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Using Role Play to Teach Social Emotional Skills in the Early Childhood Classroom

Rebecca Havens

Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine if using role play in the classroom would be an effective teaching strategy to improve the social emotional skills of kindergarten students. With the focus of kindergarten shifting towards more academics, it remains important to teach social and emotional skills with an effective, efficient approach. Participants included 19 kindergarten students in a small elementary school in the Midwest. The research included using children's literature to prompt discussions and role playing activities around social emotional skills. The role play activities included practicing what to say to a peer when a problem arises in a social situation. The researcher tracked how many times students tattled and how many minutes students could work independently. The results of this research show an improvement in classroom behavior after engaging in role playing activities based on social skills. The students were observed solving behavior problems themselves and working for longer periods of time without adult intervention.

Keywords: early childhood, social emotional, play, behavior, kindergarten

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Using Role Play to Teach Social Emotional Skills in the Early Childhood Classroom

Many childhood professionals agree that the most important part of being a teacher is classroom management (Sverdlov & Aram, 2016). One aspect that is of utmost concern is the student's ability to stay on task. Teachers have only so many minutes in each day and many objectives to teach, many kindergarten teachers still believe that social emotional skills are more important than academics in the kindergarten year (Sverdlov & Aram, 2016). Teachers must find a way not only to engage students but to keep them engaged and able to work without constant attention from the teacher (Graziano, Garb, Ros, Hart, & Garcia, 2016). Students need to be taught not just what to learn but how to learn and interact with others. This researcher is motivated to improve students' time on task behavior. Social and emotional domains are one area that many teachers assess initially to determine if a child is ready for school and academics (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006).

In a kindergarten classroom, the biggest challenge is teaching students how to work with others and stay on task. Kindergarten age children are often still a little egocentric (McLeod, 2018) and sometimes have just not had much experience working with others. One problem in many classrooms is the student's ability to work with partners, independently, or in small groups without direct supervision. Reunamo et al. (2013) suggest that higher engagement in role playing will increase students' ability to make decisions and improve their thinking skills and growth mindset. Teachers dedicate many minutes each day to teaching small groups so students must be able to stay engaged and productive without constant attention. Using role play is one strategy that could be used to help students learn how to make decisions on their own that will support their ability to work with classmates.

Many educational minutes are being taken away because students have trouble with social emotional skills including arguing and tattling (Graziano et al., 2016). If educators could cut down on the number of these incidents, students would have more time for learning and instruction. There are many times each day spent either listening to students tell about a problem (tattling) or actually dealing with a discipline issue. Kindergarten teachers are under a lot of pressure today to meet many common core standards and our students come to us at many different learning levels (Graziano et al., 2016). The role of preschool and kindergarten used to be teaching social skills, now we are focusing more on academics (Briggs, Russell, & Wanless, 2018). A student's success at school is greatly impacted by his or her ability to express themselves using appropriate social emotional skills with their peers (Ashiabi, 2007). Educators still need to take the time to address social and emotional learning. Social skills must remain a focus in our classrooms in order to help all children be successful (Clark, 2017).

Important social emotional skills to be taught in an early childhood classroom include: managing emotions, recognizing the emotions of others, focusing on tasks, listening skills, remembering directions, self-control, and cooperation (McClelland, Tominey, Schmitt & Duncan, 2017). Teachers set an example for their students of managing and recognizing emotions (Brock & Curby, 2014). Students need time to practice self-monitoring of their attention and focus to complete tasks in school (Menziez & Lane, 2011). The strategy of role play will include teacher modeling, recognition of emotions, listening to others, controlling one's emotions, and cooperating with others. In a study on cooperative learning, it was found that students who worked in cooperative groups performed significantly better than students not exposed to cooperative learning (Najmonnisa & Saad, 2017). Role play is a cooperative learning strategy that all students can participate in.

To enhance social emotional learning, many school districts have started implementing the Olweus bullying prevention program (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015). That program includes having discussions and weekly meetings, defining bullying, and steps to handle bullying and role playing as a strategy to help children to address problems they observe between peers (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015). The impact of the role playing is something that has not been addressed in much research. This researcher wants to know if the use of role playing will improve kindergarten student's behavior. Children of this age do best with hands-on, active learning (McLeod, 2018). The use of role playing could be an active learning strategy that will help children learn how to solve conflicts without adult intervention and reduce the number of tattling incidences. Using role playing during social and emotional learning to help students problem solve in order to complete tasks during partner and group work time without adult assistance is the basis for this research.

