that can be utilized in the classroom, specifically general praise and informative/effective praise. According to Brophy (1981), general praise is defined as, “to commend the worth of or to express approval or admiration” (p. 5). Examples of general praise can include when a teacher says “Good job!” or “Thank you.” Here, a teacher is acknowledging a child and his or her behavior, but is not providing information about for what the child is being praised. Although incorporating general praise in the classroom can be beneficial, it usually contains little task-related information. Hattie and Timperley (2007) found that this type of feedback usually incorporates positive evaluations of the student, however, general praise rarely converts into increased engagement and is unlikely to be effective for overall learning.

Another type of feedback given in the classroom is identified as informative praise. Informative or effective praise is defined by Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, Al-Hendawi, and Vo (2009) as a statement given by a teacher that informs students of his/her expectations and encourages behaviors that the teacher would like to see more of

in the future. Specifically informative praise “uniquely fits each situation and focuses on children’s effort, improvement, and/or quality of work, rather than focusing on outcomes or abilities” (p. 19). Examples of informative praise are “Thank you for putting your toys away in the basket like I asked you to do” or “Great job using your finger to follow along as I read aloud.” Praise is not only a key component in shaping behavior, but also in furthering positive teacher-child relationships and creating accommodating learning environments.

Stipek and Seal (2001) stated that by utilizing informative praise and encouragement, a teacher is not only recognizing what the child has done successfully, but is also giving the child an opportunity to show what he/she gained from the process. Further, informative praise invites the child to interact with an adult as well as allowing the child to associate the descriptive vocabulary of his/her accomplishment to what he/she has just successfully completed. Duke and Moses (2003) discussed the benefits of incorporating rich oral language in the classroom. They stated, “Children learn words through talk, especially from listening to and participating in high-level conversations” (p. 5). They went on to state that, “Children need to encounter words in meaningful activities, conversations, and texts. Children need to live new words” (p. 8). When teachers descriptively praise children for specific behaviors, they are providing opportunities for children to participate in high level conversation and therefore exposing children to additional vocabulary in a meaningful manner. Thus, informative praise not only encourages desired behaviors, it also provides a rich language model for children.

Effects of Professional Development on Teacher's Use of Praise

The Instructional Support component of Head Start programs is often the focus of trainings and professional development as it is historically found to be a weakness in most programs. Teacher directives and interactions with students are often targeted as an effort to provide language modeling and encourage desired behaviors. This was the case in the following studies. Both studies incorporated professional development for their teachers in an effort to increase praise in the classroom setting.

Stormont, Smith, and Lewis (2007) conducted a study that investigated whether professional development would increase the incidence of descriptive praise and pre-corrective statements (statements that inform the child about expected behaviors). In this study three Head Start teachers participated in individual 30 minute meetings that addressed how to properly use descriptive praise and pre-corrective statements during small-group activities. At the training, teachers practiced using descriptive praise and pre-corrective statements and were given corrective feedback until they had used them correctly. Teachers were observed for fifteen minutes and immediately afterwards verbal feedback from the researchers was given to the teachers (sessions were one minute or less). The results showed that teachers' use of descriptive praise increased over baseline levels. This study did not incorporate a way to measure the maintenance of the strategies suggested.

Similarly, Fullerton, Conroy, and Correa (2009) conducted a study that investigated the effects of a training on preschool teachers' use of descriptive praise. Four classroom teachers participated in the study. First, the teachers were observed prior to the professional development to determine baseline levels. Teachers were videotaped by

researchers for 5 minutes during transitions. These observations continued for three sessions per week until baseline levels were stable. Following that, individual training sessions were administered and they lasted up to an hour and 45 minutes. The training specifically instructed teachers on how to use descriptive praise statements and teachers were given examples of both descriptive praise and general praise. Each teacher was also given a training booklet and researchers conducted two verbal checks to make sure teachers understood specific praise statements. The training also included videotapes that allowed for teachers to identify times when using descriptive praise would be most appropriate. Immediately following the training a second round of observations was conducted. Based on their performance, teachers were provided written feedback through a note or email after each observation. Included in the note or email was a review the teacher's use of specific praise statements and encouragement to continue utilizing specific praise statements. The findings from this study showed an increase in the teachers' use of descriptive praise.

Both of these studies demonstrated that individualized training in giving descriptive and general praise can be effective. However, because post-test observations immediately followed training, it is not clear how long training effects would persist. Therefore, in our study we observed teachers over a longer period of time after training.

