

Emotion Labeling, Perspective-Taking and Parenting Style: Empathy and Social-Problem Solving in Early Childhood

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Abstract: This study is focusing on if emotional vocabulary and perspective-taking teach in daycare setting affect children in early childhood peer empathy and social-problem solving skill developing. And if different parenting style affect the result of children learning in daycare/school, as well as empathy and social skill development. After two weeks of intervention in daycare, with data an teacher's feedback, this study found out, emotional vocabulary and perspective-taking teaching significantly increase children peer empathy and social skill developing, as well as less problem behaviors. But due to lack of parenting style difference, this study fail to analyze how parenting affect empathy development.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Parenting, Empathy, Social-Problem.

1. Introduction

In early childhood education, sharing and other social-problems have always been a major challenge for all caregivers. Especially in daycare setting, children from different background, different parenting at home, different family composition and culture, they gathered in the same space to spend their day time together. They share the same space, toys, caregivers, attentions and rules. At the same time, they are developing friendship and learning social skills for the very first time in their life. How caregivers teach and guide them through social-problems and helping them build peer relationship, as well as understand others, will influence their future relationships and school lives. Since 1960s Diana Baumrind concluded authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting style, researchers have been study on how different parenting style affect child development, attachment and their future relationship, as well as what is the best way to parent children. With in the same time, more families have both parents working full time, so they have to find a daycare for their under school age children. More children under 5 years old spend their day time in daycare setting. So researchers also did caregiving and early childhood development research in daycare setting. But children are spending half of their day in daycare and half of their day at home, this research study on teaching preschool age children build peer empathy and social-problem solving skills by teaching emotional vocabulary, emotion labeling and perspective-taking in daycare setting, connecting children's behavior and peer relationship in daycare with their parenting style at home. In this case, this research will have a full picture of what children been learning and experiencing during the day, to study and try to help children develop better, and offer a guidance and suggestion to caregivers and parents.

2. Peer Empathy and Social-problem Solving Develop

2.1. Peer Empathy

Scholars identify empathy as the ability or the response of

understanding others' emotion or feeling; peer empathy will be the ability to understand peers' emotion or feeling [1]. Researchers also found early childhood might be the best period for empathy development[2]. For example, child A was building wooden blocks and made it really tall, child B saw the tall blocks and pushed the blocks. Child A saw the block tower fell into pieces and started crying, but child B ran away with a smile. In this case, teacher will need to gather both child together by the blocks, repeat what happened in between two children, and describe how both children feel in this social problem. Child A was happy and proud about their block tower, they were still trying to make it taller, but child B think push block tower down is fun and happy so they did it. Child A felt sad after their block tower went down, so they started crying, and child B felt fun and happy so they smiled and ran away. By going through what happened and speak it loud help children see the problem from both side. By pointing out the other child face expression and how they might felt help children developing emotion recognition, which is the ability of recognize and understand facial expression[3]. In this example, child B try to understand their behavior caused child A crying and felt sad or anger, as well as child A try to understand child B smiled and felt happy, will be the case of peer empathy. And research has shown young children who have a better understanding of others' emotions tend to demonstrate more social competence and better peer relationships[4].

2.2. Social-problem Solving

Social-problem solving is the ability to resolve successfully and appropriately conflicts or problems that arise in real-life interpersonal situations [5]. Use the example from earlier, the social-problem in this case will be child A lost their block tower, while child B hurt peer's feeling but didn't realize. As a care provider or teacher, guide children through social-problems and show them how to solve it as well as maintain a good relationship with peers, builds children social-confidence and social skills they will use in their future relationship. The teacher in our example can help children label their emotions, while children are feeling strong

emotions, it is a great timing of teaching emotional vocabulary. Talk loud about what happened as well as how each child felt, make them realize their behavior caused peer emotion, and teach them how to behave in the same situation next time and explain why. In our example, teacher can tell children, next time child B wants to play with other friends, they can ask before act, maybe child A will push the tower down after they finish building it, child B can push it with child A, or child A want to keep their tower and child B can join the building process, or child A wants to build the tower by their own and push it by themselves, then child B can start their own tower and push it down. And ask children to apologize for hurting friend's feeling, explain mistake or arguments happen all the time, but a good solution and apologize can keep friends around and make you and friends feel better. In this study we also used circle time to teach emotional vocabulary and using story pictures to teach children perspective taking and a suggested way solve social-problems.