Role playing is a strategy that will fit within the normal teaching strategies in a classroom. In a study done on role play and student engagement, Stevens (2015) found that most students were more engaged. This study was done with older students. Role playing is an active strategy which will require the students to be more involved than they would be if they were just listening to instruction. Research needs to be conducted on using role play with other ages of students. The hope was to improve teaching practice and student's learning behaviors. Role playing activities were used during social and emotional learning and student behavior was tracked objectively.

This study was conducted in a classroom, involved normal teaching practices, and assessment techniques. Students were given the choice to be active participants in the role playing activities. The students were observed just as they would for other purposes in the

classroom. The data collected did not name any individual children, thereby maintaining student anonymity. This study was conducted based on the importance of social emotional learning in the kindergarten classroom (Graziano et al., 2016).

Students in kindergarten struggle with working with others because they have not had enough experience in a classroom working with other students. Many kindergarten students come to school with no previous formal education. Teachers must develop strategies to use to effectively teach students how to work with classmates. The results from this study may help to improve teaching practices. It will introduce an effective strategy to use with social and emotional learning, an important topic in a kindergarten classroom.

Observations were used to become more reflective and responsive. This research was used to evaluate a strategy to implement to increase students' time on task behaviors and decrease student conflict and tattling. The purpose of this study was to describe the effects of role playing during social and emotional learning on student's classroom behavior. Role playing activities were incorporated during classroom meetings based on social and emotional learning and observations were made on student's time on task, ability to resolve conflicts, and tattling behaviors. As the students learn more productive problem solving techniques through role playing, the available educational minutes in the classroom will be increased.

Literature Review

Teachers are always looking for new and effective ways to improve student behavior. Classroom management is a crucial aspect of teaching; teachers cannot teach students when too much time is spent on disciplining. Teachers cannot teach students who are not paying attention. In a kindergarten classroom more time is spent on reading and math and less time on social and emotional learning (Larner, 2014). Social emotional learning remains an important aspect of teaching. Students come to kindergarten with many varied levels of experience and expectations in regard to education (Woods-Groves & Choi, 2017). Many students are lacking in social skills that help them to be successful in school. Kindergarten was traditionally a place to learn how to get along with others, how to be a student, and some academics.

Now, with the increased rigor of the common core some students are missing out on critical social skills, which greatly hampers success in the classroom. In a study of play in the classroom, Ashiabi (2007), suggests that children's classroom success is enhanced by forming relationships with other students which happens through play. Children who can regulate emotions and have good relationships with their peers work better together in a classroom (Ashiabi, 2007). This study was conducted to develop an effective strategy for teaching kindergarten students to think through behaviors and emotions and have the skills needed to interact with their peers in ways that allow them to negotiate problems with classmates independently.

Social emotional skills are an essential component of children being able and ready to learn in a classroom setting (White & Walker, 2018). Many behavior problems arise in classrooms simply because students have not had the experience of being with peers and solving problems on their own. Teachers play a very important role in demonstrating how to interact

with others in a positive manner, especially in the early years of a child's life (Rakap, Balikci, Kalkan, & Aydin, 2018). Studies show that early childhood educators can successfully design and plan curriculum to teach social emotional skills (White & Walker, 2018).

Teachers must find a way to engage students and to improve their time on task behavior. In a kindergarten classroom, the biggest challenge is teaching them how to work with others and stay on task. Kindergarten age children are often still a little egocentric (McLeod, 2018) and sometimes have just not had much experience working with others. Students who received training in social skills had an increase in academic success (Brigman & Webb, 2003). As teachers, we must assess what skills our students need in order to succeed academically, not just provide core academic instruction. Teachers desire to find strategies that will allow them to devote more time to teaching the required academics (Menzies & Lane, 2011). Students in kindergarten often have difficulty working with partners, with small groups, and independently. This puts these students at a disadvantage for learning and conforming to teacher's expectations (Menzies & Lane, 2011). During role play activities, students will have the opportunity to practice working with partners and in small groups. Students can practice focusing their attention on a task and ignoring others' behaviors during role play sessions.

