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Abstract

This action research project was conducted to determine if using Second Step social emotional learning program would affect the frequency of negative behaviors in a preschool class. The lead teacher and associate were trained in Second Step social emotional learning. Second Step was implemented in the preschool class for three weeks. Qualitative data was collected from teacher interviews. Quantitative data was collected from behavior logs, behavior reports and researcher observations. The data was entered in a table and the data was used to determine if negative behavior decreased after implementing Second Step curriculum. After analyzing the data and teacher interviews, it was determined that implementing Second Step for a short period of time did decrease behaviors overall but, in some cases, increased negative behavior.

Keywords: SEL- social emotional learning

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Teaching is more than Common Core, a district approved curriculum, technology, and fine arts. “Successful student learning depends on a teacher's ability to manage the group as a whole--keeping the attention of 30 or more students, redirecting negative or distracting behavior, and continually assessing the pulse of the room to optimize student motivation and engagement” (Jones, Bailey, & Jacob, 2014, p. 19). Teachers are faced with anxious, disruptive, aggressive, and silly behavior throughout the day in all grades. Many would think these behaviors would decrease as student’s age and be completely unheard of by middle school. The reality is teachers deal with these types of behavior from prekindergarten age students all the way into high school. Some students are dealing with emotions “that can affect their learning and well-being as well as the learning and well-being of their classmates” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 9).

To address these behaviors, schools are implementing social emotional learning curriculum to tackle the behaviors that are impeding student success by giving students the tools they need to function in a school setting. “Part of the teacher's role is to give students the tools they need to interact with and meet the demands of the social and instructional environment of school” (Jones, Bailey, & Jacob, 2014, p. 19). The skills they learn will also be used to interact with members of the community and their households. “Social and emotional skills are critical to be a good student, citizen, and worker” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 10). In school, a student needs to be able to work independently, alongside peers, as a class, and as a member of the school. Engaging in social emotional learning (SEL), gives students the language and skills to process their emotions in a healthy manner and interact with others. “More than two decades of rigorous scientific research shows that high-quality, well-implemented SEL can have a positive effect on school climate and promote a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits

for students” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 11). Social emotional learning teaches students the names of their feelings, how to cope with them, and techniques to manage feelings that are feeling out of control. “This is best done through effective classroom instruction beginning in preschool and continuing through high school, student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom, and broad parent and community involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 10). Social emotional learning curriculum seeks to build “a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 10).

Second Step Curriculum is a social emotional learning curriculum that is used in prekindergarten to 5th grade. The prekindergarten curriculum uses daily lessons based on a weekly theme such as skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, friendships skills and problem solving, and transitioning to kindergarten. The curriculum uses photo cue cards, puppets, stories and discussion, skill building, brain builder games, songs, visual aids, and take-home activities. Second Step can be implemented in daily, 5-10-minute lessons and reinforced throughout the day. The lessons build on skills already learned so skills are not lost throughout the year. Second Step themes are structured to add skills as the year progresses and the student prepares for kindergarten.

The objective of Second Step is to improve cooperation, communication, and decision making in prekindergarten children. In this research project, the researcher will collect quantitative and qualitative data to see if Second Step social emotional learning (SEL) will decrease negative behavior in a preschool classroom by increasing social skills. The researcher

will observe the preschool classroom pre and post implementation and behavior logs and incident report data will be collected and analyzed.

Literature Review

According to Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley (2015), “A recent study found that noncognitive ability in the form of self-control in childhood was predictive of adult outcomes ranging from physical health to crime to substance abuse” (p. E1). If the characteristics that predict future outcomes for a child could be predicted, parents and educators can help them grow into healthy adults. This has been viewed as a parent’s job until recently. With more children moving into kindergarten lacking social skills, schools have found their jobs harder. “Noncognitive skills related to behavior and academic motivation were found to be central to long-term effects on crime and employment” (Jones et al., 2015, p. E1). These include the ability to regulate emotions, self-regulation, and social skills such as sharing and taking turns.

