Working on social and emotional issues by bringing theater and improvisation into the early childhood classroom

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Working on social and emotional issues
by bringing theater and improvisation
into the early childhood classroom

by

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Abstract

This study addresses the need for social-emotional curriculum through theater techniques and improvisation to help children develop confidence, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence. The thesis includes history of theater and improvisation; review of programs in the field, and original curriculum for early childhood/pre-kindergarten setting with field-based reflections and list of suggested resources for integrating social and emotional wellness into the early childhood setting.
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I. Introduction
I. Introduction

The early childhood classroom serves as a safe space in an overwhelming world for the young child. This space is one that allows the child freedoms while helping him/her to understand boundaries and begin following rules and norms. The slow introduction of new concepts, experiences, and materials are all educational endeavors that help move the young child forward in his/her growth as an individual. In setting up such a classroom and its curriculum, the teacher must begin by thinking about the children. The curriculum, and the classroom that facilitates it, must support children in their current stage of development, whatever that may be, while making space as they grow and move forward. This study presents a curriculum that can be used in the early childhood classroom to help children develop self-confidence, social skills, and the ability to work with their emotions in a productive and appropriate manner.

In student teaching in a charter school in Newark, New Jersey, I was able to see the desperate need for a social-emotional curriculum for kindergarten students. Young children, particularly those in urban settings, deal with the intense emotions and interpersonal conflicts that manifest themselves in the classroom each and every day through the children's own inner emotional turmoil and in interpersonal conflicts with one another. One boy in the Newark classroom had such strong emotional issues that he had to be removed from the class at least two days a week because he would be in hysteric...
better equipped to focus and learn during the other subjects within the rest of their school day. Many of the children in this class came from difficult home lives, which left them with greater emotional issues and fewer self-help skills on which to lean in order to deal with their emotions and challenges. Lesley Koplow (2007) explains, “Young children who have lived with trauma, loss, and disruptive life experience desperately need the early childhood classroom to offer a safe haven, full of invitations” (p. x). Koplow goes on to express the success she has seen of helping such children through the arts. She makes clear the importance of using arts that allow for open ended discussion with young children allowing them to explore issues in their lives within a structured activity so as not to allow the emotions to take over the activity while the children work toward understanding and growth. This developing curriculum takes Koplow's expertise into account so that it can help children in such situations to learn skills that help them believe in themselves and their abilities to solve problems. This could enhance the interpersonal dynamics between the students as they develop in their understandings of what it means to be a friend and a community member. It would also help all the students to continue to develop and feel more confident as they grow. This curriculum is one that can be used, with modifications, in many different kinds of early childhood classrooms, not solely limited to children in any one particular economic class. Theater and the arts as a form of expression has proven successful with children with special needs, so I think this would be a great tool for an inclusion or self contained classroom to work with high functioning special needs children on building confidence, making friends, and recognizing emotions. These ideas will be examined in the next section by looking closely at the programs and research that have been done on the topic thus far.
Theater is a wonderful way to reach children in the early childhood age bracket. Theater and improvisation with young children surround games and play. Play is the basis of learning in many early childhood settings because young children experience the world around them through playing with it. Vivian Gussin Paley (1990), in her novel, *The boy who would be a helicopter*, recounts her play-based classroom during one particular year. She spends the duration of the book sharing stories about play and storytelling that went on in the classroom in order to provide information about her students that year to give a picture of her class and the learning and development that came through her play and storytelling based curriculum. Theater is another form of storytelling, and Paley draws from theater in her curriculum having her students act out stories and take on characters and traits other than themselves to help them express their thoughts and feelings. Paley explains that there is a logic to young children's acting and storytelling in their classrooms. She points out that children naturally act as different characters throughout the day while interacting with other children. This natural inclination toward improvisation shows that children are naturally actors in their classroom setting, always taking on new roles and trying out different imagined situations and relationships. Paley describes the fact that children are ready for constant change through stories and acting:

> But let the teacher order so simple a change in routine as new snack groups, and the tension mounts. Whose group am I in? Where should I go? The teacher is not at fault. The natural order in a preschool classroom rules against any plan that sidesteps fantasy or friendship. The children do not fathom her premises or follow her logic. Had the teacher said, “Simon, since you were Joseph's dad before in the bear cave, you must move to his table,” then everyone would understand and approve. (p. 7)

This thought underlies the premise that children are ever-ready to act and role play because they do so without so much as thought for it as anything other than their reality.
The challenge for this curriculum is to tap into this natural functioning as “story player,” as Paley (1990) puts it, and channel it to work effectively at something that is, to an effect, teacher-directed. Paley, throughout her book, also shares effective ways to incorporate and build on children's needs and interests in driving the curriculum.

A. Play as a teaching tool

Delving a bit more into the way in which children will learn from such technique we can begin to look at the research and thoughts of Jean Piaget (1962) in *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood.* Piaget discusses the idea that children learn through experience. Moreover Piaget expresses that children learn also through imitation, particularly when given the opportunity to try out the imitation within the learning context. This fits with the idea that children can learn through theater games, which allow them to replicate others' actions and manners of dealing with difficult interpersonal or emotional situations that they are then more prepared to deal with on their own as well. Piaget explains that a behavior shown to a child at an isolated time can then allow them to recall and use the response as a tool when posed with the situation in his/her own life. Or as Piaget states it, “It was thus a case of virtual imitation becoming real imitation in an active context” (p. 28). Using this technique at an appropriate developmental stage when children are prepared to not only watch and do an action, but also internalize the action and reproduce it as their own in an appropriate context “without the modeling being present” (p. 46), can actually help children develop schema that prepare them for difficult situations.

For Piaget (1962) play serves an important role in functional assimilation: “Thought
polarized by preoccupation with individual satisfaction” (p. 54). When children are
allowed and encouraged to play they are simultaneously learning the material and
fulfilling their “individual satisfaction.” This explanation helps to encourage the idea of
using play educationally throughout the early childhood years, and in my curriculum
I hope to use this individual desire for play to connect with the use of play as functional
assimilation. In working with children on their emotions and interpersonal skills I hope
to help them assimilate into the use of cultural norms and expectations surrounding
making friends, follow rules, and stay in control of one's own emotions.

All of this support for play as a curriculum and teaching tool meshes with educational
research on the importance of working on such outside of standard academic subjects
in schools. In her article, *Integration of mental health principles in the school setting,*
Barbara Biber (1961) delves into the importance of dealing with social and emotional
issues within the school setting and curriculum. Biber explains that children's sense of
self and coping abilities are strengthened when they are permitted to work on them in
school. She believes that “*how* a child is taught affects his inner image of himself, and
his teachability, which in turn influences what he will dare to try to learn” (p. 325). This
idea of teachability is the crux of why I believe it is of such great importance to work on
self esteem and social-emotional curriculum.. When children feel confident and in control
of their emotions they are better able to take on complex learning in all content areas.

