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A Toddler Mentor Program with Elementary Students to Improve the Development of Empathy

Michelle Aldrich
St. Catherine University, maaldrich@stkate.edu

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An Action Research Report
by Michelle Aldrich

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Advisor_____   Date_____

Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to determine if there would be improved development of empathy in elementary students as a result of involvement in the Toddler Mentor Program. The study took place in a 6-9 year Montessori Elementary Classroom. There were eight participants, which were first and second year students in the classroom. The age range was 6-7 years old. The elementary students spent twenty minutes as a mentor in the Toddler classroom once a week. Data was collected by teacher observation pre, during and post project in three different environments, the elementary classroom, the toddler classroom and recess. The students were interviewed following all visits of the toddler classroom and also participated in group discussions. The results showed an increase in empathetic behaviors over the time as a whole group. Individually, the girls displayed consistent empathy in the toddler classroom and the boys showed the most improvement over time. In conclusion, the Toddler Mentor Program provided the students the opportunity to focus on social-emotional skills such as being helpful, kind, respectful, and acknowledging other's feelings. In order to identify long-term effects outside the classroom more research is recommended.

The goal of the Montessori Classroom is to educate the whole child. The methodology includes the emotional health of the child along with academic development. The Montessori guide strives to provide the prepared environment with didactic materials and to assist in progress in all areas. As a guide who taught with infants in the elementary classroom, it was observed there was an increase in skills such as empathy, kindness and respect in the children as a result of the relationship with the infant. How could this opportunity for social emotional growth be given to all the children in elementary program continuously? I could not have a baby every year. This led to the creation of the toddler mentor program. This program would give the students the choice to assist in the classroom of the smallest children in the school. Like a work on the shelf, it would provide an opportunity for practice and growth in the area of social development.

The development of empathy is an important part of the individual's social and emotional development (McDonald & Messinger, in press). Children's social and emotional well-being during the primary years can have a significant impact on their experience at school (Pech, 2013). The Montessori guide recognizes the importance of this development. Some of the benefits are that it results in healthy social relationships, improves self-confidence in their ability to help and enhances a sense of responsibility (Masterson & Kersey, 2013).

Research shows a variety of programs for different ages have been established which include a focus on empathy and have had positive results. However, there were not any programs discovered which involved elementary students working with toddlers. By exploring this possibility and discovering the benefits, other Montessori schools could

create their own mentor programs for elementary students.

This action research attempts to answer the question, Will there be improved development of empathy in the elementary students resulting Empathy is the ability to feel sympathy for other's feelings and motivates individuals to help those in need (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). This behavior in included in the scope of pro-social development, along with traits such as sympathy, compassion, concern, comforting, helping, sharing, cooperating, volunteering and donating (Hastings, Utendale & Sullivan, 2007). Prosocial behavior is to behave in ways that help another person without obvious benefits to themselves (Berger, 2003).

Empathy has been seen as an important part of emotional and social intelligence, as it effects an individual in social and work situations (Decety & Ickes, 2011). A short term longitudinal study indicates a positive relationship between affective processes and academic achievement (Decety & Ickes, 2011).

Research has identified a precursor to being able to empathetically respond as early as 18 to 72 hours after birth when an infant cries as a response to other's crying (McDonald & Messinger, in press). Empathy is believed to emerge after 18 months as the child gains skills such as sense of self, memory, and imitation (Poole, Miller & Ellen, 2005). Toddlers often display empathic behaviors such as being helpful, sharing and comforting to another in distress. (McDonald & Messinger, in press). The ability to react to the emotions that a person is witnessing is referred to as *emotional empathy*.

As a child develops into the fourth year it appears that *cognitive empathy* starts to develop (McDonald & Messinger, in press). Cognitive empathy is the ability to imagine another's experience. As children are able to understand emotions, and communicate

their own feelings, they are able to see things from another perspective (Poole et al., 2005). The students in the second plane of development are engaging in social situations and recognizing their connection to the world and those around them (Seldin & Epstein, 2003). Though students are able to recognize that others may feel different, it does not guarantee an empathetic response (Masterson & Kersey, 2013).

There are many factors that can influence the development of empathy in a young child, such as genetics, neural development and temperament as well as imitation, parenting, and parent- child relationships (McDonald & Messinger, in press). Other factors include environment and the ongoing interactions between children not only with their family members, but teachers and the community (Hastings et al, 2007). As a result, many programs have been established in schools to provide experiences to aid with the development of empathy.