The research study by Jones, et al. (2015) measured how prosocial skills in kindergarten later affected education, employment, criminal justice, substance use, and mental health domains in 13-19-year olds. “The school setting provides the opportunity to observe children’s abilities to interact interpersonally as they cooperate with others to complete daily tasks and resolve conflicts. Such skills are important for successful progression in early grades” (Jones et al., 2015, p. E2). The study began in 1991 and was followed up 19 years later by using public records, school reports, self-reports, and parent reports. The data indicates a person who has positive social skills is less likely to have a criminal history, use public assistance, and use illegal substances. The evidence indicates social skills lead to academic success, employment, and a healthier lifestyle. The study demonstrates the importance of social emotional literacy in young children and how those skills affect a person into adulthood.

“The National Academy of Sciences reported that 60% of children enter school with the cognitive skills needed to be successful, but only 40% have the social-emotional skills needed to succeed in kindergarten” (Ashdown, & Bernard, 2012, p. 398). Students who lack social skills are unable to collaborate with peers, focus on instruction, and communicate with their teacher and peers. The study conducted by Ashdown, and Bernard (2012), examined four classes in Melbourne, Australia where 100 students participated in the study over one term. Two classrooms used a social emotional learning program with direct instruction and two classrooms were used as the comparison classrooms. The classroom using the SEL program received explicit instruction for twenty minutes a day, three days a week, for the term. The teachers used modeling, reinforcements, and class discussion to implement the program. The study found the two classes that received the explicit instruction performed better academically than their peers in the two classes that did not receive instruction. The two classes also scored higher on social emotional testing than the classes that did not participate.

Ford, Cooke, Levine, Bourke, Newell, and Lapidus (2007) conducted a study in Meriden, Connecticut. All eight elementary schools implemented Second Step during the 2002-2003 school year. The study used a student self-report questionnaire for third and fourth grade students, a student behavior observation checklist that was administered by trained research assistants during the first two weeks of school and last two weeks of school. A research assistant coded disciplinary referrals for the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years then completed a disciplinary checklist. Almost “two-thirds of students showed significant positive changes in one or more survey variable”, but the study failed to demonstrate a significant change in aggression and violent behavior (Ford et al., 2007, p. 108). Second Step is designed to prevent aggressive

behavior over time by first increasing prosocial behavior and this study was consistent with that premise.

Second Step believes “that students who are provided direct instruction in social–emotional skills and opportunities to practice those skills and receive reinforcement for exhibiting them are likely to experience a range of improved intermediate outcomes and result in a cascade of positive distal outcomes” (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015, p. 464). Low et al., (2015) studied five school districts in Washington and one in Arizona participated in this study using Second Step in kindergarten to second grade. The study indicated students who are at high risk of office intervention had higher levels of improvement. The students who had higher baseline schools showed little to no improvement as they were already performing at grade level at the time of baseline testing. Students of all ages need to be able to focus, listen attentively, follow directions, work with peers, deal with conflicts, and manage their emotions. “Children who are strong in these skill areas are less disruptive and better able to take advantage of classroom instruction. Children who struggle in these areas are more likely to be off-task, engage in conflicts with peers or adults, and minimize learning time for themselves and others” (Jones, Bailey, & Jacob, 2014, p. 20). Jones, et al., (2014) studied 12 Headstart classrooms and 42 other classrooms in two school districts using a social emotional learning curriculum. Their findings were that “classrooms observed to be generally more positive, emotionally supportive, and well-managed” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 24). They also found on average more children scored at benchmark for the domains of cognitive, literacy, and social-emotional. “By providing concrete and age-appropriate strategies to help students learn to manage their attention, feelings, and behavior successfully, educators can support social-

emotional development while enhancing classroom management and instruction” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 24).

Social emotional learning has been in preschool classrooms for more than 20 years, but the effects of social emotional learning have not made headlines. “More than two decades of rigorous scientific re- search shows that high-quality, well-implemented SEL can have a positive effect on school climate and promote a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 11). Improved social and emotional skills and classroom behavior, less disruptive behavior such as aggression and bullying, and reduced emotional stress are the heart of social emotional learning. Social emotional learning “should be embedded in curriculum and instruction, as well as in student sup- ports and after-school programming” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 11).