Biber (1961) also raises an important question regarding what is taught in schools.
She writes, “Does the school have a special orbit of potential influence on personality,
different from, yet not independent of, family influence?” (p. 324). This question brings into thought the importance of working with children on their social-emotional lives and understandings in order to reach them in a way that only the school setting can. Garry L. Landreth (2012) in *Play therapy: The art of the relationship*, agrees that play needs to be used within the school setting. He explains, “A major objective of using play therapy with children in an elementary school setting is to help children get ready to profit from the learning experiences offered...Even the most effective teachers cannot teach children who are not yet ready to learn” (p. 35). Play therapy is often used within hospital or treatment centers. However Landreth's explanation can be applied to the need for play, and in this case theater, in schools – similar to Biber's assertion that playful learning is essential for children to develop social cues, internal narration, or proper schema in order to function at their best within each different group or setting in their lives.

**B. Theater techniques for developmentally appropriate learning**

Reading, discussing, and developing an understanding of all of these educational scholars' ideas regarding development, play, and the need for social-emotional curriculum in schools helped me to ponder the curriculum being developed and constructed using theater. As I thought about children in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten age range I noted that children in this age bracket are in the preoperational stage which means they are able to represent reality with symbols or discussion, which will allow the children to be able to participate in theater games that require discussion of ideas without physical representation as well as games that require using objects as symbols for other items. Lightfoot et. al. (2009) describe the age saying, “Children
exhibit a pattern of thinking that is typical for their age – a mixture of sound logic and magical thinking” (p. 269-270). It is this combination that allows the children the use of logical thinking that is required for such games along with the element of “magic” required for play and imagination that is tied in so closely with theater and improvisation. In this way I was able to truly find the connection between young children and theater and why such a curriculum has potential to be so successful. In looking at Vygotsky I was able to see that his understanding of development is one that looks at children as creatures of play who learn through their moment-to-moment actions and interactions. Vygotsky (1978) states that, “Play is not the predominant feature of childhood but it is a leading factor in development” (p. 101). Vygotsky's focus on children's own actions and how they can learn from themselves within the constructs of guided play connected to what I want to do with my curriculum here. In addition I studied the Meisner Technique of theater, which was developed by Sanford Meisner, an actor who believed that the truest way to act and convey emotions and ideas was to be “in the moment.” That is to say that an actor should not prepare in advance how s/he will move and speak on stage, but rather they should simply be acting as their character in that very moment of the scene and that will bring out honest emotion and experiences. This type of acting is the very way that children within early childhood play naturally. Meisner worked to develop a technique that would bring actors back to their youth so that they could simply play on stage. The Meisner Technique teaches actors to truly live in their imagined realities, which children do so often as they play in small groups creating fantasy locations, relationships, and character traits. This is exactly what actors studying The Meisner Technique do as they work, however they call it role playing, while children shorten it to
solely use the term play. This connection to the “in the moment” style of learning that
Vygotsky has understood to be so beneficial for young children makes a connection
between children's intuitive play choices and their ability to learn through Meisner-style
acting games and techniques. From this connection the idea for an early childhood
theater curriculum was born. In the following section I will present a review of theater-
based programs and methodologies in the field.
II. Review of programs and methodologies
II. Review of programs and methodologies

There are programs currently using theater with children to work on their social and emotional growth. Some such programs are being brought into schools for several sessions to work with children, while others are functioning as after school programs to help children work on their self confidence and interpersonal skills as well as their emotional development and understanding. In this section we will look in detail at some of these programs to develop an understanding of what is currently in use and is seen as effective and worthwhile. Looking at these programs and the research that is published at this point will help to guide my curriculum development to bring in what is currently successful outside of the classroom and turn it into something that teachers can use with their students as a part of their educational curriculum throughout the year.

A. Selected programs

1. The Miracle Project

One key program of study to help guide the curriculum is The Miracle Project. The Miracle Project was started by Elaine Hall in 2004. As the mother of an adoptive son with autism, Hall was searching for a way to connect her non-verbal son with the outside world. After trying all the standard therapy programs she could find, under the direction of Dr. Stanley Greenspan, she reached out to actors who brought theater techniques and games into her son's world eventually connecting him with the rest of the world around him. Elaine Hall saw the transformation that theater had brought to her son and wanted to bring that development to other children. Thus began The Miracle Project, which teams actors and musicians with therapists of all kinds who work together with a small
group of children outside of school for about 20 weeks to write, stage, and perform their own musical. The program works with children with autism and their typically developing siblings to create a community and work on socialization using theater techniques culminating in the development of a musical that expresses the concerns and challenges of the children and teens acting in it. The musical often deals with themes of friendship, community, bullying, joy, and self-expression. By using acting techniques, Hall and her team believe that they are able to enter the world of the children with whom they are working instead of trying to pull them into their world. This allows the children to express their big ideas and emotions through acting, so they are not required to find the words that may not come so easily, but they still feel heard and feel that they are expressing themselves in a productive and understood manner.

The Miracle Project expresses their reasoning for using exploration of acting and music with their children because of all the development with which it can help children. They cite advancement in gross motor planning, fine motor ability, speech and language, memory, social skills, mental flexibility, sensory integration, body awareness, group dynamics, self-expression, and confidence building. These elements are important for students both in their personal lives, but also in their academic success because so many of these skills will help them to be prepared for the school day, different kinds of assignments, and the ability to work with others in their class using their newfound collaborative abilities, turn-taking, and imagination. These skills help children to grow into more developed people. And this developmentally appropriate approach that incorporates everyone's ideas while teaching skills and working on abilities can really
help children feel like valued members of a community as they develop and grow. While The Miracle Project works with children in the later years of elementary school and teens many of the skills on which they work would also benefit an early childhood setting, and working with children, albeit in a developmentally appropriate way, at this younger age could even set them up for more success by the time they reach the age of children working in The Miracle Project. Just as children with autism and their typically developing peers can benefit from this program side-by-side, so too could children of varying special needs and their typically developing peers within the school setting benefit from a similar program developed for the classroom.