Negative Comments/Commands

Teacher discourse can also come in the form of commands or negative comments. Atwater and Morris (1988) found that commands are one of the most frequently used verbal directives in the preschool classroom. Negative commands or comments include, "don't," "stop," "quit," etc. Houlihan and Jones (1990) found that when a teacher used

one of the commands stated above, it was likely to result in an increase of inappropriate behavior. Webster-Stratton (2004) talked about the importance of giving clear commands, such as telling a child to “do” something or to “start” something as children are more likely to pick up on and engage in the activities that are heard last. By utilizing “do” commands children are more likely to comply as they know what is expected of them and therefore can carry out the command successfully. McLaughlin (1983) found that preschool children were more likely to comply with an adult directive when it was phrased as a suggestion rather than a direct command. A child is even more likely to comply with requests when reinforcement is combined with the suggestion. For example in a study conducted by Ford (1998), it was found that children were more likely to comply with requests and show appropriate behavior when verbal praise and positive physical touch were included and contingent on compliance. Therefore, negative commands and comments should be reduced in the classroom setting, as they only aid in noncompliance and have a negative impact.

Purpose of the Present Study

The present study aimed to evaluate the outcomes of a training program that was designed to increase informative praise and decrease commands and negative comments utilized by Head Start teachers during instruction. The following research question was addressed: Does administering a training have an effect on the amount of general praise, informative praise, and negative comments/commands used in the Head Start preschool classroom setting? Given previous research on trainings and professional development in the early education setting (Fullerton et al., 2009, Stormont et al., 2007), it was hypothesized there would be a significant increase in the amount of general praise and

informative praise and a significant decrease in the amount of negative comments/commands utilized immediately after the training was administered. Given that previous research has not addressed the longevity of training effects (Fullerton et al., 2009, Stormont et al., 2007), in the present study, teachers also were observed 4 months and 9 months after training.

Method

Participants

The participants (N= 6) for the study were all female lead and assistant teachers employed by a child care program which was a blended Head Start and university child care center. Three of these teachers were lead teachers; three were assistant teachers. Three of the teachers were Caucasian; three were African American. Their average years of teaching experience were 15; their average age was 39. In terms of highest degree of education, one teacher had earned her Associate's, four had Bachelor's degrees, and one had a Master's degree. All six of the teachers were observed in both pre-training and post-training.

Procedure

Participants were observed instructing in the classroom eight times in four waves. The first wave was conducted in the Spring 2013, the second in Summer 2013, the third in Fall 2013, and the final wave in Spring 2014. The first wave was considered a pretest as it occurred before the training, the second wave was considered an immediate posttest as it occurred immediately following the training, and the two other waves were posttests. A layout of the observations and training schedule is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Observation and Training Layout

Wave 1	Pretest	June 2013
Training	<i>Incredible Years</i>	July 2013
Wave 2	Immediate Posttest	August 2013
Wave 3	Posttest	December 2013
Refresher on Training	<i>Incredible Years</i>	January 2014
Wave 4	Posttest	May/June 2014

During the study, two researchers were responsible for conducting the observations. During each wave, each participant was observed twice. Participants were not given prior notice as to when the observations would occur and did not know who would be observing them and when. All observations were live in the classroom and occurred during neutral times where students were present. It should be noted that between Wave 2 and Wave 3 a new set of three year old students began attending this Head Start, and the five year olds moved on to Kindergarten. One observation was conducted when the participant was instructing her students during circle time. Circle time is when the entire group (teacher and students) is meeting together and some form of content is being discussed. The second observation took place when the participant was interacting with children during center time. Center time is characterized as a time when children having relatively more freedom about what they do and where they go. Typically, children were assigned to designated areas but had complete freedom to choose what they do in that area. Centers can be tables where children have a limited

number of choices about what they can do (puzzles, journals) or center time can be free play, during which children are allowed to move about the classroom freely.

Each of these observations lasted fifteen minutes. During these observations, the observer recorded the number of general praise statements, informational praise statements, negative comments, and commands with tally marks on the observation sheet. A general praise statement was defined as: a general compliment directed at either no one in particular or at an individual and is generic in its use. This type of praise does not convey information about what the student did correctly. Examples include: “Good job”, “Wow”, “Thank you”, “Great job, class”, “Nice.” An informational praise statement was defined as statements that were directed at an individual student or the class and were very specific in what was being praised. This type of praise told the students what they did correctly and gave the students specific information about the desired behavior. Examples included: “You did a great job washing your hands front and back,” “Thank you for walking in the hallway.” Negative comments were statements directed toward a child or group of children that were negative in nature. Examples included: “You know better than that,” “You’re not doing that right.” Commands were when a teacher was instructing a child to do or not do something. Examples included: “Don’t put your toys there,” “Sally, sit down right now.”

Interrater reliability was determined by having two researchers observe the same teacher at the same time. The average percentage of observations that were double coded throughout all waves was 46%. Interrater reliability for the coding system used was computed to be a Cohen’s kappa statistic of 0.97 for Wave 1, 1.00 for Wave 2, 1.00 for

Wave 3, and 0.83 for Wave 4. The average Cohen's kappa statistic across waves was 0.95.

