A study on the strategies to develop pro-social behaviour of preschool children in Sri Lanka

P. Seneviratne*
The Open University of Sri Lanka

This study aimed at exploring the strategies adopted by preschool teachers in promoting pro-social behavior among preschool children. In this regard the researcher examined the activities conducted by preschool teachers. Four preschool case studies were completed in Homagama Education division. The sample consisted of one preschool under government control, two privately owned preschools and one preschool functioning under a religious organization. Both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used, including observations. The aim of the observation was to study classroom activities which promoted pro-social behaviors among children. Following pre- planned observation scheme the researcher spent five days in each preschool as an observer. It was revealed that preschool teachers of Sri Lanka take action to promote pro-social behavior among children through their classroom activities through sharing, helping each other, encouraging pro-social behavior and use of collaborative activities. The study recommends that the findings of this research be used by teacher educators and policy makers in the field of preschool education in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Preschool, pro-social behaviour, strategies towards pro-social behaviour

Introduction

Education in general aims at directing individual towards productive life at personal as well as social sphere of living. Nevertheless, education is not only confined to the interventions done through a well-designed curriculum or other mediums of communication. Empowering the individuals to gather knowledge and allowing them to think critically using their gathered knowledge become important components of a system of education (Bruner 1960:62). The most crucial stage of education that an individual may be given is when it is a child. Preschool education as it is called in the modern context plays a major role in shaping attitudinal dimensions of an individual's life. In this research, my major focus is on how preschool education can be instrumental in realising the attitudinal expectations of personal behaviour in society. In Sri Lanka preschool education mainly focuses on holistic development of child through providing education according to a pre-designed curriculum.

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* Email: psene@ou.ac.lk

One of the major elements in the holistic development in child, which this research further chooses to study deeply, is the pro-social behaviour of children.

Pro-social behaviour simply aims to eliminate anti-social dynamics in childhood behaviour. In preschool set-up the child is trained towards the practices and values which are pro-social by nature, namely, sharing, caring, helping, encouraging, promoting, volunteering, appreciation etc. During the preschool stage, education helps immensely for the child to develop its emotional and social behaviours. In this stage children tend to display with self-confidence the social behaviours which were not visible in them in the previous stages (Sroufe *et al 1992: 379)*. It is important to ensure that all children step into the next stage of their education having obtained values that would help them personally to connect with their peers and lessen the conflictual environment in the environment the children have to interact with each other.

Literature review

The process of developing pro-social behaviour can be looked at from many ways. The point is that children should be able to "develop cognitive competencies, emotional competencies and specific skills" which will guide their pro-social behaviour (Marion, 2003)

As Vygotsky has argued that socialization takes places in two stages. First, the development of cognition is facilitated by social engagement, and in the second stage language becomes an important factor that can greatly shape the manner of communication within a given social context (cited in Berk & Winsler, 1995). Further, "the importance of the socio dramatic play" has been emphasised by Vygotsky. Children use Play to interact, and social interaction is the major means with which children learn and in turn this process helps the development of cognitive skills. Literature shows that the preschoolers who get more time to spend with children through plays acquire advanced intellectual skills, and develop higher capacity for empathy. And this process of play activities would make the children socially more competent (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Pro-social behaviour develops can be studied as a three part process. In the first part of the process children develops the capacity to understand. Secondly, the child should be able to take decision to help or not. Finally, the child would act by providing its help to the needy one (Kostelnik *et al*., 1988). Teacher's role become significant in facilitating and encouraging the pro-social behaviour. Teachers are expected to introduce activities that would enable to develop appropriate skills, give necessary help to social network that supports children in their efforts. On the other hand Teachers should be able to design class room activities that help children develop skills and give them an idea as to why those social skills are important for them (Johnson *et al*, 2000).

A variety of methods can be used to facilitate interactions among children. For instance plays can be developed to teach cooperation and stress on the negative aspects of competition. Some games can be introduced to develop cooperation and conflict resolution skill. It is up to the teacher to arrange the classroom space and learning materials to improve cooperative play. In this effort teachers can use some literature which will emphasise on empathy and caring and sharing (Honig & Wittmer, 1996). Teacher needs to help children develop negotiating skills to handle conflict situations. As Berk (2002) emphasises Children should be guided to develop social problem solving skills to address issues in a manner acceptable to others (Berk, 2002). Preparing a class room environment that maximizes optimal pro-social learning opportunities and designing a substantive study guidelines through curriculum are important prerequisites that need to be developed by teachers. Mainly the class must provide evidences that it is arranged with a focus on providing opportunities for pro-social skills development (Herr *et al*., 2004).