In their documentary *Autism: The musical* (2005) several children with autism and their families were followed both at home and at the program's center to document the life of the children and their families while participating in the program. The children's ages spanned later elementary and junior high schools. All the children on whom the documentary focused had autism. Elaine Hall's son was the only non-verbal child, but some of the others expressed echolalia tendencies or affected speech. One boy was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, and he was very verbal and able to express the challenges of his life on the autism spectrum. He discussed feelings of loneliness and bullying that went on in school, and he was able to articulate how the program helped him feel more comfortable with himself and feel that he was making friends so that he could deal with the more challenging aspects of his life with positivity. The parents of the children all emotionally expressed their investment in the program and the fact that they each saw growth in their child as an individual becoming comfortable with
him/herself through the dynamics of the program and the relationships with the children and adults with whom they were working. This passionate and glowing endorsement for programs using theater with children with special needs helps guide the way for future programs that bring theater into the world of the child to help the child develop in self-confidence and ability with those around him/her. Often within the school setting these children were struggling to find the right placement and were not receiving the attention they so desperately wanted and needed. It is my hope that in developing such a curriculum a bit of the social-emotional work that these children were not receiving in school can be provided, and in doing so with both mainstream children and children with special needs we can begin to develop understanding and empathy for some as we build self-confidence and social skills in others. This work, which Hall began with elementary and junior high school students, I hope to alter and bring to the level of early childhood because by beginning this work in the early childhood school setting children can begin to internalize these techniques at a younger age so that they continue to grow and develop into capable, self-confident, and socially competent young adults.

2. The Theater Action Project

Another program that uses theater to work on social skills and emotional development with children is the Theater Action Project (TAP). TAP is a fifteen-year-old program that was founded and is used in Texas that uses theater and other arts to help teach skills to groups of children. TAP functions as a an after school program in many communities, and they can also be brought into schools for a five session theater based program that works on a specific, developmentally appropriate issue for the children in the class. TAP
can be brought into schools for any age, kindergarten through twelfth grade. The early childhood program they have created serves grades kindergarten through second grade, and their focus is on problem solving. They come in for one hour each day for four days to perform for the students a story about animals that are fighting and need to resolve conflicts. The group uses puppets, characters, costuming, instruments, song, dance, guided imagery, and pantomime all to engage children and convey the essence of the topic being discussed. Through the four days they teach the young children a four step process to problem solving that begins with identifying if a problem is present, exploring the emotions connected to the problem, and expressing those emotions. They continue by having the children explore different solutions to challenges with which they are faced and finally choose one and implement it so that the children, as a group, have had the complete experience of problem solving from identifying the issue to its completed solution. The big question they use is: How do we both get what we want? and they target specific words that help the children tune in to problem solving technique. They also work to leave the children with some tools for self regulation, such as a dance they call “The Shake It Off!” and they spend some time working with children on understanding the idea of body language as it relates to problem solving.

The Theater Action Project strives to have its programs channel children's academic, social, and emotional developments. A key element of their program is to excite the imagination and develop critical thinking skills amidst a setting that is developing socialization. They hope to inspire students to internalize the tools they are being given so that they can use them in their real life situations that arise. Some schools have seen a
lowering of interpersonal conflicts which they credit in part to the TAP program, and TAP feels strongly that it is important to do such work in the early childhood setting because by providing skills for problem solving at such a young age, they hope to be giving life skills for a better future for these children. One other key element to the program is that the performances are bilingual due to the fact that so many of the schools they are serving have bilingual students, speaking Spanish and English. In making the performances Spanish-English bilingual they are allowing the children to use their own languages, and they hope this helps make the performance as a whole a culturally relevant experience. They want the use of both home and school languages to encourage the children to connect the issues being dealt with in the performance to those in their own lives, and, hopefully, be able to then prevent or deal with such challenges in their futures. This work is of great importance for young children in schools. While TAP's work is valuable, it seems that children could benefit from such work even more by making it an element of their curriculum, instead of a one-week program. Children learn through repetition, and working on such skills can only help them become more comfortable and confident as they continue to grow and improve through the year.

3. Arab-Hebrew Theater Program

The Arab-Hebrew Theater program uses theater with both children and adults to work through social and emotional issues regarding living within the Arab-Israeli Conflict. This group is located in Israel in Tel Aviv, and is supported by the municipality because their therapeutic work is valued as something that helps people to deal with some of the issues that they have with their own country or with the people on the other side of
the conflict. By using theater to deal with these heavy issues people are able to work together to create a safe space for discussion. The performers use both Hebrew and Arabic, much like the TAP philosophy, to maximize participation and help everyone to know that they are being heard and represented in this discussion community.

As the success of theater as a therapeutic and effective way to help people discuss the conflict rose within Israel another group also formed with a similar goal, but this group travels outside of Israel bringing performances about the conflict to help spark discussion and understanding in outside countries. Combatants for Peace is the name of this organization, which functions as a theater troupe that travels the globe to perform and then use their performance and theater to help people begin discussing their understandings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their views on how to work toward peace. This remains the only group using theater that travels outside of Israel to discuss the conflict. The group is comprised of both Palestinians and Israelis, and they have developed performances together that include the audience in the acting to help begin the big conversations. Nour Shehada is one of the group's leaders. He is a Palestinian man who spent five years in an Israeli prison because he was caught as one of the local leaders of the Fatah Military. He now works side by side with Israelis. He says, “Theater is an important tool for non-violent resistance” (Manzoor, 2010). The group engages the audience in considering what they would do if they were in the shoes of an Israeli or Palestinian in the conflict. The group won the Anna Lindh Award for dialogue between cultures, and they believe it is all “a tribute to the power of theater and a reason for hope.” This is the power that can work through therapeutic situations both amidst current
events and countrywide conflicts, or interpersonal issues and internal conflicts within people. These interpersonal and emotional conflicts exist everywhere and those are the impetus for this curriculum. These groups dealing with The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict through theater have laid the groundwork for the fact that theater is a powerful tool that helps transform people's minds and manners of thinking to help them resolve conflict and gain new perspectives. Combatants for Peace believe that “no change happens without changing ourselves,” and that is what can happen for children working with theater as well. In performing and watching and listening to other they gain insight into themselves and the world around them that helps them to change in a way that encourages growth in themselves and in their abilities to work with others.

B. Methodologies and techniques

1. Drama therapy

This turn toward theater in therapy is one that has begun to take route within the United States as well. Drama Therapy programs have begun at several universities throughout the country, which train professionals with theater backgrounds to work with adults and children to help them through emotional difficulties they are having, as well as to work with children to develop problem solving skills and other such techniques that will help them succeed in their everyday lives. New York University was one of the first to develop a program to train drama therapists. They describe the profession as “the intentional use of theater techniques to facilitate personal growth” (NYU, 2012). Drama therapy provides a clear understanding that theater is an important tool to use with children in order to help them work on social and emotional issues. However, a drama
therapist's goal, as laid out by the New York University program, is to help people integrate the many roles in their lives using theater techniques so that they can lead successful and happy lives. However, bringing this into the classroom serves the purpose of working with young children on their developing interpersonal skills and socialization. Much of schooling in the early years should incorporate a side-by-side education of both academic subjects and life skills. Putting the latter into a formal teaching curriculum can help educators and parents to understand the value of such work in the classroom, as well as helping students to really grow and develop through theater, as so many other programs have proved a successful tool and technique.