This researcher wants to know if the use of role playing can improve kindergarten students' behavior. The action research will be used to determine if the use of role playing during social and emotional learning improves kindergarten student's behavior. Children of this age do best with hands-on, active learning (McLeod, 2018). Kindergarten is a crucial time for students to develop the skills necessary to succeed in the academic environment (Menzies & Lane, 2011). The use of role playing may be an active learning strategy that will help children learn how to

solve conflicts, problem solve, and complete tasks independently. The successful use of these skills will allow the students more time to focus on their learning.

History

The teaching of social skills has been a focus in early childhood classrooms from the beginning. Kindergarten was traditionally a place of socialization. Play was used to teach, which is considered developmentally appropriate practice (Larner, 2014). With the increased emphasis on high stakes testing, kindergarten is now more academically based. Friedrich Froebel designed kindergarten to be nurturing, playful, and active (Larner, 2014). As the focus on academic achievement increases, the focus on play and socialization has decreased. The new academic demands that are not developmentally appropriate are causing students stress and anxiety which has increased negative behaviors in the classroom (Larner, 2014). More must be done to teach social and emotional skills.

Kindergarten students who can regulate their emotions and behaviors are more prepared to learn and succeed academically (Morris et al., 2013). Classroom success can improve when teachers give more attention to social skills (Brigman & Webb, 2003). Teachers must find an appropriate way to incorporate more social learning in the classroom. Many kindergarten teachers surveyed reported that students who have difficulty in the classroom came to school with low social skills, they had problems getting along with peers and cooperating with others (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Children who are new to the school setting need teachers to help them learn how to interact with peers.

In a study conducted by Rashid and Qaisar (2017) it was suggested that role playing was an effective strategy to enhance critical thinking skills in the elementary classroom. Critical thinking is a skill that must be taught in order to improve academic and social outcomes, it is a

skill related to being able to develop a plan to solve a problem, students must learn to think about and analyze a situation before choosing an action that will give positive results as opposed to just reacting to situations without thinking first (Beavers, Orange, and Kirkwood, 2017). Students who develop better thinking skills exhibit better social skills (Coskun & Coskun, 2019). These ideas contribute to the theory that educators should be taking the time to model problem solving by thinking aloud and helping students to develop the skills needed to think about situations to make good decisions in social situations.

Students need to practice new social skills to help them get along in a classroom. One strategy to practice is using role play. There has been some research done on role playing in higher education and in the medical field. There was not much research found on using role play in an early learning setting. An electronic search was conducted using the ERIC database and google search engine which was limited to peer reviewed articles written within the last ten years using the keywords: role playing, social emotional learning, kindergarten curriculum and play in education.

Implications

Teachers must research effective strategies to implement in their classrooms. Stevens study (2015) suggests that role play is an effective strategy to use in education. This study was done in a higher education setting in a history class. Stevens (2015) used role play because he believes it to be an active way for students to learn which will increase their engagement. His students took on roles of people in history to increase their understanding of the material. Some of his students enjoyed the project while some did not. Role play is also a collaborative strategy; students can learn from each other and get support from the teacher which will increase

motivation and engagement (Stevens, 2015). The use of role play with kindergarten students should be an effective strategy to improve their engagement.

Teachers must take time early on to teach students how to pay attention and how to stay on task; many students come to school without these skills. Children must be taught, with explicit instruction, how to stop and think about a situation and make a plan that will result in a positive outcome (Menzies & Lane, 2011). Having the guided practice of using role play in the classroom based on social skills with the teacher is one strategy educators can use to give their students the skills to navigate social problems.

Woods-Groves and Choi (2017) suggest that providing instruction that is engaging and involves the students enhances their interest and provides positive results in meeting classroom expectations. Play has traditionally been recognized as the way children learn best, it is engaging and motivating to children (Irvin, 2017). Using role play is a way to combine guided learning with play that provides children with the opportunity to practice important social skills.

In an analysis of research on engagement and achievement, Fitzpatrick (2012), summarized that the ability to self-regulate and work independently in kindergarten is associated with higher achievement later in elementary school. Through play, children learn how to adjust to different situations (like school) and gain communication skills which will help with problem solving (Irvin, 2017). Irvin (2017) states that research shows the importance of play on a child's development. Irvin (2017) provided a history of play but did not specifically mention the effectiveness of role play as a teaching strategy. Teachers can incorporate role play into instruction as a way to increase student learning and engagement in a developmentally appropriate way.

