

Social Emotional Learning in a Kindergarten Classroom: Case Study Response Plan

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Case Study Response Plan Assignment

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Scenario: You are having a lot of trouble with a Kindergarten student named Jacob. Jacob is often very angry, possibly due to his parents' recent divorce. Several times each day, he loses his temper if he doesn't get his way, yelling and screaming at anyone who frustrates him. His temper keeps the class on edge and none of the other students want to work or play with him.

Young children are beginning to learn how to identify and express their emotions. As an educator it is important to introduce social-emotional learning within the classroom to help guide and teach, not only Jacob, but the entire kindergarten classroom about emotions and how to self regulate during difficult situations. Jacob is exhibiting difficulties in emotional and social self regulation which may be due to his parents' recent divorce. The support of the classroom, as well as administrators, support staff, a school psychologist and parents will be identified as crucial components to guide Jacob. I will bring emphasis on mental health by providing a safe, caring environment where students can learn how to develop problem solving and coping strategies in the classroom.

Prevention

Students that are entering kindergarten are beginning to develop skills to regulate their attention, behaviour, and emotions. Through the guidance of an educator, students begin to develop emotional well being skills that permeate into different scopes of learning (e.g., problem solving, mathematics, literacy) (Ministry of Education, 2016).

My initial approach would be to begin the school year by establishing classroom guidelines to help students understand the standards in the classroom. Sayeski & Brown (2014) explain in their three-tiered model of support that effective student behaviour has the greatest potential to be impacted when rules and procedures are well-designed and clearly communicated. However, Gartrell (2004) argues that rules tend to be stated in negative terms (e.g., No running) and that actions have consequences. In my classroom, my goal is to set guidelines that teach students how to fit in and participate as a member of the class (Gartrell, 2004). This will allow

students, like Jacob, to understand classroom expectations, and guide students through problem solving skills rather than solely focusing on consequences.

Socio-economic learning (SEL) teaches whole group instruction on how to manage emotions through facial expressions that correlate with emotions and recognizing how to respond to these emotions (Denham et al., 2012). Kindergarten students are understanding their own and others thinking, and feeling the importance of physical and mental health and wellness (Ministry of Education, 2016). I will plan an effective curriculum that encompasses self regulation and well-being techniques. Students will learn about various emotions and skills related to processing those emotions. As part of the daily schedule, I will dedicate specific time throughout the day that focuses on educating students on self regulating activities such as deep breathing exercises and meditation. During the morning large group discussion, I will incorporate educational resources on emotions and create a class discussion that reflects on those emotions. Additionally, I would initiate open-ended group discussion that allows students to assess their energy levels and emotions while leading them through several self-regulating activities. For example, the students would openly share and discuss their emotions and problems, and work towards solutions. Allowing students and Jacob to have their feelings heard will foster a “sense of togetherness” and may provide additional incite into potential problems that I might not be aware of (Gartrell, 2004, p. 96). In the kindergarten program, self regulation and well-being frame focus’ on the children’s learning and development through recognizing their emotions and respecting the “differences in the thinking and feelings of others” (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 15). As part of my prevention plan, the classroom environment will consist of a safe place where students will be encouraged to go when they are feeling upset, frustrated, overwhelmed,

etc. The area would include multiple sensory materials (e.g., fidget toys) and easy to follow coping strategies (e.g., deep breathing, self soothing yoga positions).

Another preventive approach that I will take as an educator will be to create positive student-teacher rapport. As an educator, one of my priorities is to create a positive relationship with students where they feel safe, validated, and loved. I will lead a caring environment where their needs are met through being an active listening educator. This includes incorporating open communication and modeling self-development through respectful words and having my students feel nurtured. Miller Lieber and colleagues (2019) noted that there are benefits in getting to know your students and making them feel known. When an educator prioritizes making their students feel known by demonstrating care and genuine interest, they foster a positive ongoing interaction that supports conversations about their needs, experiences, and aspirations (Miller et al., 2019). All children need to feel accepted as a valued member of the class, and build positive relationships with their teachers (Gartrell, 2004). I will stress the importance of getting to know my students early in the school year and developing open communication with their parents. Creating an open communication with parents would allow me to better understand the situation of Jacob's parents and the continued support he will need in the classroom.

Immediate Response

When Jacob loses his temper and becomes angry, my immediate response is to help Jacob self regulate his emotions. I have developed a positive and nurturing student-teacher relationship with Jacob where I am able to guide him through deep breathing techniques and help him verbally state and recognize his emotions (e.g., I am angry because...). The goal of co-regulation is to enable children to develop self-regulation strategies they can apply independently

in the future (Hutchinson et al., 2021). The goal for Jacob would be to recognize his emotions and go to the quiet area of the classroom where he is able to independently self regulate before returning to play. The kindergarten program states that “when children have access to a variety of materials, tools, and spaces in the classroom, they gradually learn to select the ones that provide stimulation or a calming effect” (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 57).