Training

The teachers who participated in the study received training from a developmental psychologist from Western Kentucky University. The training was based on the *Incredible Years* developed by Webster-Stratton (2004). The *Incredible Years* is an evidence-based program to prevent and treat behavior problems in young children. It has been evaluated in numerous randomized control group studies by the developer and other independent researchers (e.g. Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Beauchaine, 2001; Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Hammond, 2007; Webster-Stratton, 1998; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). All materials utilized for the training were obtained from the Incredible Years website. These materials can be found in Appendix C.

The training was administered in two phases. The first phase occurred on July 29, 2013 following the pretest observations. A one hour session of the training was given to lead teachers and a second one hour session was given to assistant teachers. The second phase occurred on January 24, 2014 where a refresher of the training was given to teachers. This refresher occurred in the same way the original training was conducted, a one hour session for lead teachers and a one hour session for assistant teachers. The training specifically encouraged teachers to increase the overall amount of praise utilized in the classroom and specifically focusing on informative praise. To engage teachers in the training, teachers were asked to identify behaviors that they would like to increase; discussion focused on how to use informative praise to increase these teacher-chosen behaviors. Teachers generated lists of behaviors they would like to discourage. Training

focused on using praise (general and informative) to increase desired behaviors and decrease non-preferred behaviors. In service of these goals, teachers were encouraged to use praise directed at children who were “caught doing good” to manage the behavior of children who were “not yet doing good.”

Of course, teachers do have to use some commands, but using commands sparingly increases their impact. Therefore, teachers were encouraged to use “do” commands rather than “don’t” commands. Because young children often do the last thing they hear, “don’t” commands often produce the behavior that is not desired. Specific objectives of the *Incredible Years* training that were incorporated were: using praise and encouragement more effectively for targeted behaviors, understanding the importance of general praise to the whole group as well as individual praise, doubling the impact of praise by involving other school personnel and parents, reducing unclear, vague, and negative commands.

Variables

The number of general praise statements, informative praise statements, and negative comments and commands used by teachers during each observation were tallied for both center time and circle time. The total number of each kind of statement listed above was calculated for each wave.

Results

Table 2 presents the total number of general praise, informative praise and negative comment/command statements by wave. To evaluate whether the training was effective, a chi square examined the frequency of each type of feedback (general praise, informative praise, and negative comments/commands) by wave (pretest, immediate posttest, fall, spring).

Table 2

Total Teacher Feedback by Wave: Circle and Center Time

Wave	General Praise	Informative Praise	Negative Comments/Commands
1	50	11	91
2	61	29	68
3	64	1	62
4	44	11	47

This analysis yielded a significant result, $X^2 (df = 6) = 33.15, p < .01$. This was primarily seen in the amount of informative praise utilized by teachers. During the immediate posttest (Wave 2), the amount of informative praise increased from 11 informative praise statements to 29 praise statements. This number then decreased to 1 informative praise statement during Wave 3. Both the 29 informative praise statements (Wave 2) and the single informative praise statement (Wave 3) deviated from the expected values for informative praise, as shown by the higher chi square values for those cells (12.42 and 10.33). The informative praise statements then increased back 11, which is what was observed during the pretest. The total number of commands and negative comments

declined across the four waves. During the pretest (Wave 1) there was a total of 91 commands and negative comments compared to a total of 47 commands and negative comments during the last wave of observations (Wave 4). Overall, the amount of general praise statements did not deviate from the expected amount of general praise statements. It should be noted that there was an increase in general praise statements from the pretest (Wave 1) to the immediate posttest (Wave 2). The amount of general praise statements increased by 11 after the training was administered. It should be noted that when looking at praise statements (both informative and general) as compared to negative comments and commands, there was a ratio of 61 praise statements to 91 negative comments and commands during Wave 1. This ratio then changed to 55 praise statements and 47 negative comments and commands at Wave 4.

Two additional chi square analyses looked at the frequencies of general praise, informative praise, and negative comments/commands at each wave, separately for circle time and for center time. Results for the analysis examining circle time observations are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Total Teacher Feedback by Wave: Circle Time

Wave	General Praise	Informative Praise	Negative Comments/Commands
1	23	7	45
2	34	23	35
3	38	1	32
4	24	6	22

This analysis yielded a significant result, $X^2 (df = 6) = 27.52, p < .01$). Informative praise increased from 7 statements during the pretest (Wave 1) to 23 during the posttest (Wave 2). The number of informative praise statements used during the posttest observations (Wave 2) was 23, and then decreased to 1 praise statement used during Wave 3. Both the 23 informative praise statements and 1 informative praise statement deviated from the expected values for informative praise, as shown by the higher chi square values for those cells (10.8 and 7.17). The total number of negative comments/commands used across all four waves decreased from 45 (Wave 1) to 22 (Wave 4). Overall, the amount of general praise statements did not deviate from the expected amount of general praise statements. It should be noted that there was an increase in general praise statements from the pretest (Wave 1) to the immediate posttest (Wave 2). The amount of general praise statements increased by 11 after the training was administered and continued to increase by 4 more statements during Wave 3. General praise statements then decreased back to pretest levels with a total of 24 general praise statements during Wave 4.