Methodology

This research therefore mainly attempts to identify the values of pro-social behaviour which are inculcated in the child during the preschool stage and analyse how they are inculcated and the effectiveness of those teaching method and the strategies adopted by the teachers during the entire period of education of the child. Methodology; The study followed a case study design to conduct an in-depth study guided with empirical observational techniques. The cases are from four preschools from Colombo, Sri Lanka. They included one government operated preschools (named as A), two private preschools (B and C) and one which is operated by a religious institution (D). The selection of these three different categories of preschools helped to distinguish different range values taught in these institutions as per their curriculum. The researcher participated as an observer during the classroom activities of them. Following a pre- planned observation scheme the researcher spent five days in each preschool and gathered both qualitative and quantitative data mostly. Analysis of data and information gathered was mainly done through frequency analysis of quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Findings and analyses

During the period of participatory observations the researcher was able to gather data on six major themes, namely, [1] strategies taken by teachers to motivate the children, [2] support to work cooperatively, [3] teaching learning process and behavior, [4] Teacher as a model to encourage pro-social behaviour, [5] Stimulation, [6] Teacher's Response. These findings are summarized in six tables given below. The data in the table 1 shows in the school (A) which is government owned all categories of strategies have recorded higher percentage of occurrences. Out of fifty observations on 'encourage children verbally' the school A has recorded fifteen times or received 39.5%. Comparatively the other school categories have reported less number of occurrences in all categories of strategies. There are major differences at the school C in several strategies. School C has recorded the lowest when it comes to teach the children to appreciate with clapping when they perform an action of helping others. Likewise it is important to understand that the category of school has something to do with motivating students towards pro-social values. Mainly, the teachers and the syllabuses they use have got a role here. As the researcher found the School A had teachers with more experiences in teaching than in other categories.

Table 1: Strategies taken by teachers to motivate the children

Strategies	School (A)	School (B)	School (C)	School (D)	Total
Encourage children (Verbally)	15	12	11	12	50
Appreciate children (Verbally)	21	12	01	09	43
Appreciate children good work in front of the class	15	07	07	08	37
Appreciate with clapping children when they help others	09	07	00	06	22
Total	60	38	19	35	152
Percentage	39.5	25	12.5	23	10

The table 2, summarizes the findings on the facilitation of teachers towards the cooperative bahaviour of preschoolers in the four different categories of schools. The

teachers have used several strategies to teach cooperative behaviour. In this observation, the researcher found that all schools have equally attempted to train students towards cooperative behaviour. In providing chances to share materials the school B had recorded the lowest number of occurrence. All schools have significantly recorded low number of instances in planning activities to teach students the merits of help. Also schools have mostly not been able to organize activities to teach the manners of helping others as well. In total there are two hundred fifty observance of instances of cooperative action. The highest number was recorded by the schools operated by religious organization and a private institution. Nevertheless the government category school also recorded an almost similar number of instances of encouraging cooperative behavior. The lowest number of cooperative actions were seen in the one of the two private institutes operated schools. Generally teachers have encouraged to take cooperative actions but the curriculum and teacher experience seem to have a positive correlation toward it.

Table 2: Support to work cooperatively

Strategies	School (A)	School (B)	School (C)	School (D)	Total
Train to work cooperatively	08	07	10	09	34
gave chance to share the materials	07	04	08	09	28
Help to children	11	09	10	10	40
Teach about the rewards for helping	07	05	08	06	26
Gave children chance to help others	09	07	05	07	28
Plan activities to encourage help	05	03	07	05	20
Gave advice for exchange the Color pencil, books and glue	06	05	09	10	30
Encourage the sharing the materials	07	06	08	09	30
Organize the activities for develop the cooperative behavior	05	03	05	05	18
Total	65	49	70	70	254
Percentage	26	19	27.5	27.5	100

In table 3, I have summarized my observations regarding the teaching and learning process and student behaviour. Accordingly, I have identified five strategies and seen that each category of school has trained students to behave according to those behavioral manners but with the number of occurrences of each strategy giving different ratios depending on the type of preschool. Again generally teachers have been concerned towards adopting a learning process, yet the development in this category remains at a low compared with the other strategies of developing pro-social behaviour.

