

PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN SRI LANKAN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Introduction

Prosocial behavior is described as a form of behavior that benefits other individuals and can take many forms, including helpful acts, cooperation, sharing, altruism, assertiveness, and an indication of empathy (Baron & Byrne; 1991). It also describes the phenomenon of acting out of concern for another person with no expectation of reward (Papalia & Olds, 1994)

Objective

The aim of the study was to investigate preschool teacher perceptions pertaining to the nature and prevalence of prosocial behaviors in preschool children.

Method

A survey questionnaire soliciting 275 preschool teachers from 18 (out of 25) districts in Sri Lanka requested then to list five prosocial behaviors which frequently occur in the classroom. In addition 22 preschool teachers from diverse preschools backgrounds were requested to name prosocial behaviors which they observed within the children in their classrooms. Prosocial behaviors listed in the 1st 100 questionnaires were grouped into several categories and using those

categories as a guideline, the responses to the remaining 175 questionnaires were tallied and computed, with the help of experts and peer debrief-persons.

Results

The study solicited 1087 (79%) responses from the preschool teachers (N = 1375). The initial tallied categories were divided into 09 broad categories. They were: helping (30.5%), sharing (14.7%), patience (.4%), exchanging (13%), indication of empathy (3.3%), social competence (3.5%), caring (1.4%), co-operation (12%) and praising others (.4%). The responses provided by the preschool teachers in the context of prosocial behaviors were also divided into three main categories according to their nature; physical, verbal, and emotional, using literature as a measuring scale. Physical forms of prosocial behavior (66%) seem to be the most prevalent in comparison to verbal (4.9%) and emotional (3%). In addition, three experts in the field of Educational Psychology, Clinical Psychology and Early Childhood Education were requested to rate the intensity of the prosocial behaviors using a three-point rating scale. The ratings provided by the experts were totaled to calculate the mean intensity of prosocial behaviors ($X = 2.3$; S.D. =

.6). Only 8 responses from the initial list 66 of responses received less than 1.5 'total, average' rating from the experts. Moreover, analysis of regression indicated that there is no significant effect of preschool teacher experience, duration of preschool teacher training or years of educational qualifications on the intensity of the reported prosocial behaviors of the preschool children by the preschool teachers. Moreover, the model has accounted for only .3% of the variance in the outcome variable.

Among the prosocial behaviors stated by the teachers during the interview were: having parents who display prosocial behaviors; sharing food; feeding younger children; taking the younger children to the toilet and bringing them back; helping other children to wash hands before and after eating; helping a child to get up when he falls while running; and helping the teacher on various occasions.

Discussion

Survey results indicate that a significant percentage of preschool teachers has recognized and are

aware of prosocial behaviors in preschool children. The analysis revealed that physical prosocial behaviors occur more frequently in the classroom (for e.g., sharing, exchanging and co-operation) while emotional and verbal prosocial skills such as empathy, praising, patience, caring and social competence hardly seem to occur. Another noteworthy investigative point in this research is the insignificance of experience and duration of preschool teacher training or years of educational qualifications on the intensity of the perceived prosocial behaviors of the preschool children by the preschool teachers. This finding should be seriously considered against the absence of preschool teacher training on early violence/ aggression prevention and promoting prosocial behaviors in the Sri Lankan Early Childhood Educational Curriculum..

References

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