Results for the analysis examining center time observations are summarized in Table 4. This analysis yielded a result that was insignificant, $X^2 (df = 6) = 7.77, ns$. None of the amounts deviated from what was expected, which is shown by the lower chi square values for all cells. The amount of general praise statements and informative praise statements used during center time remained fairly consistent throughout all waves. Overall, the negative comments and commands used decreased across the four waves during center time, but not at a significant level.

Table 4

Total Teacher Feedback by Wave: Center Time

Wave	General Praise	Informative Praise	Negative Comments/ Commands
1	27	4	46
2	27	6	33
3	26	0	30
4	20	5	25

Discussion

This study aimed to address how a training using the *Incredible Years* curriculum (Webster-Stratton, 2004) could impact the amount of general praise, informative praise, and negative comments/commands used in a Head Start setting. It was hypothesized that the training would result in an overall increase of both informative praise and general praise and a decrease in commands/negative comments. The present study appears to be the first to assess the impact of this training on these three types of responses in two different settings (circle time and center time) and over an extended period of time. The findings revealed different results based on the setting and time elapsed after training.

The training of Head Start teachers was geared toward strengthening the instructional support component of a Head Start program. In previous research, the Instructional Support component is historically a weakness across Head Start classrooms (Early et al., 2005; Hamre, 2014; Mashburn et al., 2008). As a result, this training specifically focused on impacting teacher-child interactions by instructing Head Start teachers on ways to praise a child effectively and the importance of incorporating praise in the classroom setting.

Previous research has also investigated how professional development and trainings can have an effect on the amount of informative or directive praise utilized in the classroom setting (Fullerton et al., 2009; Stormont et al., 2007). Like the previous studies, the current study also found a training effect immediately after training. This is interesting because the current study used a group training method, unlike the individualized training in the previous studies (Fullerton et al., 2009; Stormont et al., 2007). In the current study participants increased the amount of general praise and

informative praise utilized in the classroom setting immediately after training. This increase was particularly evident during the circle time setting. However, as time progressed it was found that the amount of praise statements, both general and informative, decreased back down to pre-training levels.

However, when looking at commands and negative comments, a decrease in the amount used was seen consistently throughout all Waves of observation when compared to baseline levels in the pretest. As a result of this training, a decrease in commands and negative comments were seen proportionately across both settings observed.

The results of this study also revealed that the training appeared to be most effective right after the training was administered (Wave 2). The posttest observations that occurred longer after the training was administered (Wave 3 and Wave 4) revealed that teachers reverted back to their earlier patterns of behavior before the training was given, despite having a refresher on the training in-between Wave 3 and Wave 4. However, the refresher on the training occurred in January, and the observations for Wave 4 did not take place until later in the spring semester (May), so we do not know whether the refresher training had an immediate effect.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study comes with a few limitations, as is found in most research. First, the results should be viewed cautiously due to low numbers in some cells which violates the assumptions of the chi square analysis. Also, this study was based on a small sample size. This study incorporated six female lead teachers and assistant teachers as participants. Therefore, these results may not generalize to other Head Start programs or preschool settings.

Future research should use a larger sample that incorporates both males and females and several Head Start programs to improve generalizability. The trainings in this study were given in a group setting as this was both time and cost effective. Future research may wish to explore the benefits of additional individualized coaching over time to prevent fading of training effects (Rush & Shelden, 2011). This also would permit researchers to target the training specifically to the needs of each teacher. Additionally, videotaping each teacher might be beneficial in order to facilitate coaching and would allow teachers an opportunity to review their interactions with students as researchers guide them in incorporating and utilizing praise more effectively.

Observations utilized in future studies might also want to separately count commands and negative comments. Commands can be beneficial when used correctly (i.e., “do” commands, see Webster-Stratton, 2004). Therefore, future research may want to consider how commands are used in combination with their frequency.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the current study found when implementing a training focused on increasing praise and decreasing negative comments/commands in the Head Start setting, the training was most effective immediately after it was administered. Although commands and negative comments decreased consistently across all additional observations, informative and general praise increased immediately following the training, but decreased back to pretest levels in the last two sets of observations. It is important to continue to study professional development on general praise, informative praise, and negative comments/commands in the Head Start setting, as training continues

to be an effective way to encourage desired behaviors and provide a rich language model for children.