Empathy Programs

Roots of Empathy is a program based out of Canada which was developed to break the intergenerational cycles of abuse and neglect (Ward, 2012). The program works with children from kindergarten -8th grade and has three primary goals:

1) To develop children's social and emotional understanding

2) To promote children's pro-social behavior and decrease their aggressive

behaviors   3) To increase children's knowledge about infant development and

effective parenting skills (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait & Hertzman,

2011, p.2)

This program is designed to have an infant and parent visit the classroom for the 9 month school year. Students learn about the child's development and receive lessons

which foster empathy, emotional understanding and problem solving skills (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2011). Researchers have found a positive impact on increased empathy and decrease of aggression (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2011; MacDonald et al., 2013). A study by the Government of Manitoba in 2001 noted that improvements in behaviors were maintained after 3 years ("Research and Effectiveness," n.d.).

In addition to the "Roots for Empathy" there are a variety of other programs that have been developed which focus on social-emotional and character development, which includes the development of empathy. These programs have been established in schools and are valued to help students with expression of their feelings and making friends (Mindness, Chen & Brenner, 2008). The belief that emotional well-being and social competence of a student provide a strong foundation for brain development and emerging cognitive abilities was found by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007).

In the 80's a program called The Second Step: A Violence Prevention Program was established which focused on recognizing the feelings of self and others, consider other peoples perspectives and responding emotionally (Decety & Ickes, 2011). It is organized by grade level and includes various tools for teaching, from puppets to videos (Mindness et al., 2008). The Columbus Elementary School assessed positive changes at the school as a result of teacher surveys and pre- and post-assessments (Mindness et al., 2008).

Learning to Care Curriculum was established in 1984 and focuses on problem solving games, storytelling, making tape and video recordings and group discussions (Decety & Ickes, 2011). This program appears to be similar to the most recent program

Interplay Solutions. Interplay Solutions, which was developed in 2006, uses stories, role

plays and structured activities to assist in the development of social emotional skills

(Mindness et al., 2008). This program includes follow up work with hands-on activities

so that the children can be assessed for the mastery of the social skills being presented.

The Responsive Classroom approach developed by the Northeast Foundation for

Children strategies include engaging the children to create their own rules, collaborative

problem solving, guided discovery and academic choice (Mindness et al., 2008). This

approach and focus to create a community is continued with a "Book Buddy" program

which involves students to engage with younger peers and find out their interests

(Schachter, 2011). The Responsive classroom depends on children's report of self-

reflection and progress in the areas of art, writing and mathematics to show evidence for

the social-emotional development (Mindness et al., 2008).

The Bully-Proof curriculum teaches students strategies to help themselves and

others in bullying situations, using empathy to relate to the victims of bullying (Stetson,

Hurley & Miller, 2003). The methods used are teacher's lessons, worksheets, handouts

and roleplaying. One study that assessed the program found positive results, showing

improvement that bullying had decreased over four years (Stetson et al., 2003). These

findings were the result of self-reports by students.

Other programs such as I Can Problem Solve and Promoting Alternative Thinking

Strategies and Positive Action have all reported positive reports over time in improving

social emotional competencies in some form (Stetson et al., 2003). There is also support

for programs in which teachers create their own activities from service projects to other

projects which nurture kindness (Mindness et al., 2008). Studies have shown that live

pets contribute positively to the development of empathy in the classroom (Daly & Suggs, 2010).

Mentoring

Mentoring is described as an act of an older, more experienced person who guides or develops a friendship with a younger individual (Rekha & Ganesh, 2012). Big Brothers Big Sisters program is a popular mentoring program which matches adults or young adults or young adults with youth. This program was established in 1904 for boys and 1902 for girls. The two programs combined in 1977 ("Started Something," n.d.). This program states that it wants each child to achieve:

1) Higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships

2) Avoidance of risky behaviors

3) Educational success."("Changing Perspectives," n.d.)

In the 2012 Big Brother Big Sister Youth Outcome Report positive outcomes were noted in the community based program in the areas of the socio-emotional competency, educational success and attitudes toward risky behavior. Positive Outcomes were noted in the school based programs in the area of socio-emotional competency and educational success, but not in the area of attitudes toward risky behavior (Big Brother Big Sister, 2012).

Mentoring programs are believed to have increased over the past decade with school based mentoring programs estimate to make up about 70 percent of the formal mentoring programs in the United States (Randolph & Johnson, 2008). Some research suggests that these programs have limited positive effects or positive effects that do not last (Spencer, 2007; Pryce and Keller, 2012).