2. History of improvisation

In order to better understand the way in which theater can be used in the classroom we must also look into the history of improvisation in theater to understand how it can best be utilized in the classroom and with young children. Improvisation began with the beginnings of theater. The original performers were storytellers who improvised much of their routines each time they told stories. Then from the time of Commedia Dell'arte, which took place in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in Italy, improvisation became a key theater preparation technique. So, though the actions that were taking place on stage were prepared, actors would rehearse using improvisation techniques to help authenticate their performances. However, it was not until the 1940's that a woman name Viola Spolin created improvisation as we know it today. She was an innovator of the American theater world within the twentieth century. When she developed improvisation she did so as a method to assist actors in their preparation of acting. The
goal was to help them to be focused on the present of the scene as if it were taking place in real life. She later coined the term “theater games,” which is the term most often used for modern improvisation and she compiled her games and ideas so that they could become of use to all actors. Her son, Paul Sills, helped to popularize the technique and he formalized the rules of improvisation in Chicago in the 1950's along with his theater group, The Compass Players. Such “rules” are still in use today to help keep improvisation successful. The goal of improvisation has always been to help people be creative and to use play for self-expression, and these goals fit beautifully with the early childhood setting where creativity and self expression are encouraged, particularly through play. Thus in the early childhood setting, improvisation and theater games can be used to help children express their inner feelings. In developing a curriculum that has a time and place in the classroom we can create a rehearsal-like space in which children can simulate life-like choices, discoveries, and experiences in order to help them play out scenarios so that they are prepared for when they arise in their real lives.
III. Original work
III. Original work

A. Curricular plan and setting

The development of this curriculum is one that has taken the path of growth through intensive study of the history of improvisation and theater games, analysis of their current use with children, particularly those with special needs, and understanding of child development. In bringing all of these components together I planned to produce elements of an early childhood appropriate curriculum that utilizes theater games and improvisation for the sake of assisting children, both typically developing and those with special needs, in their understanding of and dealing with emotions, interpersonal communications, and confidence. These three key concepts are the broad strokes that helped to formulate the curriculum, inspired by the work done in The Miracle Project, TAP, The Arab-Hebrew Theater Program, and other programs and methodologies.

Though in its production it has taken on other elements of education and development as well, as many of the games also assist children in developing or strengthening their body regulation and problem solving skills as well. In looking at the programs studied earlier I have felt highly inspired by the work done in The Miracle Project relating to bringing improv games to children with special needs, however this curriculum is bringing it to a much younger group than that with which The Miracle Project has worked. TAP has a more similar population as it is prepared to work with children as young as kindergarten, so in many ways the curriculum reflects elements of the work TAP does, however unlike TAP the focus of the curriculum is to bring this work in as a standard element in the classroom rather than a several session program. The Arab-Hebrew Theater Program also brings light to the curriculum in its ability to help children through traumatic
situations and emotional issues, which can help many children with special needs who suffer from disorders intensified by environmental stress.

The curriculum plan is meant to be used in a pre-kindergarten or kindergarten class throughout the academic year. In using this within the classroom all year long, instead of simply as a short unit or after school enrichment, I am both providing assistance to all my students over a long period of time allowing for the best results and greatest amount of growth. I am showing students, their families, and my colleagues and principal that I see this element as worthwhile of educational and academic time and that it should be valued accordingly. As Barbara Biber (1961) explained teaching the whole child includes using academic time to work on less academic subjects, particularly in the early years.

Through this curriculum I hope to work with children to help them learn the skills they need to build relationships with others, develop their own self confidence, and develop an understanding and coping strategies for the great many emotions they experience. In preparing children with these skills and understandings, I believe they will become much more successful in all aspects of their schooling and their lives.

The curriculum will utilize the development of a classroom community in order to assist in creating a safe space in which these activities can take place. In order to ensure that all children are comfortable the beginning weeks of the curriculum focuses strictly on developing rapport and introducing the concepts of improvisation and teaching some basic theater games that we will return to as the year progresses. As the units progress we will move into group games and activities that focus on building a sense of unity and
community. Through creating a sense of the group we are not only developing the community in which such building and growth can continue, but we are also creating a space in which all the children want to support one another because they are understand that they are all working together as a group and their success is tied to others.

Once we have established and maintained a group identity we can start working with a more individual focus by beginning confidence building. Through games and activities that both allow and require children to take the opportunity to speak in front of others, think on their feet, and express their thoughts in a variety of ways as well as work on assisting each child in gaining confidence in him/herself and his/her actions. Self confident children are stronger academically because they are not constantly second guessing themselves. Similarly, children with higher self confidence are more able to function independently, which is a set of skills that pre-K and kindergarten teachers spend a great deal of time helping to ensure that each child acquires.

The children will work on developing the ability to interact with others. Through the development of interpersonal communication skills children are being provided with academic teaching of skills they are expected to obtain and master on their own. The ability to understand and communicate with others is one of the most important things we must be able to do throughout our lives. In helping children gain the basics of understanding of early communications and the beginnings of relationships we are working on friendship building and basic conversation etiquette. However, as we move forward with this learning, children who are able can take the next step and begin to
understand taking on alternate perspectives and seeing another's point of view in a conversation or simple situation. This allows for the child to begin to gain empathy as giving the upper hand in knowing how to talk to others with a sense of compassion and understanding, as well as learning to help others see their perspective in a reciprocal way.

In the third and final section of this curriculum we begin working on emotional awareness. We begin by focusing on identifying emotions to ensure that all children can identify and label different mood states. With this knowledge the children are able to begin associating physical characteristics, gestures, and facial expressions with certain emotions. This moves to a more advanced level of labeling where a child can see attributes and perceive that the person portraying them is experiencing an emotion. Each step in this process makes no assumptions about children's prior knowledge or ability coming into the program. Though children who come in with tremendous knowledge will not be held back by others, the program allows for children with disabilities learning of others' body language and emotional states to gain understanding of emotions and be able to identify others' expressions of them. This allows for movement toward understanding of how to cope effectively with complex individual and group dynamics.