2.3. Emotional Vocabulary and Perspective-taking Teaching Affect Empathy and Social-problem Solving

Research shown, self-regulation, positive peer relations and pre-academic skills are all positively related to emotion knowledge[6]. Teaching emotional vocabulary, perspective-taking and social-problem solving help build emotion knowledge for pre-school age children. Researchers have studied on parenting style and parenting warmth affect on children empathy development, as well as social-problem solving skills; researchers also studied on parental in childcare affect on children empathy development. But there are no research have studied on both parenting and parental in childcare on children develop, and only a few studied on pre-school age children. This study focusing on pre-school age children, teach children emotional vocabulary and perspective-taking by social-problem story talking and pretending play.

3. Method

3.1. Intervention

There are 8 pre-school age ($M=47.625$ months) children from the same childcare classroom participant in this study, with their parents' verbal permission, 4 boys and 4 girls. It is a 2 weeks intervention experience, including parenting style questionnaire (Cronbach Alpha: .63 $p < .01$), preschool and kindergarten behavior scales (PKBS) in this study as "classroom observation form" (teacher filled it before and after two weeks), emotional vocabulary form (including 16 basic emotions; happy, scared, sad, worried, silly, confused, surprised, mad, proud, nervous, angry, shy, embarrassed, tired, disgusted, frustrated) and 12 social-problem stories (including a overview of the story, aim, key points to cover and suggested questions, and 2-4 story pictures) [7,8]. Teacher handed out introduction of this study and parenting style questionnaire to parents a week before the intervention. Got text or verbal agreement for their children to attend this study, as well as their questionnaires. This study randomly pick out two children as control group, but since they are all in the same classroom with the same routine, it is hard to exclude any children, so they still joined intervention. Teacher filled out first classroom observation form before the intervention. This study's intervention lessons happened 3 times a week,

for two weeks, each lesson maintain 30-40 minutes, teacher also try to step in and guide children through social-problem during the day, as a play-based learning process. The intervention lessons: teacher teach emotional vocabulary and ask children how do they feel today, and what other emotional vocabulary do they know; teacher show children the story pictures, ask children to come up a story or what they think happened in the picture, ask children how the characters feel in the story, how can we behave and respond in the same situation, and how would they feel. Play-based learning process: when teacher see social-problem (will not share, physically aggressive, yelling or screaming, disobey rules, have problem making friends, etc) happened walk to children and get down to their level, ask or talk through what happened, ask or talk about how each children felt, ask or talk about how can they solve this problem. After two weeks, teacher filled out the classroom observation form again.

3.2. Analysis

One week after the intervention, all results been collect, other than two children's parenting style questionnaire. Teacher rate each student from 0-3 (0 as never, 1 as rarely, 2 as sometimes, 3 as often), added all score for each category when analyze, got 8 score for each children each form. Data from classroom observation form been organized into SPSS and ran paired t test. There are three paired t test in this work, for all children, for males and for females. For all children, social cooperation score M from 33.25 to 34.75, $SD=1.5$; social interaction score M from 28.5 to 31.875, $SD=3.375$; social independence score M from 30.5 to 32.125, $SD=1.625$; self-centered/explosive score M from 9.875 to 6.5, $SD=3.375$; attention problems/overactive score M from 5.5 to 2.125, $SD=3.375$; antisocial/aggressive score M from 3.75 to 2.125, $SD=1.625$; social withdrawal score M from 6 to 3.375, $SD=2.625$; anxiety/somatic problems score M from 7.625 to 3.75, $SD=3.875$. For all males, social cooperation score M from 32.5 to 33.75, $SD=1.25$; social interaction score M from 26.25 to 32.25, $SD=6$; social independence score M from 29 to 31.25, $SD=2.25$; self-centered/explosive score M from 14 to 10, $SD=4$; attention problems/overactive score M from 7.25 to 4.25, $SD=3$; antisocial/aggressive score M from 7.25 to 4.25, $SD=3$; social withdrawal score M from 7.25 to 4.75, $SD=2.5$; anxiety/somatic problems score M from 7.5 to 4.5, $SD=3$. For all females, social cooperation score M from 34 to 35.75, $SD=1.75$; social interaction score M from 30.75 to 31.5, $SD=0.75$; social independence score M from 32 to 33, $SD=1$; self-centered/explosive score M from 5.75 to 3, $SD=2.75$; attention problems/overactive score M from 3.75 to 0, $SD=3.75$; antisocial/aggressive score M from 0.25 to 0, $SD=0.25$; social withdrawal score M from 4.75 to 2, $SD=2.75$; anxiety/somatic problems score M from 7.75 to 3, $SD=4.75$. For all children, social skills (social cooperation, social interaction and social independence) scores mean SD is 2.167, for males social skills scores mean SD is 3.167, for females social skills scores mean SD is 1.167. For all children problem behavior (self-centered/explosive, attention problems/overactive, antisocial/aggressive, social withdrawal and anxiety/somatic problems) scores mean SD is 2.975, for males problem behavior mean SD is 3.1, for females problem behavior scores mean SD is 2.85. In the first classroom observation form, all males social skills score are lower than females, most problem behavior scores are higher than females, but anxiety/somatic problems females are 0.25 higher than males. In the second classroom observation form,