Students need to learn how to solve problems with others without the assistance of an adult. Reunamo et al. (2013) suggests that higher engagement in role playing will increase students' ability to make decisions and improve their thinking skills and growth mindset. Through the use of role play, students will gain skills and the language they need to improve their classroom behavior. Social and emotional learning is a crucial factor in addressing the increased number of young students with behavioral issues (Clark, 2017). Role play is a strategy to give students more social skills which they can learn from interacting with each other. Clark (2017) believes students will benefit from the use of modeling appropriate behavior and language. It was not mentioned if modeling is more effective coming from the teacher or from other students. Clark (2017) suggests that we meet the needs of each student by assessing their social skills and providing instruction based on those assessments. One way to address social skills is through the use of role play.

Need for Research

Teachers need to continue to focus on social emotional skills in the kindergarten classroom to ensure their student's academic success (Graziano et al., 2016). Many teachers feel they lack to skills necessary to effectively teach social emotional skills (McClelland, Tominey, Schmitt & Duncan, 2017). More research needs to be conducted to find effective strategies that are easily implemented in early childhood classrooms. This research intended to discover if using role play is an effective strategy for improving social emotional skills.

There have not been many studies done on the use of role play in social emotional learning. McDaniel, Bruhn, and Troughton (2017) studied students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders using the explicit teaching of social skills within a specific program and saw an improvement in negative behavior. The study was limited by size and time constraints which

suggests the need for more research in the area. Research must be done to identify effective strategies to teach social skills in early elementary. Young children learn best through hands-on, active exploration and discovery (McLeod, 2018). Role playing should be studied as a way for students to discover for themselves how to handle new situations.

With the increased pressure to teach academics and the increase in students with challenging behavior, we must research new strategies to effectively teach students needed skills. Because schools have seen an increase in behavior problems, teachers need to research new ways to teach important skills (Clark, 2017). The use of role play to improve social skills in kindergarten students needs to be studied to determine if it is an effective way to help students be successful. Reunamo et al. (2013) question if the use of role play will make learning more personal and if it can be used to teach children to be more independent.

Mooy (2018) conducted a study on social emotional learning with 16 general education kindergarten students. A six-week intervention teaching emotions, growth mindset, self-management, kindness, conflict resolution, and respect was followed with observations of behavior. Seventy-five percent of the students in the class showed a fifty percent or higher decrease in negative behaviors (Mooy, 2018). This shows social emotional learning to be very important in the classroom. Mooy (2018) suggests more time spent researching this area along with trying more programs to teach social emotional learning.

In summary, a review of the literature shows that research on using role play in social emotional learning is very sparse and more needs to be done. More research must be done on the use of role play because of its benefits in child development (Reunamo et al., 2013). In research done by Fitzpatrick (2012), with the use of Tools of the Mind curriculum, role play was used as a technique where the students would check the work of their partner and then use that skill to self-

monitor. The transfer of this skill was not explained in the research but students did learn to be more independent. This curriculum was shown as successful with four year olds with disadvantaged backgrounds; Fitzpatrick (2012), cites the need for more research to be done with more populations of students. Due to the potential benefit of role play for students' social skills as indicated by research, and the modern student's increased need in this area, research using role play in kindergarten classrooms to teach social emotional learning needs to be conducted to determine if it is an effective tool for improving student behavior.

Methods

This study was conducted for a period of five weeks in a general education public kindergarten classroom. The classroom was located in a small town in the Midwest. The research was conducted in a Preschool through grade five building with 39% students on free/reduced lunch. The research included incorporating role playing activities during classroom meetings based on social and emotional learning and observe student's time on task, ability to resolve conflicts, and tattling behaviors. All students were exposed to the social emotional literature and observed or participated in the role playing activities.

Participants

Participants of the study included 19 kindergarten students, aged five and six years old. Of those 19, seven were five years old and twelve were six years old. One student was of African American descent; the others were Caucasian. The students were predominantly middle class. Two students had individual education plans (IEP's) for speech, one student had an IEP for reading, writing, and math. The student's names were not shared and they were allowed to choose to participate in the role play or just observe. There were two adults present in the room, the classroom teacher and a full-time volunteer.