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Appendix A: IRB Letter



*INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY*

DATE: June 18, 2013

TO: Elizabeth Lemerise, Ph.D.
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [480761-1] Program Evaluation of Concept Development and Quality of Feedback Training for Preschool Teachers: Teacher Outcomes

REFERENCE #: IRB 13-400
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: June 18, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: June 18, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 18, 2014.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

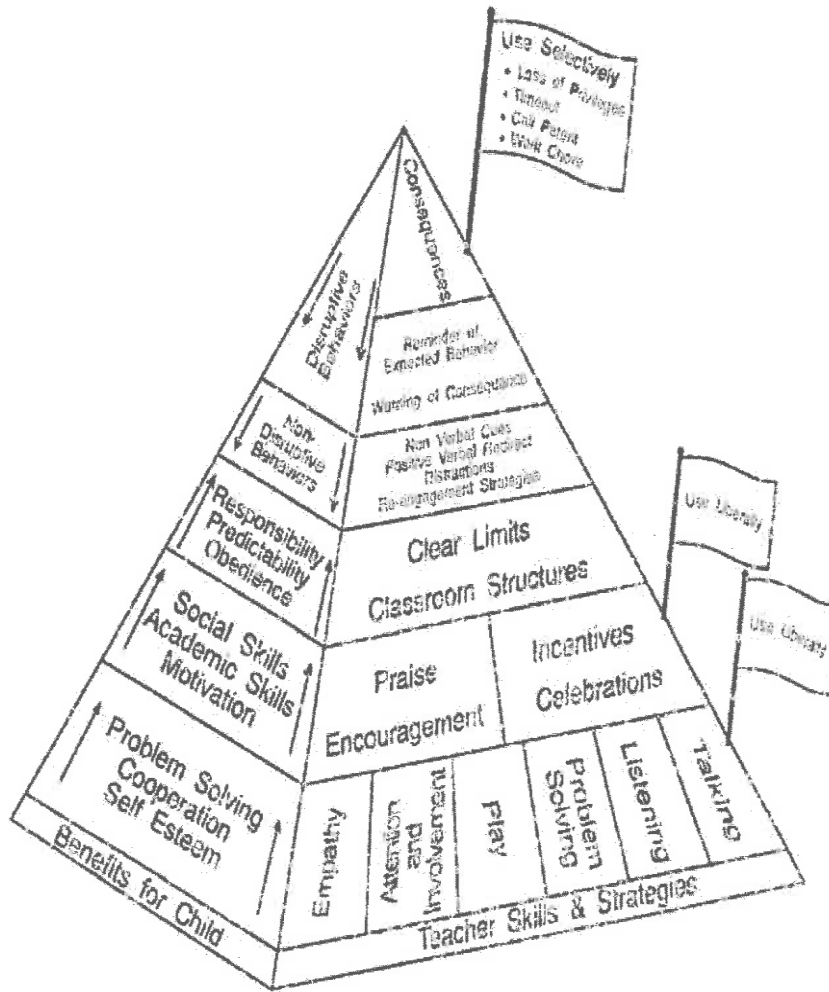
If you have any questions, please contact Paul Mooney at (270) 745-2129 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB's records.

Appendix B: Schedule of Training

1. Welcome and invitation
2. Training pyramid: what teachers do
3. Activity: Identification of behaviors to encourage
4. How to encourage and praise desired behaviors in each context
 - a. Individual praise/feedback
 - i. Describe the behavior being praised (be specific)
 - ii. Call child by name
 - iii. Avoid "I like"
 - iv. Show enthusiasm
 - v. Encourage efforts and progress: Rome wasn't built in a day
 - vi. Use consistently and frequently especially when learning new behavior
 - b. Group praise/feedback
 - i. Describe the behavior being praised (be specific)
 - ii. Call child by name
 - iii. Avoid "I like"
 - iv. Show enthusiasm
 - v. Encourage efforts and progress: Rome wasn't built in a day
 - vi. Use consistently and frequently especially when learning new behavior
5. Using Circle Time to promote peer praise (culture of praise)
 - a. Ask children to compliment a friend
 - i. Reward compliment with applause
 - b. Ask children to share something that they are proud of (hold and bear technique)
 - i. Reward with applause
6. Children who are inattentive, highly distractible, and oppositional
 - a. Need frequent attention and praise when they are behaving appropriately
 - b. Teacher will need to monitor these children to "catch them at being good"
 - c. Praise children according to your individual behavior goals for them
 - d. Start with the most important 2 or 3 goals (don't try to identify too many goals for children who pose the most difficulties)
 - e. Remind yourself to praise desirable behavior in difficult children
 - i. Pennies in pocket technique

Appendix C: Incredible Years Training Materials



A few examples of behaviors to encourage and praise

- Sharing
- Talking politely
- Quiet hand up
- Helping a classmate
- Giving a compliment to another classmate
- Complying to teacher requests, listening and following directions
- Solving a difficult problem
- Achieving something that was hard for a particular student
- Cooperating on the playground/in the gym
- Persisting with a difficult task (working hard)
- Thinking before answering
- Putting classroom materials away
- Being thoughtful
- Being patient
- Walking in the classroom/hallway
- Following one/all of the classroom rules

A few examples of ways to praise

- 'You do a super job of...'
- 'Good idea for...'
- 'You are being a good friend by...'
- 'Pat yourself on the back for...'
- 'Give me five for...'
- 'Thank you for being so patient and kind while I was...'
- 'Thank you ---, for making a quiet choice during center time...'
- 'It helps us when you...'
- 'You took the time to clean up the art materials, that's very thoughtful.'
- 'See how well you have improved in...'
- 'You must feel proud of yourself for...'
- '---, you were a great helper today.'