Table 3: Teaching learning process and behavior

Strategies	School (A)	School (B)	School (C)	School (D)	Total
Encourage children to keep materials in proper place	03	04	07	04	18
Present poetry, story and child sons to stimulating cooperative behavior	06	02	03	04	15
Using pictures to teach children about cooperative behavior	02	01	01	02	06
Teach children about clearness	13	12	09	13	47
Give chance to express	07	06	07	06	26
Total	31	25	27	29	112
Percentage	27.7	22.3	24.1	25.9	100

In table 4, Generally all schools have fared well in the area of encouraging students through teachers as models. Teachers are observed to have used several strategies in this regard. First, teachers advise students of the negative implications of bad behaviour and all schools have recorded almost similar instances of giving advise to children in this regard. Teacher's role as one who show kindness, love and affection toward students is observed in a large number of instances in all the schools. The total of such occurrences of showing love, kindness and affection remains at forty four. In the six strategies used by teachers to be role models by themselves the government school has recorded the highest number. However, other institutes too have fared well in this category where teachers turned into role models for students.

Table 4: Teacher as a model to encourage pro-social behaviour

Strategies	School (A)	School (B)	School (C)	School (D)	Total
Explaining implication of bad behaviour	10	07	07	08	32
sawing affection, kindness & love	14	11	10	09	44
advising not to break instrument in the class	04	06	06	05	21
Teach displaying a model behaviour	13	07	08	11	39
teaching the importance of helping the needy and the weak	07	04	05	06	22
Advising on unity	09	07	09	10	35
Total	57	42	45	49	193
Percentage	29.7	21.8	23.3	25.4	100

In table 5, Altogether the teachers of all schools have used stimulative methods to encourage the pro-social behaviour of students. Generally I have observed three major strategies of teachers in this regard; open appreciation good behaviour, rewarding good behaviour with a gift, and a star. The highest percentage of stimulation method used by a school is reported from the government school. Teachers in all schools have openly appreciated the good behaviour children mostly, yet in the area of rewarding them some

schools have not shown any instance of such behaviour during the period of observation (C and D).

Table 5: Stimulation

Strategies	School (A)	School (B)	School (C)	School (D)	Total
Open appreciation of good behavior of children	11	07	06	06	30
rewording children who help others with gift	04	02	00	00	06
rewording children who help others with star	03	02	00	02	07
Total	18	11	06	08	43
Percentage	41.9	25.6	13.9	18.	100

In table 6, Teachers need to use words of kindness and love with children and also listen to children. These two strategies were observed form all schools but the majority of instances were shown by the government school. Government school teachers with their exposure to more training and experiences have tended to adopted such behaviour in the class room.

Table 6: Teacher's Response

Strategies	School (A)	School (B)	School (C)	School (D)	Total
use words of kindness and love with children	15	08	09	09	41
listen to children	16	10	08	08	42
Total	31	18	17	17	83
Percentage	37.7	21.7	20.5	20.5	100

Conclusion

This case study of four preschools of Colombo Sri Lanka have focused identifying the strategies adopted by preschools to encourage pro-social behaviour among preschoolers. Mainly, the study has found six strategies adopted by teachers. These strategies were categorised under enhancing motivation, cooperation, teaching learning process and behaviour, teacher as a model, stimulation, and offering teacher response. The general observation is that pre-school teachers mainly focus on pro-social behaviour of preschoolers. However, the research has highlighted the complex nature of outcomes of the strategies depending on the school type. Government schools have fared more strongly in the implementation of the strategies identified, and the two private schools were quiet behind at times. The difference between private and the public schools may be due to the recruitment criteria and the kind of training the teachers were given by them. Findings from the religious institution operated school did not record major differences from the other three categories, but its strategies need to be explored more qualitatively since religious values too can have a

role, but this research has not focused on that aspect. Since this research has focussed on preschools from Colombo, which is the metropolitan area of Sri Lanka its findings may not be easily generalizable for the whole country. Teacher training, curriculum revisions and necessity of infrastructure development of preschools seem to be the areas that need urgent attention. Pro-social thinking is a dynamic subject and the teachers and the educationalist need to develop new strategies to incorporate modern day requirements that require the children to develop competencies in new directions as well.

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