Method

Participants

This action research was conducted in a childcare center with an all-day preschool program-serving children four to five years old. The classroom of twelve students consisted of seven females and one male. Three children, 25% are considered low socioeconomic status. There are no English language learners in this classroom. One female in the class wears glasses and another female student is being monitor by the local Area Education Agency and the school district for behavior problems that have been consistent throughout the year. The classroom consists of one full time, lead teacher and a part time associate who works with the students two hours a day while the lead teacher is out of the classroom. A second associate works in the classroom for one hour each day while the lead teacher is taking a lunch break.

Data Collection

The focus of the action research was to determine if the use of Second Step Curriculum reduces the number of negative behaviors in a preschool classroom. The preschool teacher implemented Second Step social emotional learning over a three week period beginning June 11, 2018. The lessons consisted of 10 minute daily lessons, using cue cards, puppets, and modeling. The cue cards were photos of social situations with prompts to encourage conversation and allow the students to practice social interactions. The teacher role modeled possible scenarios and encouraged student participation and conversation.

The researcher used qualitative and quantitative data to see if behaviors improved after implementing Second Step. The quantitative data was collected by tallying behavior logs and incident reports as well as tallying behaviors observed by the researcher from 9am to 11am during a five-day period beginning May 29, 2018. The behaviors were tallied as not listening, physical aggression, and inappropriate behavior. The environment was also noted such as playground, at the tables, in the gym or at centers. The behavior logs indicate the location, time of day, summary of the incident, and teachers present. (See Appendix A) Post implementation data was collected for a five-day period beginning July 2, 2018 using the same methods and the researcher observed the class from 9am to 11am for one week.

The qualitative data included teacher interviews with the lead teacher and associate. Both teachers were interviewed prior to receiving training on Second Step Curriculum. The teachers were interviewed separately then together to discuss their feelings toward their student behaviors and to discuss possible causes and solutions. These interviews took place over three days during the week of May 29, 2018. The teachers were introduced to Second Step Curriculum June 5, 2018 and they were able to review the materials and lessons together over two days. Second Step was implemented in the classroom June 11, 2018 during morning meeting. The lessons were 10

minutes each morning using the Second Step cue cards and curriculum. Post implementation interviews were conducted together July 13, 2018.

Findings

Data Analysis

There was minimal researcher bias during this research project. The researcher is the supervisor of the preschool teachers. The data was collected by the two teachers who work in the preschool classroom using a coding system to provide quantitative unbiased data. Collecting quantitative data allowed the researcher to understand the benefits of a social emotional curriculum.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data was collected using a table to track the number of incidents per student during the pre and post implementation periods. The behavior logs and incident reports (Table1) were tallied to track the number of reports within the collection period. Researcher observed negative behaviors were tallied pre and post implementation (Table 2 and 3) then compiled to compare the difference between pre and post implementation (Table 4).

Table 1

Number of Incidents per Student

Student	Preliminary	Post	Change
A	5	4	-1
B	2	1	+1
C	7	6	-1
D	2	4	+2
E	2	5	+3

F	3	0	-3
G	2	1	-1
H	2	3	+1
I	0	0	0
J	0	0	0
K	1	0	-1
L	1	3	+2

Table 1 indicates the number of incident reports or behavior log notations per student pre-implementation in column two and post implementation in column three. Five students, 41% had increased behavior reports after implementation of Second Step curriculum while the same number of students had decreased behavior reports. Student E had more than double the number of behavior reports post implementation while student F behavior was reduced by 100%. Students H and I had no change in behavior reports.

Table 2

Behaviors Observed by the Researcher Pre-implementation

Student	Not Listening	Physical Aggression	Inappropriate
A	3	5	2
B	4	2	1
C	10	7	3
D	7	2	3
E	5	2	4
F	6	3	2

G	3	2	1
H	1	2	0
I	4	0	0
J	3	0	2
K	5	1	2
L	7	1	3

In table 2 researcher observations were categorized as not listening, physical aggression such as hitting, kicking, or pushing, and inappropriate behavior which may include spitting, rude gestures, or bullying. During the pre-implementation observation period several behaviors were observed that didn't result in an incident report or notation in a behavior log. Not listening and inappropriate behavior were managed at the classroom level and not reported to parents.