Procedures

The focus of this project was to increase students' time on task behavior and decrease student conflict and tattling. Measurement included: tracking incidences of tattling and time students can spend working independently. A tally recording sheet was utilized for tracking the number of times students tattled. A tattle was recorded when a student told the teacher or volunteer what someone else was doing during recess or in the hallway. Tallies were taken after recess three times per week. The researcher used a timer to determine how long students worked

independently during center time, this information was recorded on a spreadsheet. The timer was stopped when a student, or students, become off task with a behavior that disrupted other student's work.

The researcher noted what kinds of problems the students needed help with and what occurs before the students ask an adult for help. This information was used to help determine what issues to address through the literature and role play activities. The teacher read aloud a picture book with a social or emotional theme, conducted a discussion, and had students act out how to solve the problem presented in the story. Students were eager to volunteer to participate in the role play. At times, all of the students in the classroom got a chance to participate. One noted example was how to address a bullying student on the playground. The students took turns practicing what to say to the other student to stop the behavior.

Data Collection

To establish a baseline of behaviors, data was taken for one week three times per week before the intervention. The intervention lasted for three weeks, incorporating role playing during social and emotional lessons twice each week. During the intervention, data was taken after recesses and during center time three times each week. After the intervention, data was taken again three times during a one-week period.

The independent variable in the study was the use of role play during social and emotional lessons. The dependent variables measured were: number of tattles recorded during center time and time on task when students are working with a partner or with a group during centers. The qualitative and quantitative data was triangulated in the analysis. All data was taken for 20 minutes, three times per week before, during, and after the intervention. The quantitative data was counted and averaged to determine if there were more or less adult interventions and

more or less tattling after the intervention. Qualitative data analysis was used with the anecdotal records to provide a clear picture of student behavior during partner and group work.

A classroom volunteer assisted with recording tallies to track the incidences of tattling and timing how long the students worked in centers without an adult intervening. The literature readings, discussions, and role playing was conducted by the classroom teacher. The teacher researcher took anecdotal records before, during, and after the intervention. The data was analyzed by the researcher and an instructional coach.

Findings

Quantitative Data Analysis

Data was collected for a period of four weeks. Baseline data was collected to determine the mean number of tattles and the mean number of independent work minutes before conducting the intervention. Tally marks were recorded to find the number of tattles for a period of twenty minutes immediately following recess, three times per week. The number of independent work minutes were timed by a volunteer for twenty minutes, three times per week during center time. The timer was stopped when a student, or students, went to an adult for assistance because of a problem with another student.

The data that was collected on the number of tattles after recess shows a decrease during and after the intervention. Students were tattling less often after role playing. The baseline data show an average of 12 tattles, week one of the intervention consisted of an average of 11 tattles, week two shows an average of 9 tattles, and the final week there were an average of 7 tattling incidences. Table 1 shows the descriptive data analysis of tattles during the intervention.

Table Number 1

Descriptives for Tattles

<u>Week</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Std. Err.</u>	<u>Lower \bar{x} 95% C.I.</u>	<u>Upper \bar{x} 95% C.I.</u>
1.00	3	12.33	1.53	0.88	8.54	16.12
2.00	3	10.67	2.08	1.20	5.50	15.84
3.00	3	9.00	1.73	1.00	4.70	13.30
4.00	3	7.00	2.00	1.15	2.03	11.97
Total	12	9.75	2.60	0.75	8.10	11.40

The number of independent work minutes was also recorded and showed an increase during and after the intervention. The data analysis shows that the increase in the number of minutes was significant. The baseline data showed that the students could work independently for an average of 8 minutes. During week one, that average increased to 10 minutes. During week two, the students worked for an average of 13 minutes, and the final data showed an average of 14 minutes. Table 2 shows the descriptive data analysis of the number of independent work minutes.

Table Number 2

Descriptives for Work Minutes

Week	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.	Lower \bar{x} 95% C.I.	Upper \bar{x} 95% C.I.
1.00	3	8.00	1.00	0.58	5.52	10.48
2.00	3	10.00	1.00	0.58	7.52	12.48
3.00	3	12.67	2.08	1.20	7.50	17.84
4.00	3	14.00	1.00	0.58	11.52	16.48
Total	12	11.17	2.69	0.78	9.46	12.88

The results of the one-way ANOVA for tattles indicated there was a statistically significant difference between groups $F(3, 8) = 4.58, p = .04$. This data could indicate that the use of role playing to help students solve problems on their own and reduce the number of times students tattle is an effective strategy. The results of the one-way ANOVA for independent work minutes show there was a statistically significant difference between groups $F(3, 8) = 11.82, p = .003$. This data suggests that the use of role playing had a significant impact on the number of minutes students could work independently during center time.