In preparing this curriculum I have been going into a pre-Kindergarten classroom in a play-based school in order to implement some of the lessons with the children. The classroom is labeled a general education classroom but it has several children either recently diagnosed or currently being evaluated for Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). This classroom has given me the opportunity to work with the curriculum in
a hands-on way to help prepare it for full time use in a classroom. Though this is one sampling of students, the curriculum is intended to work in either general education, inclusion, or high functioning special education classroom settings, and is designed to work with pre-Kindergarten or kindergarten age children. With some adjustments the program could be used with other ages, but it is geared toward this midline within the early childhood age bracket because four and five year old children are beginning to think about large concepts while they also young enough to internalize the foundations of social-emotional awareness as a positive, enduring life skill and value-set.

Field-based setting: “The Seabrook Community School”

I have spent time this school year going into a suburban school which will be referred to as the “Seabrook Community School” or SCS (pseudonyms will be used throughout this section). During that time, I worked with varying groups of children, but the ones who are most prominent in my field-based commentary are Aiden, a boy currently undergoing testing; Ivy, a girl who has been posing a behavior problem in her classroom since the beginning of the year; Sarah, a very quiet and shy girl; Mary, a confident, talkative girl; and Barry, a thoughtful, eloquent boy. These children are members of a class of fifteen children in a progressive, play-based classroom with a head teacher (Bank Street alum) and assistant teacher. The pre-Kindergarten class consists of 4 and 5 year olds who were able to try out lessons from the curriculum to test out how they are received by a group of students to help me in the process as I put together the curriculum for future use.
I planned to use theater games to begin building group unity and confidence as well as a safe space in the classroom in which big topics can be broached. In building this group identity the first unit focus is on confidence building by providing children with the opportunity to practice public speaking and presentations. We then move into games that require interpersonal work or communication of varying degrees to help children who struggle with getting along with or engaging others. Finally I begin to include activities that deal with understanding and dealing with one's emotions. Since we, as people, experience such a large range of emotions it can be daunting to help children with the task of dealing with each individual emotion successfully, and that makes this task a natural and necessary outgrowth of such a curriculum for children struggling to master an understanding of developmentally appropriate emotional understanding and control.

The curriculum incorporates a range of materials and strategies focused on inclusion. Components include: improvisation games and exercises for individuals and groups, use of props, puppets, and objects as symbols, and sensory exploration. The following section includes selected activities with outline, rationale and field-based commentary.

**B. Selected activities with commentary**

In the creation process of this curriculum there have been many stages. It began with the idea of bringing theater and improvisation into the early childhood inclusion classroom. Though there did not seem to be writing to find on that specific topic I set out to gather what I could in regard to theater, young children, and the connections that have been fostered through new and up and coming programs using theater to help children,
specifically those with special needs, express themselves through, and learn from, theater and improvisation. Once this body of work had been collected there was a great defense for placing theater in the classroom, so I set out to develop my own ideas regarding the placement of theater into the classroom. I developed lesson plans to express the ideas and began to formulate the big ideas regarding what the children would be gaining through such a curriculum. Finally, I entered a pre-Kindergarten classroom, with specific permission, to begin trying out elements of the curriculum to see how the implementation of such a curriculum worked with this age group.
Lesson 1: Setting the Scene

**Goal:** To develop a rapport with the students as a group and community while introducing them to theater games and group improvisation through game.

**Before activity:** Introduce plan to work with the children repeatedly to play improvisation games and work on social-emotional growth.

- Language to be used in introduction: coming to play games and work together

**Process:** Play several games that will be repeated to have fun and connect as a group

*Vocabulary:* improvisation (improv)

**Game 1:** *Make up names game* – sit in a circle and each child will get to say his name in a funny way and all repeat it

**Game 2:** *Jack-in-the-box* – there is a rhyme/song that while sung, all the children stay in a ball on the floor and the song ends with telling them what pops out of the jack-in-the-box and they “pop” out as that animal, character, etc. until they hear “jack-in-the-box” when they quickly turn into a ball on the floor once again.

**Game 3:** *Yes let's* – one person will say what we are going to do (an action) and everyone else will say “yes let's” and then proceed to act that out

**Game 4:** *“Woa a lay lay game”* – children repeat my words and motions with same emphasis and volume

**After:** say goodbye and see again soon to play again

**Lesson rationale:**
This session consists of playful games children love, in order to invite them into the world of improvisation. This will prepare the children for the curriculum by creating excitement for it, while also ensuring that the group dynamic is there and all are ready to push themselves slowly through the process of playing games and growing together. I spent the first session playing purely fun, get-to-know-you games. I began with The Make Up Names Game. In this activity all the children have a turn to say their names in a playful way by using a different volume, tone, pitch, tempo or phrasing. While saying it, they also had the opportunity to include a motion. After each child displayed their name and its motion, the rest of the group was asked to repeat it in mirror-like way.
**Observation and commentary:**
This game was a struggle for Aiden who had trouble mimicking others because of the requirement of focusing visually on another child's actions, which posed a great challenge for him. The benefit of this game is that it had the two part requirement of vocal repetition and physical mimicking, which allows for children who do not yet have the ability to do one of these tasks or the act of both simultaneously to still participate and enjoy. As the children began to enjoy and lead the game themselves they went around with comfort so I was able to get up and occasionally remind Aiden, who was struggling with the motions, to actually look at the leader as s/he spoke so he would know what to do. This reminder allowed him to succeed at the task for the duration of one child and then he would again forget to watch the speaker and would excitedly repeat the names in exactly the same way the initiator had said it. The children were also willing to try again if someone indicated that they had missed it, thus showing their support of one another and their interest in each individual's success. This often occurred for Ivy who was finding it nearly impossible to focus on any child because she preferred to be the leader. Ivy realized that she could get attention during another leader's turn by saying she had missed the motion, so she needed to see it again. However, instead of receiving negative attention, as her teacher informed me was nearly constant for Ivy, she was permitted to do so because the other children were willing. The children and I discussed the game to help the group make sure they knew how to succeed, and Mary articulated it best when she said, “You need to use eyes and ears for this one.” Mary articulated, in her own words, the idea that in order to master both tasks simultaneously the children were required to both listen with their ears and watch with their eyes so that they could then repeat the name as it had been done and its accompanying motion.

**Review:**
This one instance shows the ability of an improvisation game to allow a child to work on a task or skill that is a challenge for him/her. Aiden struggled to fulfill both components of the game, but by repeating this game and others like it, he is given the opportunity to work on visual tracking, focus, and eye contact. Ivy's need to see each motion again for the attention was also simultaneously help Aiden. This served two purposes, allowing the children to help one another in their allowance for difference.
Lesson 2: Building Community

Goal: To introduce new and continue playing improvisation games based in the group working together and gaining a sense of being a united group.

Before Activity: Introduce to the children that we are going to play group games. Remind/establish that all are there to work together and help each other.