From Carolyn Webster-Stratton (1999). *How to Promote Children's Social and Emotional Competence*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

BEHAVIORS TO ENCOURAGE--- WE WANT MORE OF THESE BEHAVIORS!!

BREAKFAST/LUNCH

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

CIRCLE TIME

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

CENTER TIME

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

GYM/OUTSIDE TIME

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

NAP TIME

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

TRANSITIONS FROM ONE ACTIVITY TO ANOTHER

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Praise

Definition: A positive statement given when a desired behavior occurs to inform students what they did well.

*The behavior you pay the most attention to is the behavior you will get more of in the future.

Reinforcement of appropriate behavior

- Increases the likelihood that desired behaviors will be repeated
- Focuses greater attention on appropriate behavior than on inappropriate behavior
- Encourages a more positive climate
- Reduces the need for punitive measures

Effective Praise

- Contingent
- Provide immediately
- Specific
- Credible and focused on what the student did
- Rewards specified performance
- Provides information about student competence
- Orients toward task-related behavior
- Uses prior accomplishments as context for describing current successes
- Noteworthy effort
- Attributes success to effort
- Fosters endogenous attributions

Increasing Use of Praise

- Catch good behavior
- Reminder to praise
- Double up on praise
- Increase the number of Opportunities to Respond
- Display student work
- Use performance feedback to monitor

Acknowledging Appropriate Behavior - Classroom Continuum:

- Level 1 = Free and Frequent
–Use every day in the classroom
- Level 2 = Intermittent
–Awarded occasionally
- Level 3 = Strong and Long Term
–Quarterly or yearlong types of recognition

Free & Frequent	Intermittent	Strong & Long Term
Verbal Praise Smile Stickers Rubber Stamps Thumbs up Home Notes	Token Economy Phone Calls Special Privileges Computer Time Social/Free Time Special Seat	Group Contingency Field Trip Special Project Recognition Ceremonies Honor Roll

Ratio of Interactions:

- Teachers should interact with students 4 times more often when they are behaving appropriately than when they are behaving inappropriately **(4:1 ratio)**
- Interactions with students are considered positive or negative based on the behavior in which the student is engaged at the time attention is given
- Negative interactions are not wrong and are sometimes necessary; the key is the *ratio*
- Positive interactions can be provided in a variety of ways: verbal praise, nonverbal acknowledgement, non-contingent attention

Blackboard Notes **About Attention, Encouragement & Praise**



- Establish eye contact, move close, and smile at the child.
- Pinpoint what it is you like about the behavior and be specific in your praise.
- Praise with sincerity and enthusiasm, and in a variety of ways. Make a big deal out of it.
- When a desired behavior occurs, praise it immediately.
- Combine verbal praise with physical affection.
- Don't wait for behavior to be perfect before praising.
- Praise individual children as well as the whole class or small groups.
- Use praise consistently and frequently, especially when a child is first learning a new behavior. Remember, it is the most powerful form of positive recognition you can give a child.
- Children who are inattentive, highly distractible, and oppositional need frequent attention and praise whenever they are behaving appropriately.
- Praise children according to your individual behavioral goals for them—including both academic and social behaviors.
- Don't stay behind your desk during independent work time; rather, circulate around the room giving recognition for positive behaviors.
- If you are working with a small group of students or an individual student, look up every 3-4 minutes and monitor the students who are working independently. Take a moment to make a comment about their positive behavior.
- When you give a direction, look for at least two students who are following the direction—say their names and restate the direction as you praise the fact that they are following it.
- Develop a concrete plan for how you will remember to provide consistent praise such as a sticker on the clock or your watch, coins in your pocket, timer, etc.
- Focus on their effort and learning, not just the end result.
- Focus on students' strengths and areas of improvement.
- Show your belief in your students' abilities.
- Express how you feel about the behavior and the positive effect of the action.
- Do not compare one student with another student (or sibling).
- Use written words of appreciation, "happygrams," i.e., telegram notes of approval to the child.

Common Rules for Young Children

1. Keep your hands and feet to yourself (manners rule)
2. Put up a quiet hand to ask a question
3. Arguments and problems should be talked about (use your words/problem-solving rule)
4. Speak quietly and politely to each other (inside voice rule)
5. Hands washed before breakfast/lunch/snack

Examples of Effective Commands and Rule Reminders

Walk slowly, thanks.

Keep your hands to yourselves.

Talk softly.

Play quietly.

Mouths quiet.

Face front and listen please.

Keep the paint on the paper.

Wash your hands.

Sharing, thanks.

Helping, thanks.

Waiting, thanks.

Remember to put your chairs under your desks.

Remember our class rule for quiet hands up.

Please put your toys away.

Talk with your inside voice.

No you can't work on the computer, you haven't finished your....

I'll listen when you are using quite voices.