T-tests were conducted to compare the means for each week. The tests showed one significant difference in the number of tattles and three significant differences in the number of independent work minutes. A post hoc analysis using Bonferroni correction indicated that the tattles in week 4 ($M = 7, SD = 2$) was significantly less than the tattles in week 1 ($M = 12.33, SD = 1.53$), $p = 0.05$. The data is shown in tables five and six, below.

Table Number 5

Post hoc paired t-tests for Tattles with Bonferroni correction

<u>Wee</u> <u>k</u>	<u>Week</u>	<u>Mean Diff</u>	<u>Std. Err.</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Lower</u> <u>95% C. I.</u>	<u>Upper</u> <u>95% C.I.</u>
1.00	2.00	1.67	1.51	1.00	-3.58	6.92
	3.00	3.33	1.51	0.35	-1.92	8.58
	4.00	5.33	1.51	0.05	0.08	10.58
2.00	1.00	-1.67	1.51	1.00	-6.92	3.58
	3.00	1.67	1.51	1.00	-3.58	6.92
	4.00	3.67	1.51	0.25	-1.58	8.92
3.00	1.00	-3.33	1.51	0.35	-8.58	1.92
	2.00	-1.67	1.51	1.00	-6.92	3.58
	4.00	2.00	1.51	1.00	-3.25	7.25
4.00	1.00	-5.33*	1.51	0.05	-10.58	-0.08
	2.00	-3.67	1.51	0.25	-8.92	1.58
	3.00	-2.00	1.51	1.00	-7.25	3.25

Table Number 6

Post hoc paired t-tests for work minutes with Bonferroni correction

<u>Week</u>	<u>Week</u>	<u>Mean Diff</u>	<u>Std. Err.</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Lower 95% C. I.</u>	<u>Upper 95% C.I.</u>
1.00	2.00	-2.00	1.11	0.65	-5.85	1.85
	3.00	-4.67*	1.11	0.02	-8.51	-0.82
	4.00	-6.00*	1.11	0.004	-9.85	-2.15
2.00	1.00	2.00	1.11	0.65	-1.85	5.85
	3.00	-2.67	1.11	0.25	-6.51	1.18
	4.00	-4.00*	1.11	0.04	-7.85	-0.15
3.00	1.00	4.67*	1.11	0.02	0.82	8.51
	2.00	2.67	1.11	0.25	-1.18	6.51
	4.00	-1.33	1.11	1.00	-5.18	2.51
4.00	1.00	6.00*	1.11	0.004	2.15	9.85
	2.00	4.00*	1.11	0.041	0.15	7.85
	3.00	1.33	1.11	1.00	-2.51	5.18

* Significant with Bonferroni correction at the 0.05 level.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Before, during, and after the intervention, anecdotal records were taken by the teacher researcher. Records were made regarding what the students said to each other during observations after recess and during center times. Prior to the intervention, students who were being bothered by another student would stop what they were doing and tattle to an adult. The tattles included such remarks as: a student was not sharing the ball at recess, a student cut in line

after recess, a student was running in the hall, and a student did not let another student play with them. The students also tattled when they observed a classmate breaking any rule. After the intervention, students were observed using phrases such as, “please stop,” “I don’t like that,” “you are making me sad,” and “remember the Rams Way” (our school wide behavior expectations). The students were able to handle conflict better by using these phrases and didn’t feel the need to tattle after they were able to express their ideas and feelings to one another.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

This research suggests that the use of role playing to teach social emotional skills in a kindergarten classroom is an efficient way to help improve classroom behavior. After the role playing intervention, students were able to work independently for longer periods of time. After the role playing intervention, students tattled less often. Classroom instructional time was increased. The students showed positive attitudes towards this intervention. Every student wanted to participate on most days. During the intervention, students were observed repeating many of the phrases that were used in the role playing activities. When students were having a problem with another student, they knew how to politely ask them to stop and/or share their feelings of discomfort with one another verbally.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study showed positive results for the use of role play to enhance young children's social skills, there are limitations. This study was limited by the small number of students involved in the intervention and the fact that research was only conducted in one classroom. This study was conducted in one school with predominantly white, middle-class students. Another factor that may influence the study is the number of students who choose to participate in the role playing activities. This study is also limited by the amount of time of data collection and intervention. Another limitation is the age of the students; the results might be different if the study was done with students in other grades. This study does not show long term effects of the role playing intervention. The data may change after time has passed and the students are no longer using role play to enhance social skills on a regular basis.