Table 3

Behaviors Observed by the Researcher Post implementation

Student	Not Listening	Physical Aggression	Inappropriate
A	5	4	3
B	2	1	2
C	7	6	1
D	4	4	5
E	8	5	6
F	4	0	1
G	2	1	1
H	2	3	4

I	3	0	1
J	4	0	2
K	3	0	1
L	4	3	1

As table 3 shows, researcher observed negative behaviors continued port-implementation of Second Step early learning curriculum. Students I and J had not scored in behavior logs or incident reports but had behaviors scored during pre and post implementation.

Table 4

Number of Researcher Observed Negative Behavior

Student	Preliminary	Post	Change
A	10	11	+1
B	7	5	-2
C	20	14	-6
D	12	13	+1
E	11	19	+8
F	11	5	-6
G	6	4	-2
H	3	9	+6
I	4	4	0
J	5	6	+1
K	8	4	-4
L	11	8	-3

Table 4 demonstrates the change in researcher observed negative behavior per student. Five student, 41% had an increased number of negative behavior while six students, 50% had a decreased in the number of negative behaviors. Although the number of student behavior changes is relatively the same, the number of behaviors overall decreased by six incidents. It is important to note students E and H had substantial increases in negative behavior and students C and F had large decreases in negative behavior.

Table 5

Location of Negative Behavior Pre-implementation

Student	Centers	Tables	Gym	Playground
A	12	1	2	3
B	8	1	0	4
C	23	2	2	2
D	12	2	0	3
E	10	2	1	3
F	12	1	1	2
G	6	1	1	1
H	3	2	0	3
I	3	1	0	0
J	4	0	1	0
K	7	2	0	0
L	10	1	0	1
Total	110	16	8	22

Table 5 shows the location of negative behaviors documented and observed. As indicated, centers was the location with the most negative behavior with 110 incidents, 70% while the gym had the least. Each child had more incidents in centers than the other areas reported. While significantly less than centers, the playground had more incidents than the gym and tables.

Table 6

Location of Negative Behavior Post implementation

Student	Centers	Tables	Gym	Playground
A	9	3	2	1
B	4	1	0	1
C	18	1	1	0
D	16	1	0	0
E	19	4	1	0
F	4	0	0	1
G	3	1	0	1
H	7	4	1	0
I	2	1	0	1
J	4	2	0	0
K	3	1	0	0
L	7	3	0	1
Total	96	22	5	6

Table 6 indicates the number of negative behavior documented and observed in each location post implementation. The centers had the most negative behaviors with 96 documented and observed incidents, 75% while the tables had 22, and the gym and playground had 11 total incidents. Each child had more incidents in centers than the other areas reported.

Table 7

Location of Negative Behavior Pre and Post implementation Observed and Recorded

Student	Preliminary	Post	Change
Centers	110	96	-4
Tables	16	22	+6
Gym	8	5	-3
Playground	22	6	-2
Total	156	129	-27

Table 7 shows the total number of observed and reported incidents in each location pre and post implementation. Centers had the largest reduction in negative behavior while the gym and playground had modest decreases. Tables had an increase of 6 incidents post implementation.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected for this study was done by teacher interviews pre and post implementation. The researcher met with the lead teacher and associate individually and together to discuss their feelings toward student behavior and possible causes. The teachers discussed the major behavior problems in the classroom such as physical aggression in the form of hitting, kicking, and pinching as well as inappropriate behavior such as spitting, name calling, and

pushing. Not listening was a generalization used for behaviors such as ignoring the teacher, arguing, or not following directions. Both teachers felt the overall negative behavior in the classroom had decreased post implementation. The teachers reviewed their notes of time sampling taken pre and post-implementation to compare the amount of time teaching versus time spent managing classroom behavior.