Examples of Unclear, Vague or Critical Commands: Avoid using these!

Let's put away the toys.

Don't yell.

Stop running.

Why don't you/we....?

Stop whining.

Didn't I tell you to pick that up?

Can't you stay in your seat?

I've told you before.

You made a mess. Can't you be careful? Go wash up, you are not doing that now.

Are you supposed to be doing that?

You, I mean you, get over here –now! Listen, I don't care how you speak to him but in my class....

Do you want to run the lesson, eh?

I've shown you how to do that a hundred times, here I'll show you again.

I'm fed up, get over here, don't argue with me, go.

Why haven't you started to work?

Why can't you....?

How many times do I have to tell you to...?

You never....

You over there, shut up.

Let's don't do that anymore.

Be nice, be good, be careful.

Watch it.

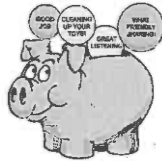


Brainstorm–Rewriting Commands

Rewrite the following ineffective commands into positive, clear, respectful commands.

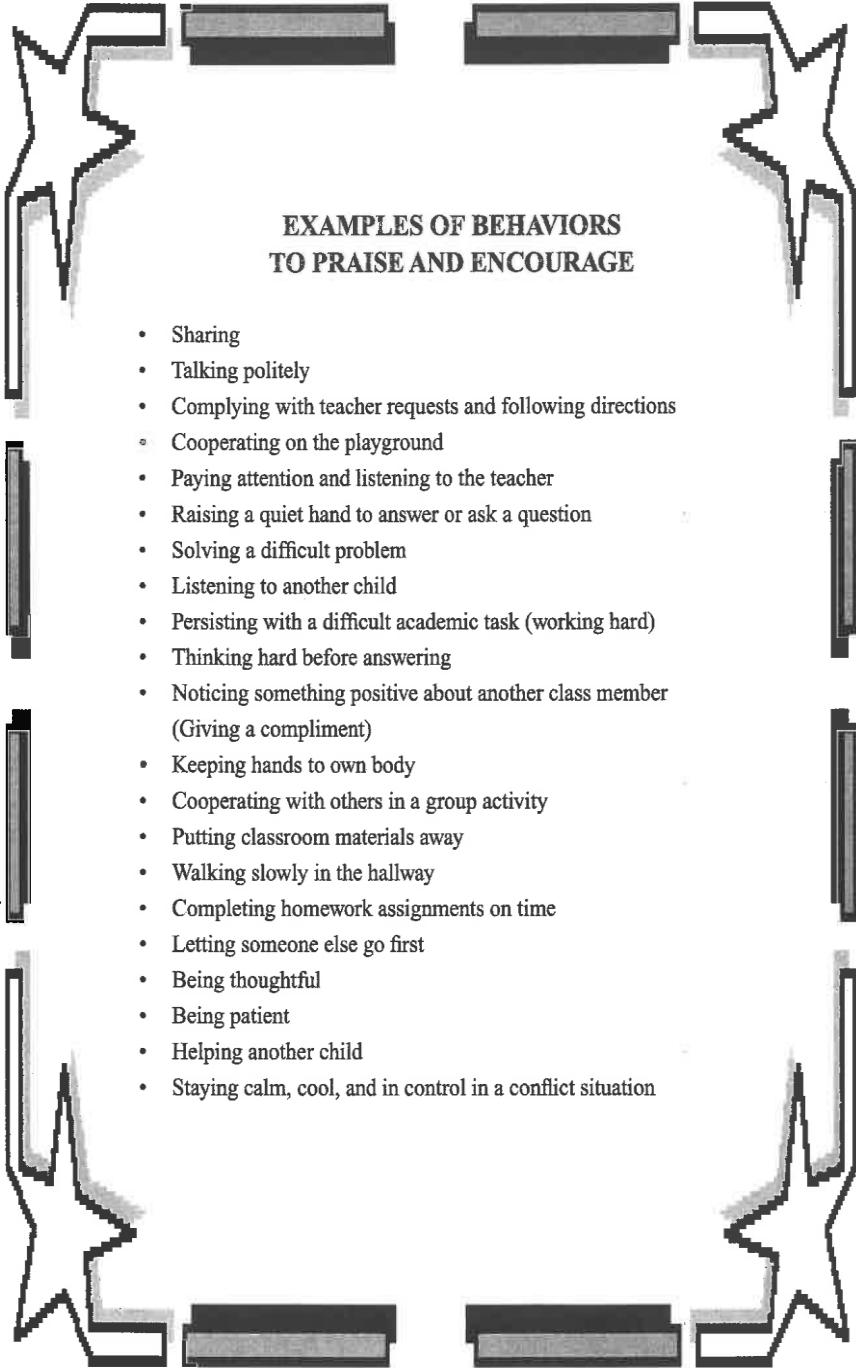


Ineffective Commands	Rewrite
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shut up • Quit shouting • Stop running • Watch it • Why don't you put that away? • Let's clean up the blocks • Cut it out • What is your coat doing there? • Why is your backpack there? • Don't push him like a bull • Why is your book still on your desk? • You look like a mess • Stop bugging your friend • You are never ready • You must stop touching her in circle time • Your desk is a mess • Don't whine • You are impossible • Stop dawdling • Hurry up • Be quiet • Why are you out of your seat when you've been told not to? • What are you doing bothering your friend? • Are you stupid? 	