Process: Play several games all containing the theme of group activity and unified action

Game 1: “Woa a lay lay game” - students repeat my words and motions with same emphasis and volume (eventually leading to their leading each other)

Game 2: Yes let's - one person will say what we are going to do (an action) and everyone else will say “yes let's” and then proceed to act that out

Game 3: “Hi” five – in this game the children walk around the space and as they near someone they must approach them with a smile, look into their eyes, say, “Hi” and then give them a high five before continuing to walk and repeating the process.

After: say goodbye and tell the children they will play these games again soon

Lesson rationale:
In this session the children should be working together and feeling connections. The first activity allows them to all feel connected through their unified speaking. Since I provide the language and intonation, the speech the children create comes out sounding like a unified chorus, which provides them with a connection. The humor of the words and their corresponding actions also helps the children feel bonded in their activity since they are all doing the same funny actions. As they move forward in this game and grow to be able to be the leaders themselves, the students will also work as a group by showing support for the chosen leader and continuing to speak and move in unison.

The second game also requires the students to act in the same way, however in this instance they need not all move identically. Instead, once given the parameters of play by the leader, all the children speak in unison saying, “Yes let's” and then are free to play within the realm of the assigned activity. The children stay focused on the task because they enjoy listening and taking on different roles within a peer-directed scenario. The last game asks children to improvise an introduction or greeting (these greetings can later become basis for class chart or mural showing different ways of saying hello).
Observations and commentary:
The game “Yes, Let's” allows for one suggestion, but before anyone can begin to improvise or play within the given scene or structure all must say, “Yes, let's.” This bit of a tongue twister allowed for a mini lesson in articulation, which had not been intended. Aiden approached me within the play of acting like babies during Yes Let's and engaged me in a game. He initiated playing Pat-a-Cake, which proved to be very difficult for him. He struggled with the hand-eye-coordination necessary, the ability to keep the rhythm of clapping on his own between the times in which our hands met, and his ability to cross the midline and resist the urge to use the hand on the same side as the one I was extending. Aiden's beginning the game Pat-a-Cake then began rounds of the hand game throughout the room thus allowing Aiden to be a leader amongst his friends, which is rare for him. After Aiden and I had played for some time, Barry, a talkative and thoughtful boy, came over and engaged Aiden in play. The two boys continued together for some time as the game continued through several rounds.

Over time, the game progressed from teacher-directed mode to one in which the student could lead including me now in their world. The personal attention reached by my playing with Aiden allowed for us to work together and have fun while I was performing informal assessment to gather information regarding his struggles that are clearly affecting his academics in other aspects of school, which his teacher confirmed. The skills brought up through this kind of play allow for work on so many different areas of struggle both within the social and emotional realm and in other areas. Aiden's peers are beginning to realize that he is not keeping up with them in their play and they become frustrated with him more easily, but during improv the playing field seemed to level and the children were more willing to include Aiden rather than keeping him on the outside.

Review:
The miniature articulation lesson showed me, once again, the way in which such work can be effective in helping children with social and emotional issues within an integrated curriculum. This game allows for individual ideas that become a group agreement as the community, in unison, takes on one child's idea as its own. The play-time allotted in between the changes in activity allowed for children to explore roles and cooperative play. Some became leaders and others followers as they navigated through the group dynamics and finding their own role within the play, but all had the experience of taking on an agreed upon task, and playing and improvising together within that realm.
Lesson 3: Identifying emotions

**Goal:** To use improvisation games to work on presenting an emotion and having the group identify the emotion based on its physical characteristics.

**Before Activity:** Hold a short meeting with the group to discuss what an emotion is and to begin thinking about different emotions that are familiar to them.

**Process:** Play improvisation games that require looking at people's facial expressions and body language to identify emotions.

*Game 1: Woa a lay lay* – this game has been played before during the curriculum, but this time as the group repeats the words, they have to do so with the same emotion given by the leader, including tone, facial expression, pace, etc.

*Game 2: Emotion ball* – pass a ball to someone in the circle saying “this is a ______ ball” filling in the blank with an emotion and both the sender and receiver need to make a face expressing that emotion before passing again.

*Game 3: You know what I love/hate* – each go around saying something they love/makes them happy, and then go around saying something they hate/makes them mad.

**After:** Make a list on chart paper as a group of all of the emotions we came up with today so that we can come back to them next time.

**Lesson rationale:**
As we begin to explore emotions we are creating a foundation for further discussion. Without being able to name and identify emotions children cannot begin to try to act them out or explore them as they are really experiencing them. In the first game the children are taking on the physicality of an emotion, only after having seen it completely so that they do not have to think for themselves about what such an emotion should, or can, look like. In providing them with opportunity for physical expression, children can begin to think about the many nuances of emotion, including face, body and voice. The second game allows the children to take a step back from having to identify emotions based on their expression and allows children to simply label emotions they know. This also provides the opportunity for children to bring up emotions they may have heard of but do not really understand, which can provide information for later discussion when moving to identifying matching physicality for emotions being listed. Finally with the third game, the goal is to connect emotions to likes and dislikes focusing on vocal expression of the conflicting emotions as the children take the opportunity to sing-song their likes and scream their dislikes internalizing the way emotions can express identity.
**Observations and commentary:**
In this lesson I saw Sarah, a reserved and shy girl, slowly come out of her shell. Sarah is painfully shy and struggled to get involved in the games. She seemed to portray in her physicality the conflicting feelings going on in her body of wanting to participate and not knowing quite how. For Sarah, the games with choral responses were best. I first saw her really flourish during a game called Woa-A-Lay-Lay. This game consists of a series of chants with matching movements that use the entire body. Sarah was so embarrassed at first to join in the repeating of my words that she spoke almost inaudibly and moved very little. As she took note of every child around her speaking the words loudly she seemed to realize that her own voice would be joining the mass and not singled out, or maybe she simply decided she was ready, but since she was given the words of what to say all the way down to the tone in which to say it, and its matching body language, there was very little struggle once she made the choice to join. The empowering progression for Sarah showed her the fun she can have when she chooses to participate on her own.

**Review:**
This experience with Sarah serves as one example of quiet children becoming empowered to speak, move, or join a group through the work of improvisation games. Sarah continued to flourish as I returned to the class and her teacher mentioned noticing that Sarah she had begun to participate more in group discussions during meeting times - speculating that Sarah's increasing confidence could be attributed to the theater games.

**Lesson 4: Interacting with Others**

**Goal:** To go from community building to encouraging interaction within the community.

**Before Activity:** Talk to the children about relationships within our community and have them help me develop a list of relationships in their lives that we can explore (eg: mom and baby).

**Process:** Play games that help the children explore relationships and power dynamics that take place within relationships (ie: explore the feel of being the leader and the follower).