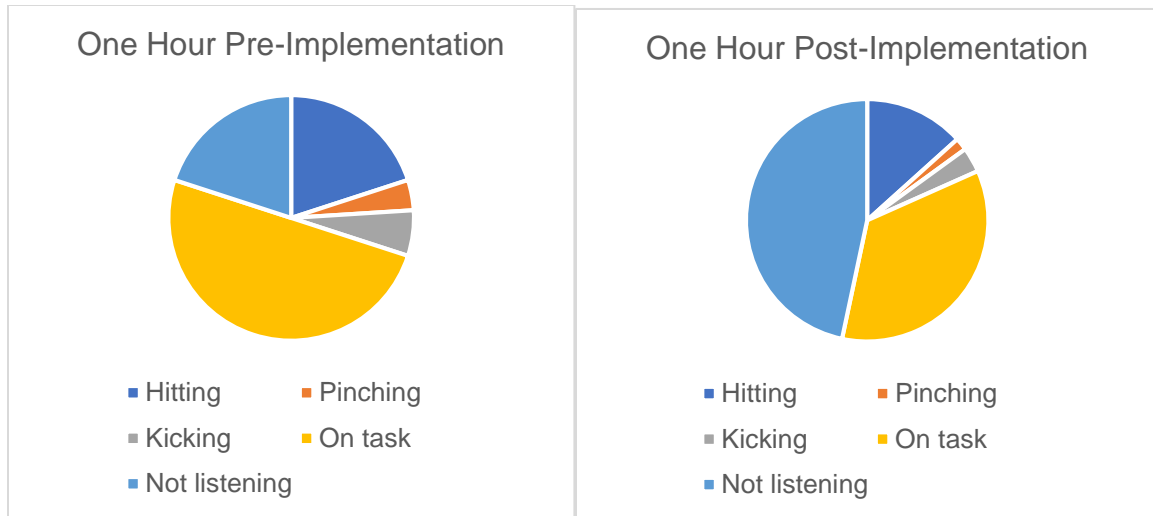


Figure 1 Behavior in one hour of preschool The figure illustrates the time spent managing negative behavior.

Figure1 illustrates the minutes spent in one hour of preschool managing negative behaviors or on task behavior. The chart demonstrates the decrease in physical aggression but increase in time not listening. Pre-implementation less than thirty minutes was spent teaching while the students were on task. Post-implementation the time on task had decreased by five minutes. Physical aggression time decreased by almost five minutes, which would indicate almost one hour of teaching time, was gained in a ten-hour day, which is the typical day for most of the students attending the program.

The teachers indicated the incidents of physical aggression had decreased, but inappropriate behavior such as name-calling had increased after implementing Second Step. The

teachers felt the incident reports needed to be changed to add more detail such as where in the classroom behavior took place and the actions taken by the child as a result of intervention. They felt that the behavior increases may be a result of an awareness of their feelings and the behavior report should reflect their actions when the teacher intervened. The teachers believe the students are communicating their feelings more often and conflicts are being resolved more quickly.

Discussion

Limitations

One of the limitations is the study only used one preschool classroom. Since the class only consists of twelve students, it is difficult to know if the curriculum is effective in larger populations, other age groups, and more diverse classes. The second limitation was time. The time allowed for implementation was limited to three weeks. The limited time and short lessons made it difficult to see Second Step fully integrated into the classroom. A third limitation is the limited number of teachers involved in the study. Another limitation is the minimal training given to the teachers before implementing the curriculum. Finally, a limitation is the lack of support by the other teachers in the building.

Further Study

Future studies of the effects of Second Step curriculum in a preschool classroom, may want to gather information from other preschool classrooms in the community with varying demographics. Future studies may want to increase the implementation time to allow classrooms to fully implement the curriculum. Additional training time is important to the success of the curriculum. Additional studies would benefit from training all school personnel to integrate Second Step throughout the building providing support to the classroom teachers. Already having a Second Step atmosphere is important to the study.

Conclusion

Through gathering behavior logs, incident reports, and researcher observations the research indicates Second Step curriculum decreases negative behavior in some children but may increase negative behavior in others. It is unclear if the increase in negative behavior is a short-term effect of integrating social emotional learning (SEL). The study leads the researcher to believe Second Step curriculum needs to be fully implemented over a longer period to positively effect student behavior. To better understand the effects of Second Step further information is needed such as detailed reporting. Creating better reports to fully track incidents is crucial to understanding where the behavior occurs and the type of behavior. In addition to detailed reporting, implementing Second Step curriculum throughout the school will allow colleagues to support the teachers using Second Step. Support from administration in the form of time for the lead teacher and associate to collaborate and providing support materials is essential to the success of Second Step. The outcome of this research project indicates Second Step may affect some preschool students positively, but further study is needed to determine the long-term effects on the whole classroom.

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