Handout
BEHAVIOR RECORD
Praise "Positive Opposites"

Behaviors I want to see less of: (e.g., yelling)	Positive opposite behavior I want to see more of: (e.g., polite voice)
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.



**EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIORS
TO PRAISE AND ENCOURAGE**

- Sharing
- Talking politely
- Complying with teacher requests and following directions
- Cooperating on the playground
- Paying attention and listening to the teacher
- Raising a quiet hand to answer or ask a question
- Solving a difficult problem
- Listening to another child
- Persisting with a difficult academic task (working hard)
- Thinking hard before answering
- Noticing something positive about another class member
(Giving a compliment)
- Keeping hands to own body
- Cooperating with others in a group activity
- Putting classroom materials away
- Walking slowly in the hallway
- Completing homework assignments on time
- Letting someone else go first
- Being thoughtful
- Being patient
- Helping another child
- Staying calm, cool, and in control in a conflict situation



**EXAMPLES OF WAYS TO GIVE
PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

- “You do a super job of ...”
- “You have learned how to ...”
- “I like it when you ...”
- “You must feel proud of yourself for ...”
- “Good idea for ...”
- “You’ve done a great job of ...”
- “See how _____ has improved in ...”
- “You have worked so hard ...”
- “Look how well he/she did ...”
- “That’s a creative way of ...”
- “Wow, what a wonderful job you’ve done of ...”
- “That’s correct, that’s a cool way to ...”
- “I’m so happy you ...”
- “It really pleases me when you ...”
- “You’ve grown up because you ...”
- “You are a real problem-solver for ...”
- “Great thinking ...”
- “Thank you for ...”
- “What a nice job of ...”
- “Hey, you are really thinking; you ...”
- “That’s great, it really looks like ...”
- “You’re doing just what the teacher asked you to do.”
- “My! That ... was great teamwork.”
- “That’s very nice (or good) for ...”
- “Pat yourself on the back for ...”
- “Beautiful! Super! Great! Gorgeous! Tremendous! Cool! Fresh!”
- “Give me five for ...”

Facilitating Children's Academic Learning: Teachers as "Academic Coaches"



"Descriptive commenting" is a powerful way to strengthen children's social skills, emotional literacy, and academic skills. The following is a list of academic concepts and behaviors that can be commented upon when playing with a child. Use this checklist to practice describing academic concepts.

Academic Skills	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _____ colors _____ number counting _____ shapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "You have the red car and the yellow truck." ● "There are one, two, three dinosaurs in a row." ● "Now the square Lego is stuck to the round Lego."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _____ sizes (long, short, tall, smaller than, bigger than, etc.) _____ positions (up, down, beside, next to, on top, behind, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "That train is longer than the track." ● "You are putting the tiny bolt in the right circle." ● "The blue block is next to the yellow square, and the purple triangle is on top of the long red rectangle."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _____ working hard _____ concentrating, focusing _____ persistence, patience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "You are working so hard on that puzzle and thinking about where that piece will go." ● "You are so patient and just keep trying all different ways to make that piece fit together."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _____ following parent's directions _____ problem solving _____ trying again _____ reading _____ thinking skills _____ listening _____ working hard/best work _____ independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "You followed directions exactly like I asked you. You really listened." ● "You are thinking hard about how to solve the problem and coming up with a great solution to make a ship." ● "You have figured that out all by yourself."

Coaching Children in Cooperative Play With Peers

Join children and their friends when they are playing and “coach” them in good play skills by noticing and commenting on their cooperative efforts. For example:

Making Suggestions: “Wow, that was a helpful suggestion to your friend.”

Expressing Positive Feelings: “That’s a friendly way to show how you are feeling.”

Waiting: “Super! You waited your turn and let him go first, even when you wanted to be first.”

Asking Permission: “That’s very friendly to ask him if he wants to do that first.”

Complimenting: “What a friendly compliment. I can see she feels good about that.”

Taking Turns: “You let her take a turn—how very helpful.”

Sharing: “You are both doing it together. I can see you are team players.”

Agreement: “You agreed with her suggestion—what a friendly thing to do.”

Using Soft Touch: “You are using gentle and soft touch with him. That is friendly.”

Asking for Help: “Wow! You asked him to help you—that is what good friends do for each other.”

Caring: “I can see you really care about her ideas and point of view. You’re a thoughtful person.”

Problem-Solving: “You both worked out that problem in a calm way. It looks like it feels good for both of you.”

Being Polite: “You were so polite in the way you asked her to wait—that’s very friendly.”