all males social skills scores are lower than females, all males problem behavior scores are higher than females.

All parents have the highest score on authoritative parenting style, 7 parents have permissive as second preference, 1 parent has authoritarian as second preference, 7 parents have authoritarian as third preference, 1 parent has permissive as third preference.

3.3. Discussion

The classroom observation data shows a significant change for all children after two weeks of learning emotional vocabulary and perspective-taking, all children have higher social skill score and lower problem behavior score. The result shows a significant different on gender, males has higher SD on both social skills and problem behaviors than females. But part of the reason can be all female has higher social skills score and lower problem behaviors score at the first classroom observation form compare to males, so there are less room for the score difference. Half female had one of two category at a full score on their first classroom observation form, and each female had one or two problem behavior scored as 0. On the other hand, it proved females have higher social skills, less problem behaviors in early childhood. This study also collected teacher's feedback after two weeks of intervention. All children are better at social-problem solving and seem to have higher peer empathy based on teacher's feedback. Teacher said during daily free play children are more likely to use emotional vocabulary and better at communicating before act. During the two weeks, children are better at social-problem story telling, faster and more accurate at the characters' emotion in the story pictures, for example children will use "she looks sad." when teacher showed them the story pictures. Teacher said children are using social skills that they learned from the stories during the day more often than they expected, with using more sentence to communicate with peers during social-problems, children are more calm and caused less fights than before. But teacher also said during the two weeks, one new boy joined in the classroom, caused more aggressive behavior in the boy group. Which this study did not expect. The gender difference is higher than this study expected.

Parenting style questionnaire showed each parent's preference parenting style, also with a small group of participants, this study is able to analyze each question and related them with children's behavior as well as teacher's feedback for each children. Find out that parents who expose some of their feelings about children's behavior to children, as well as give some criticism to their negative behavior at the moment, their children have higher peer empathy and social skills and less problem behaviors; parents who sometimes punish their children by taking away privileges but also shows full respect and love to their children, their children have better peer empathy and social skills, but also some problem behavior and anxiety; parents rated themselves low on spoiling their children, their children have higher problem behaviors.

3.4. Limitation

This study has a small group of participants, included different culture background, but all families are working in an university community, so this study is lacking of data from different finance and education background family, as well as different family structure. With a small group of participants,

it is hard to analyze a significant relation between parenting style and children empathy and social skills development, since all parents have authoritative parenting style as highest preference.

4. Conclusion

This research find out emotional vocabulary teaching and perspective-taking teaching in daycare setting helps early childhood building peer empathy and social skills, less problem behaviors during the day. Children lead to use more communication before action, help the class calmer and smoother. There are no significant relation between parenting style and daycare teaching, due to lack of data and difference. But from the questionnaire, classroom observation form and teacher feedback, warmth parenting with respect, explain expectation and some criticism lead to higher social skills, empathy and less problem behaviors. Parents rated less level on spoiling their children, tend to lead children to higher anxiety and more problem behaviors. For future studies, a larger group of participants with different background will help generalization the results, and might clearer if there is a higher gender difference or higher parenting style difference causing different behavior. Also with a long term follow up study might give a clearer relationship in between parenting style and parental in childcare and children empathy and social skills development.

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