**Game 1: Sculpture garden** – pair up the children and tell them to take turns as the artist and as the clay. Then provide the first sculpting activity to the first set of artists, such as something very tall. The children who are deemed the artists in that round get to move the body, or tell the other person how to move depending on verbal ability and tactile/sensory comfort, to create a tall sculpture for the room’s “sculpture garden.” Once that is finished all the artists get to look around at the sculptures and then the roles are reversed. New artists are given different kinds of sculptures.
**Game 2: I'm Going on a Bear Hunt** – lead the group in an “excursion” looking for a bear and simulate/act out all the adventures of traveling through nature together.

**Game 3: Guess who** – the children will be put into pairs and given a relationship to portray. They will have time to practice so that the teacher can walk around and help ensure they are clear. Each pair will perform as their given identities in front of the class, and the children in the audience will guess what relationship is being conveyed.

*After:* Tell the children what a great job they did and what a deep understanding of relationships they are expressing. Then choose a spot in the room to hang the list of relationships to remind them of the activity and so they can go to it if they want to play guess who on their own as well.

**Lesson rationale:**
In this lesson the goal is to explore interactions and relationships. The first activity allows the children to think of all the relationships they can, which allows them to call upon prior knowledge and share their expertise before being pulled into a more teacher-directed activity. The game that follows pulls them away from concrete relationships and forces them to explore the power dynamics of working one on one with another. Though this is too complex an idea for most of them to articulate they can all experience the feeling of getting to tell someone else what to do and having to listen to another person, which are both important elements of every relationship. The second game continues on this thread of working together, but this time it is done while acting in the same way instead of controlling another person. As the children are told the style of movement we are doing on our “Bear hunt,” they must create the movement but are permitted to walk, crawl, climb, etc. together as they enjoy the movement activity. Finally, the third game brings the children back to the concrete relationships they had thought up at the start of the lesson and allows them to explore what one looks like as well as watch others and need to identify the relationship based on characteristics, which requires them to think analytically about relationships and how people interact.

**Observations & commentary:**
This lesson held a particularly unique experience that came when I was working in a small group and we were playing “I'm going on a bear hunt.” This song/game is familiar to some of the children because it is written as a children's book, but here the play is in acting it out and helping those who know it to become flexible enough to see that we might make a change from the written story while allowing those who do not know it the pleasure of playing through it as they would any other improvisation. In our small group, Mary was very familiar with the storybook version and being a very outspoken girl she often helped to guide the tale according to the book version she knew. Aiden, on the other hand, did not seem to be familiar with the story, and as we went through our bear
hunt he decided that one of the elements of nature through which we should walk to find our bear was a tornado. Once he made this declaration he could not discuss anything else. He became very excited when we included the tornado right before finding our bear. As the game goes, once the bear is found the entire sequence of events is then acted out, nearly in fast-forward, in its reverse to help the travelers return home from their journey. Well, for Aiden the way back included a tornado and nothing else. He continued acting as if his body were caught in a tornado even once all the other children had made it all the way back to the beginning. As she was breathing her sigh of relief to end the game Mary noted aloud that Aiden was still stuck in the tornado, so I asked what we should do. Immediately Barry said, “We have to go back to help him out.” Aiden, who is often incapable of positive social interactions with his peers allowed the children to grasp onto his arms and “rescue” him from the tornado. They led him all the way back out through the other elements of the trip and back to the beginning. At the very end everyone says, “And I'll never go on a bear hunt ever again.” The first time through I noticed that Sarah did not join. However, given this second chance, since they had to go rescue Aiden, Sarah initiated the statement and all the other children joined in with her.

**Review:**

*The two vignettes from this improvisation helped reaffirm for me that these experiences can help foster positive and appropriate social interactions for all children (Aiden being willing to be touched and guided), while providing them with a sense of community (the rest of the group's need to go back and save him), and encouraging their building of personal self confidence (Sarah's leading of the line she had not previously had the courage to speak out loud). Sarah had developed the confidence and comfort to speak aloud and lead the group, and partly it was thanks to the opportunity she was given by Aiden who needed some extra time and assistance to get through his bear hunt.*

As I continued to work with this group of children I saw them become able to take more risks. Though it was a slower process for some than others they were able to move forward from the comfort with which they started to take more risks and explore their own abilities. One day, Barry, who had been slow to warm up to these activities asked if we could bring his toy cars into the games today. I was so excited to hear him expressing interest in the games that I told him that would be great. Everyone in the group took one toy car, and since the first game I had planned to play with the children was “What are
“you doing?” in which each child gets a turn to tell the group what they are doing in response to the chorally asked question. Once the speaker tells their chosen activity the whole group has to begin to act out the described action until the next child is asked what s/he is doing. This time we allowed for the questions to be directed to the cars. Some children pretended their car was asking the question, and all used their cars to convey the activity. This actually allowed for actions that otherwise would have been deemed unsafe, for example, Ivy, a particularly adventurous child, was able to say she was doing back flips because with the cars each child could act out back flips since the cars were doing the actions instead of our own bodies. This was a welcome change to some of the children who, like Ivy, have more difficulty with the idea of using their bodies as instruments of group/teacher-directed play. Though some of the children seemed aware that the use of cars was due to Barry's request they all supported the decision, whether this was because they wanted to try it out themselves or because they wanted to help him participate I cannot know, but I have seen throughout the teaching process of this curriculum the incredible ways in which young children support each other during play. They help one another in providing ideas when someone is struggling and allowing for accommodations for those in need.

This experience encouraged me as a teacher because it showed me by creating the open and inviting environment required for this work I am able to help children become comfortable enough to help me understand certain accommodations they are aware that they need so that they can feel comfortable participating. It also makes me feel that the excitement surrounding such games makes children want to participate, and this can help
push them forward. Though no one is forced to do anything they are not ready for the
first time around I have seen all the children participate at some point showing their
growth and progress when given time and encouragement. We were also generally able
to find ways for children to participate initially even if it was not in the way that others
were doing. One such instance included Barry who was not comfortable going in front of
the group during the game standing ovation in which a child leaves the area while
everyone else determines a position for them to stand in so that when they return we help
them figure it out by providing applause as they get closer. Though he did not want to
participate in this way, which most of the other children were very excited to do, he was
very good at providing the information to the children trying to figure out the position
and other children began to look to him to know when to applaud. We also allowed
accommodations during this game for children who were not able to figure out a position,
instead we chose a specific place for them to stand. Similarly, children who simply could
not remember to clap with the excitement of seeing their friends get close to the answer
were permitted to say “closer” and “farther” as their friends approached their target
location or position. The goal is always to have the children comfortable and
participating as they slowly progress from starting place to more advanced participation.