Further Study

Further study needs to be done to show that role playing is an effective teaching strategy for social emotional skills. This study was not long enough to determine if the skills the students learned to use will continue to help them months, or years, past the intervention. Kindergarten may be the first time some children have been involved in formal education while others have attended preschool, it would be of interest to determine if previous schooling has any impact on the use of role playing and the skills that were gained. Research should also be done in other grade levels to study the effectiveness of role playing at different ages of students.

Another concern is that the research was done using literature and skills chosen by the teacher researcher. There was not a systematic approach to social emotional skills. Eklund, Kilpatrick, Kilgus, Haider, and Eckert (2018) suggest that educators need research based state standards for social emotional skills. The state of Iowa, where this research was conducted, does not currently have grade specific standards for social emotional skills (Eklund et al., 2018). This research was conducted by observing what social skills the students were lacking in and using that observation to choose literature based on that problem. A more systematic approach could yield different results. A curriculum based on teaching empathy, problem solving, communication, and self-control using evidence-based materials that follows a progression of skills beyond the preschool age which would then be assessed and monitored is needed (Eklund et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine if role playing is an effective strategy to use to teach students social emotional skills that would assist them in getting along in the classroom. Social emotional skills are important in how successful children are in the classroom both socially, and academically (Eklund et al., 2018). Students entering kindergarten often have little experience dealing with peers. The classroom environment demands that children are able to work with classmates and get along without a teacher's constant attention. Engaging in practicing social emotional skills will help students become better decision makers and improve their thinking skills (Reunamo et al., 2013).

Teachers look for new strategies to use in the classroom that will improve student learning. Children learn more and retain more when they are involved in an active learning approach (McLeod, 2018). Role playing is a way for students to be involved in learning in an active manner that includes guidance from the teacher. Using role play in teaching social emotional skills provides an active way for the teacher to help the students develop the social skills needed to get along with peers in the classroom and to be able to work independently.

Traditionally, in kindergarten, play was used to teach, which is considered developmentally appropriate practice (Larner, 2014). With the adoption of common core state standards and an increased emphasis on high stakes testing, kindergarten is now more academically based. Friedrich Froebel designed kindergarten to be nurturing, playful, and active (Larner, 2014). Using role play as a teaching strategy is a way to bring back some of that active, playful learning. This research showed positive results in using role play to teach social emotional skills. Engagement levels during the research was high. Students used phrases from the role play interventions when dealing with problems with peers after the intervention.

This research included using observation to determine areas of social emotional development to target. The teacher researcher then chose literature to support those particular areas which included: bullying, name calling, not sharing, bossing others around, and breaking school rules. The intervention included reading aloud and discussing the literature followed by the teacher modeling how to think through the situation to problem solve and choose a positive solution. The students then engaged in role playing activities so they could also practice talking through problems with peers. All of the students had many opportunities to role play solving problems in social situations.

More research needs to be conducted in this area. This research was short in nature and conducted in one small classroom. The research was not continued for a significant amount of time to show if the skills learned stayed with the students and were used in other places outside of the classroom. Also, many of the skills learned could have been due to the students maturing and/or learning them outside of the classroom. Literature was used during the intervention and that aspect of the research was not studied. The literature itself could have had an impact on the student's social emotional skills.

Role play is just one strategy to use to teach social emotional skills. The information provided by this study supports the idea that educators could use role playing in the classroom as an effective teaching strategy. Using role play was a way for the researcher to model appropriate behavior and communication during a social situation which research has shown to be effective (Clark, 2017). Fitzpatrick (2012) suggest that students who have social skills that enable them to get along with others and work independently have greater academic success in the classroom. As educators continue to change and add to their curriculum, it would benefit the students to

keep in mind the importance of teaching social emotional skills and the possibility of using role play to support that learning.

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