"Mentor Attunement: An Approach to Successful School-based Mentoring Relationships" by Julia Pryce (2012) acknowledged the importance of establishing a relationship in which one can read and respond to verbal and nonverbal cues and respond to the youth needs.   This study observed that the more successful mentoring relationship is established when the mentor has a higher level of attunement. Also noted in the article "School-Based Mentoring Programs: A Review of Research "by Randolph and Johnson (2008) the quality of the mentoring relationship is essential for positive outcomes. The level of commitment and respect that the mentor brings to the relationship and the professionalism of the program has a great significance on the best practice for mentor programs (Anastasia, Skinner & Mundhenk, 2012). Studies noted that in order to achieve best practice, training, self-assessment and supervision are recommended (Pryce, 2012). Research in the area of the school based mentoring programs suggests more research in this area to refine the program and monitor the lasting affects (Pryce, 2012; Randolph & Johnson, 2008).

My research showed that positive outcomes may be achieved by implementing programs that focus on social emotional development. The benefits of empathy include creation of community, healthy social relationships, increased self-confidence, increased sense of responsibility and success in school (Masterson & Kersey, 2013). Experiences may be provided to give the opportunity to build these skills, such as instruction, role plays, reading stories and working with other peers in class. It is my goal to create a program which includes elementary students mentoring toddlers to enhance social emotional skills, such as empathy. Education, modeling, communication, and practice will be components to assure an effective program.

Description of Research Process

My data collection process included field notes of teacher observations in class and at recess pre, during and post- intervention, student self-reports, teacher observations in the toddler class, and group discussions.

During week 1(September 2, 2014) the elementary children had a lesson on identifying emotions. This lesson was to assist with the elementary student's journal writing throughout the year. The students in the lower elementary class write in journals following recess a few times a week throughout the year. When writing in the journal the students are asked to identify feelings and what the cause of the feeling is. The students were given examples of different emotions to discuss as a group and a handout with pictures (see Appendix A).   The class discussed how to identify emotions in ourselves and others.

On September 3, 2014 the students were given a lesson on toddler development. The class was given instruction of how to approach toddlers. The students were asked to get down on their level, use eye contact and a gentle voice. These are best practices when approaching toddlers. The students also discussed how important it is to role model behavior for the toddlers.

On September 3, 2014 the elementary students were observed for 20 minutes at recess using a tally sheet. The name of each student was written and the amount of desired and undesired behaviors at recess was noted (see Appendix B).

On September 4, 2014 the elementary students participated in a discussion on how toddlers may express emotions.   The students were provided with pictures to help

identify emotions on an Emotions Chart found at http://www.playsafekids.com.au/Toy-Product/Emotions-Chart_1564.

The class discussed how toddlers communicate. A toddler does not have many words at times, and it is important to see the body language of the toddler. The students revisited how to approach a toddler. The students' role played some scenarios of being upset toddlers and talking to a toddler.

Also on September 4, 2014 the participants were observed in the lower elementary classroom for a 30 minute period using a tally sheet (see Appendix C). This tally sheet identified specific desired and undesired behaviors. The students initials were placed in the box in which the behavior was observed, and notes were added if needed.

On September 5, 2014 each elementary student was interviewed by the teacher. The students were given a scenario and asked a series of questions (see Appendix D). These questions asked the students to identify their feelings and the feelings of others. The answers were recorded.

On the second week of the study the elementary students began their visits to the toddler class. Due to the elementary fall camping trip only half of the elementary students were able to participate. Each visit to the toddler classroom lasted twenty to thirty minutes. During the visit the elementary student was asked to observe the classroom for ten minutes and then begin to interact. The elementary students were given the freedom to interact with any of the toddlers in the classroom. The elementary student could assist in bringing a work to a table or a mat, assisting with a work or reading to the toddlers. The toddler teachers were also able to give instruction if needed to the students of where to assist. At any time the toddler teacher could decide to send the elementary student back

to the elementary class if they deemed that the elementary student was disruptive to the

toddler environment.

The elementary student was interviewed following the visit by the elementary

teacher. The elementary teacher used the Social Emotional Guide (see Appendix E) for

each interview. Each elementary student was asked to identify at least two events that

occurred during the visit. For each event the student was asked how they felt, what the

child was feeling, how they felt about the child and their actions. At the end of the

interview they were asked if they enjoyed their experience and if they would want to

return.

On week three of the study, all the participants were able to visit the toddler

classroom. Following the first visit, the elementary students were given the freedom to

choose whether to observe or interact. Each elementary student was interviewed

following their visit using the Social Emotional Guide (see Appendix E). The elementary

students continued to write in their feelings journals after recess.

On week four the study was interrupted due to a family emergency and I had to

take a leave of absence from work. The study was delayed until January 2015.