The growth and development that I witnessed throughout my work with the children
helped to encourage me in my use of this curriculum. Though it requires flexibility with
different groups and kinds of children it seemed to show me that children are able to learn
from improvisation games and theater techniques. Children enjoy play and learning
through play, and I saw so many children grow in their confidence and willingness to
take risks in the duration of my work with them. I watched as children became more expressive and as some slowly moved toward improved regulation during our games. The teachers of the classroom tried to encourage use of the techniques we were providing through the curriculum particularly as we moved into the emotions unit by encouraging the children to think about our emotions list and explore how others feel and how to help them in those moments. This also encouraged me in that if it were an element of the standard curriculum in my classroom it would be that much more incorporated and supported on a daily basis, helping children internalize and learn to a greater capacity.

Overall, when I came to work with the class, the children were eager to play showing me they enjoyed our work together. Their excitement helped me feel that the work we did was different from anything else they were doing in their classroom, which showed me the need for a social-emotional curriculum within the classroom and the connection children feel to acting and improvisation that makes them enjoy it. We often went back to games we had played before in order to encourage the children to gain even more comfort and mastery of the games, as well as to continue working on, and reinforcing, the different social-emotional goals set forth in my use of each activity. As we continued working together it became increasingly easier to read the class and know how long to continue a game and when to move on so as not to lose their interest and learning, which helps me to know that using it as a constant element of my classroom curriculum will only make it that much more effective.
IV. Reflection
IV. Reflection

Developing this curriculum has allowed me to address a need in early childhood education often overlooked in current policy climates, and has proven an invaluable teaching tool for my own professional growth. Having the opportunity to actually implement some of the lessons from this curriculum has helped me to see my creation in action, and understand some of the ways in which it can function within a classroom and help the children who work with it to learn what it is intending to teach. I see the growth and transformation children can accomplish with the assistance of improvisation and drama, which inspires me to continue usage of this curriculum. Other teachers will be able to implement elements or parts of the curriculum as well, to help them incorporate theater and a social-emotional curriculum into their early childhood classrooms.

As I think of the future of the curriculum it is also important to see how it can be improved in order to look toward future research looking at such a teaching tool in the field. I have begun to explore, and am hopeful to continue, a formulated way of charting children's progress as they develop through this curriculum. As a teacher I am a proponent of running records and gaining knowledge of children and their progress through observation and careful note taking. I am envisioning a great deal of note taking by the teacher as the curriculum progresses. I also feel that charts can be made pertaining to goals created for certain children as they move through the curriculum. For example, a child who is working on making connections with peers can have a chart that documents his/her work through the games and activities specifically pertaining to the actions regarding peers and peer interactions. Hopefully others with more experience in the
domains of recording progress and testing a new idea will also be able to enhance this element of the curriculum in its future.

Overall, as is reflected by the idea of charting progress, this curriculum is a beginning. I have been able to begin using it in a classroom, but each group of children is different and will have to be accommodated. Similarly, I see the ability to use it in one's own classroom as a very different experience from what I have done this year in going into a classroom to work with children as a specialty teacher of music or physical education might do. My long term goal is complete integration of the curriculum into the classroom, so that is something I am looking toward as I move forward into the curriculum's future as well. Simultaneously, as I look ahead, I feel it is important to look back and remember from where this work is coming. I began on this journey in order to bring my passion of theater into the classroom in a way that incorporates it into the early childhood setting to help allow theater to help children grow and develop in their social and emotional abilities as I have seen happen so many times. I see work on a social-emotional level inside the early childhood classroom as something that has so often been pushed aside as less important, but that truly needs to be brought to the foregrounds of education of the young child. In early childhood education viewing the child within a holistic framework is a guiding principle. I feel that this curriculum has and will continue to help me remember to work with each child as an individual - empowering them at every phase of classroom life to find unique identities and strengths as they move forward to greet the challenges of an ever-changing and complex world of experience.
V. Bibliography
V. Bibliography

A. References


B. Programs


With thanks to Sana Ehehosi and Kendra Lewis for review and feedback on draft at Integrative Masters Project group meeting March 12, 2013.
VI. Appendices
VI. Appendices

A. Parents' Role

Parents know their children best. We, as teachers, need to work with parents to ensure they are connected to what is going on in the classroom so that the home-school connection is fostered and the principles children are learning in one place match with the other to help create two safe, welcoming environments in which the children feel capable and able to learn and grow. As a result, updates to parents should include information on the current status of the social-emotional curriculum in order to include parents in the process and to help them see this element of the curriculum as important since it is being valued by the teachers as equal to other curricular subjects. Questions parents can ask their children about the lessons and activities will be included in order to help parents connect with their children regardless of their knowledge or comfort level. By providing questions parents are provided the opportunity to speak to their children and hear about school with ease because the questions are provided for them. This also ensures that parents are asking open-ended questions which allows for more conversation with their children, which they might not otherwise know to do. Instructions to games being played in the classroom as a part of this curriculum will also be sent home so parents can talk to their children about it and even play together if they want. This information will be sent home in English or bilingual fliers as needed, so that language will not be a barrier for families in their ability to support their children’s academic growth.
Follow-up activities: Interacting with emotions

**Goal:** To have children further explore emotions and social interactions to reinforce prior experience.

**Before Activity:** We will have our list of emotions in sight. We will begin by thinking about what emotions feel like in our bodies. If they need the tangible assistance, each child can pick an emotion to display and several can express verbally what they feel and think about when they make their face and body express that emotion.

**Process:** We will play improvisation games that allow us to express emotions so that we can explore both how they feel in our bodies and begin to look at how it affects our interactions with others.

*Game 1: Laugh Down the Line* – about 5 children will sit in a row facing the rest of the group. The first will start to laugh and after a bit of time the next will add on until all the way down the line all are laughing. After the game is complete, this time we will discuss if the laughter was real or artificial and why for different people it was different.

*Game 2: Know What I Love/Hate* - We will stand in a circle and one child will go into the center and say, “You know what I love/hate” (we will predetermine if we are working on things we love or hate) and everyone else will respond with, “What?” and then the child will say an item. As the game progresses the interactions become more affectionate and sentimental when discussing loves or volatile if discussing hates, which can be supported by suggesting alterations of volume and tone if it does not happen naturally.

*Game 3: Finger Puppets* – I will then have the children each get a finer puppet or small doll. They will get to pick a name and a voice for the animal or creature they receive. They will then all receive a situation, such as one is sad and the other is excited and they have to say hi to each other. At first each pair of children will do this at the same time facing each other, and as it becomes more comfortable we can have one pair come up and do a greeting scenario in front of the whole group.

**After:** Tell the children puppets will be left in an area of the room where they can play with them and explore the work they have begun in their own ways.

*PM. 5.10.13*