When Jacob is in play and a conflict arises, this is an ideal time to introduce Jacob and his peers to skills that address social problem solving. Gartrell (2004) suggests a “five-step problem solving model of conflict management” (p. 82). The first step that I would implement would be to calm down Jacob and then help him and his peers identify the problem. By identifying the problem, I can help Jacob and his peers facilitate ideas on how to solve the problem. When Jacob and his peers decide on a solution, this will allow me to guide the students through their solution and follow up if or when necessary. When educators provide children with a choice in the learning environment it supports their emerging ability to self-regulate (Ministry of Education, 2016). Thus, an environment that is composed of care, kindness, and cooperation in the classroom supports the development of social and prosocial regulation in children.

If Jacob’s behaviour is becoming more persistent in the classroom, involving his parent(s) will be necessary. As a result of the strong partnership and open communication with Jacob’s parent(s), I will explain what is occurring within the classroom. I will inquire if his anger is extending past the classroom and into his home environment. I will ask if they have noticed a change in his behaviour. If there has been, I will ask when they noticed that change and are there any specific triggers at home. Being able to have an open communication with Jacob’s parent(s) will empower a home-school connection. In addition, I will follow up with phone calls to express any observations that are occurring within the classroom. If there are serious problems occurring

with Jacob, I will have in person conversations through parent-teacher-child conferences. When done in a positive environment, conferences offer the educator “a unique opportunity for information about the family that adds to understanding and teaching effectiveness (Gartrell, 2004, p. 49).

Intermediate Response

In the second tier of their model, Sayeski & Brown (2014) recommend introducing reward and token systems into the classroom that are based on positive reinforcement. I will integrate McCloud’s (2015) bucket filler books that encourage positive behaviour by using the concept of an invisible bucket to show children how easy and rewarding it is to express kindness, appreciation, and love by “filling buckets”. I would have students create their own buckets and display it on the classroom walls to symbolize that all of us have invisible buckets. Next, I would place a big bucket in the classroom where the class collectively works together to fill the bucket by showing kindness to their peers. The students will understand that when they fill this bucket, they will be granted a reward (e.g., pajama day, popcorn and a movie, extra gym class). When Jacob plays cooperatively or can regulate his emotions, he is rewarded by adding a jewel into the bucket. In addition, a personalized token system can also be used to give an immediate reward to Jacob when he is playing respectfully with his peers or finding ways to self regulate in the classroom.

Long Term Response

My long-term response would be to contact the school’s child youth worker (CYW) about the potential of providing additional support in my classroom and directly working with Jacob to teach cooperative play and problem-solving skills amongst his peers. These social groups would be comprised of Jacob and three other students on a rotating basis that could be

implemented into the classroom schedule during play once or twice a week. Miller Lieber et al. (2019) notes the practice of creating group cohesion is “through building a high-functioning, cohesive classroom community of learners” (p. 52). These social groups will help Jacob build a stronger bond with his peers. In these groups, small group games can be played with Jacob and his peers that will create trust and a rapport between the group. As well, it will help Jacob and his peers to share positive experiences with each other. Students who are struggling with aggressive or angry behaviour often do not know how to assert themselves, advocate for what they need, or connect in ways that are skillful and socially appropriate (Miller Lieber et al., 2019). Jacob and his peers need guidance to develop critical competencies that will ensure prosocial behaviour.

If Jacob’s behaviours are increasing and beginning to impact his learning, my next step would be to consult my administrator. I would ask the principal if it would be possible to have a school psychologist observe and provide a consultation with Jacob. I will support Jacob by monitoring for signs and symptoms, acknowledging when next steps are required to assist Jacob, and promoting an inclusive, safe classroom environment within mental health guidelines (OME, 2011). I will observe Jacob in my classroom and make any notes on his behaviors and symptoms. As the teacher, it is essential to be in constant communication with parents and administration so when student behavioural and emotional problems become more consistent the appropriate next steps can be quickly implemented. Sayeski & Brown (2019) suggest in the third tier of their model that a move towards an individualized intervention such a crisis management or safety plan is necessary. If Jacob’s behaviours begin to escalate and provide safety concerns for other students, a crisis management plan may need to be discussed with the administrator, support staff, and parents. Accommodations and modification will help Jacob feel that he can be successful in his learning and his social development with his peers.

Reflexivity Strategy

As a reflective educator my growth plan is to practice critical and pedagogical reflections by examining my actions and reasons for each decision to ensure it aligns with my teaching philosophy. My teaching philosophy is to provide a safe space to inspire and nurture student learning through encouraging critical thinking and broadening students' knowledge in relation to their own experiences and interests. I value the importance of creating a learning environment where my students can feel loved and cared for by actively listening and developing a positive student-teacher rapport. My self-reflections would occur on a weekly basis at the end of the day using a journal to make documentation of key information. For example, how Jacob (or my students) has (have) progressed and assess whether the strategies that I have taught have proven to be effective. Based on these reflections, I would evaluate and readjust my strategies to meet the needs of my students for the following week. As well, I would reflect on the accessibility and frequency of use of the "Quiet Area" and make minor adjustments to see if it helps on a weekly basis. In addition, Sayeski and Brown's (2014) three-tiered model of support checklist is a beneficial tool for me to understand the next steps required to be implemented with my students. Through this checklist, I plan to evaluate my next steps, additional resources that may be useful and seek out assistance and feedback from my administrators, support staff, school psychologist, and parent(s). This is especially important for Jacob, so he feels safe in his classroom environment and can seek guidance and support from me. It is hoped that this checklist will be an effective tool for planning and accountability within myself as an educator.

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