Week four of the study was continued starting January 5, 2015. Each participant

in the study was able to visit the toddler class for a twenty to thirty minute period. Prior

to visiting in January each elementary student verbally reviewed with the researcher the

guidelines of the toddler classroom due to the length of the interruption of the study.

Following the visit, the students were interviewed using the Social Emotional Guide (see

Appendix E). The toddler teachers were also given an observation sheet to note the

elementary students' behavior in the toddler environment (see Appendix C). This sheet

noted if the following behaviors were observed during their visit: comfort a student, listen to what is being said, acknowledge feelings of the other students, use a quiet voice, hug a student, ignore someone who is upset, talk over others, do not pay attention to others in class, use a loud voice and hit a student.

During week 5 (January 12, 2015) the elementary students who were available continued to visit the toddler classroom and were interviewed following their visit using the Social Emotional Guide (see Appendix E). The students also participated in a group discussion (see Appendix F). The goal of the group discussion was to allow the students to share their feelings about their experiences. The focus of the discussion was to share how they could tell what the toddlers were feelings. The elementary students asked to role play some events that had happened which was allowed. The elementary students were observed in the classroom environment and at recess for 20-30 minutes during this week. I choose to use the observation sheet the toddler teachers were using in the toddler class (see Appendix C).

During week 6 (January 19, 2015) the elementary students who were available continued to visit the toddler classroom and were interviewed following their visit using the Social Emotional Guide (see Appendix E). The toddler teachers continued to observe the elementary students in the class (see Appendix C).

The goal of the action research project was to have every elementary student assist in the toddler program at least six times. By week 6, every elementary student should have visited the toddler class five times. Due to special events, holidays, sickness, student vacations and other interruptions I noticed three out of the eight participants had not been able to visit the toddler classroom five times. I extended the

mentor program a seventh week in order to allow the students who missed having the

opportunity to have one additional visit.

Following the final visits the elementary students were observed both at recess

and in the classroom using the tally sheet for desired and undesired behaviors (see

Appendix B).   The elementary students participated in a final group discussion (see

Appendix G) and the elementary students were interviewed individually (see Appendix

D).

Analysis of Data

Starting in September, I interviewed each elementary student to create a baseline

to determine their ability to identify feelings of others and identify with that feeling (see

Appendix E). The interview also determined if the elementary student would take action

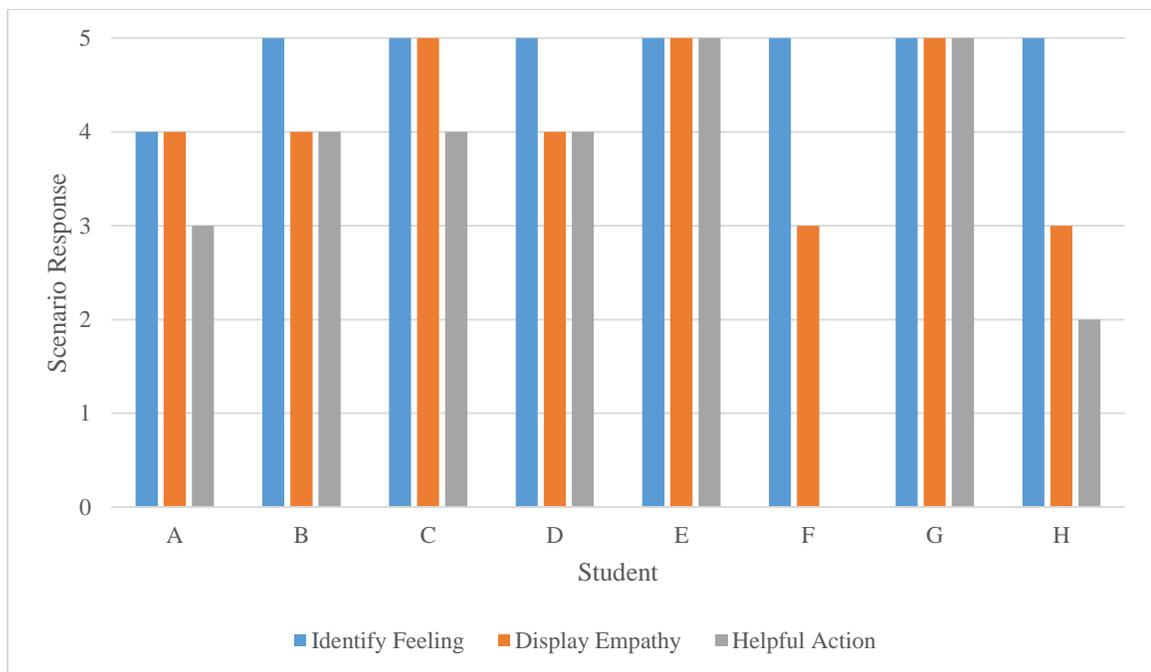to interact with the student in a helpful way.

Figure 1. Number of Answers to Scenarios Which Displayed Desired Behaviors

Pre Implementation.

The data suggests that two of the eight students were able to identify the feeling, display empathy and take helpful action in all five scenarios. Seven of the eight students could identify feelings in the five scenarios. Three of the eight students demonstrated empathy in four of the scenarios and two of the eight students displayed empathy in three of the scenarios. One student was not able to provide helpful action for any of the scenarios.
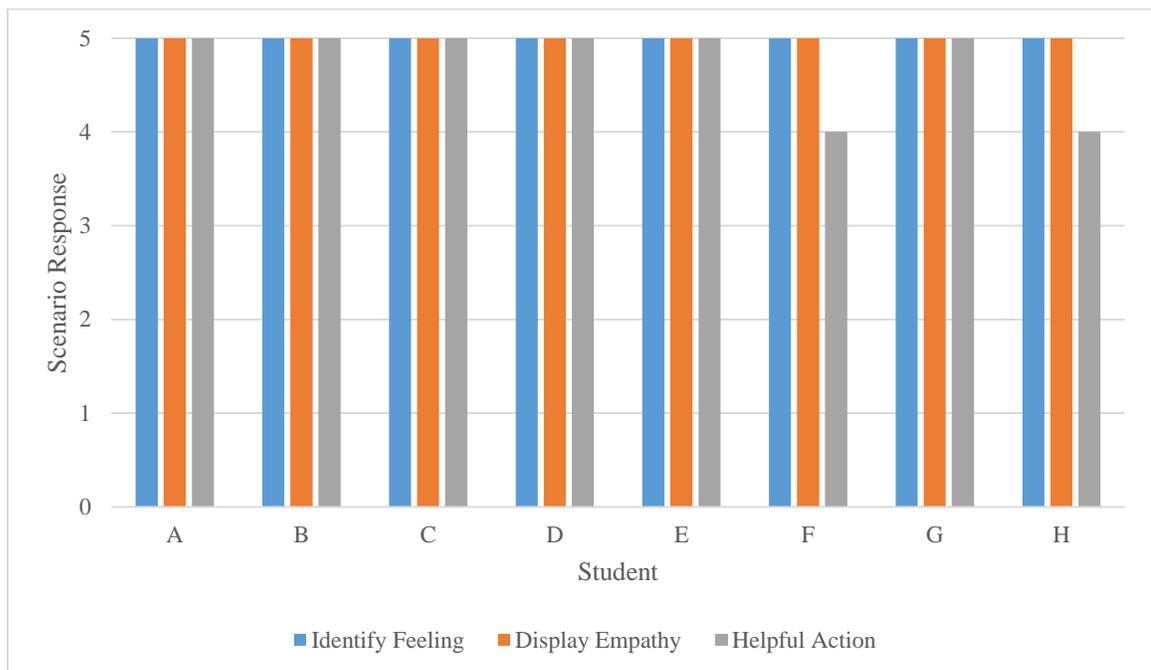

Figure 2. Number of Answers to Scenarios Which Displayed Desired Behaviors Post Implementation.

The students were interviewed following the intervention (see Appendix E) on week 7. As seen in Figure 2, there was an increase in the ability to display empathy and provide a helpful action. Six of the eight students displayed the desired behavior for all five scenarios. Two of the eight students were able to identify the feeling and display empathy in the five scenarios and provide a helpful action in four of the scenarios.

Once the program started each student was interviewed following their visit to the toddler class to discuss at least two events that occurred during their visit (Appendix F). They were asked to identify the event, a thought about the event, the toddler's feelings, their feelings and the action they took in that situation. This information was organized to identify two components: display empathy and provide a helpful action.

The other component noted was whether the student was observing a situation or giving a lesson to the student. It was important to note when the student reported seeing a situation and then chose to approach the toddler. If the student was discussing giving a lesson, the student was discussing an event in which they were already engaged with the toddler.

Following the last three visits the toddler teachers were asked to give feedback on their observations of the elementary students (see Appendix D). These observations included desired and undesired behaviors. . The desired behaviors included: comfort a student, listen to what is being said, acknowledge feelings of other students, use a quiet voice and hug a student. The undesired behaviors included: ignoring someone who is upset, talk over other, do not pay attention to others in class, use a loud voice and hit or touch a student in a disrespectful way.
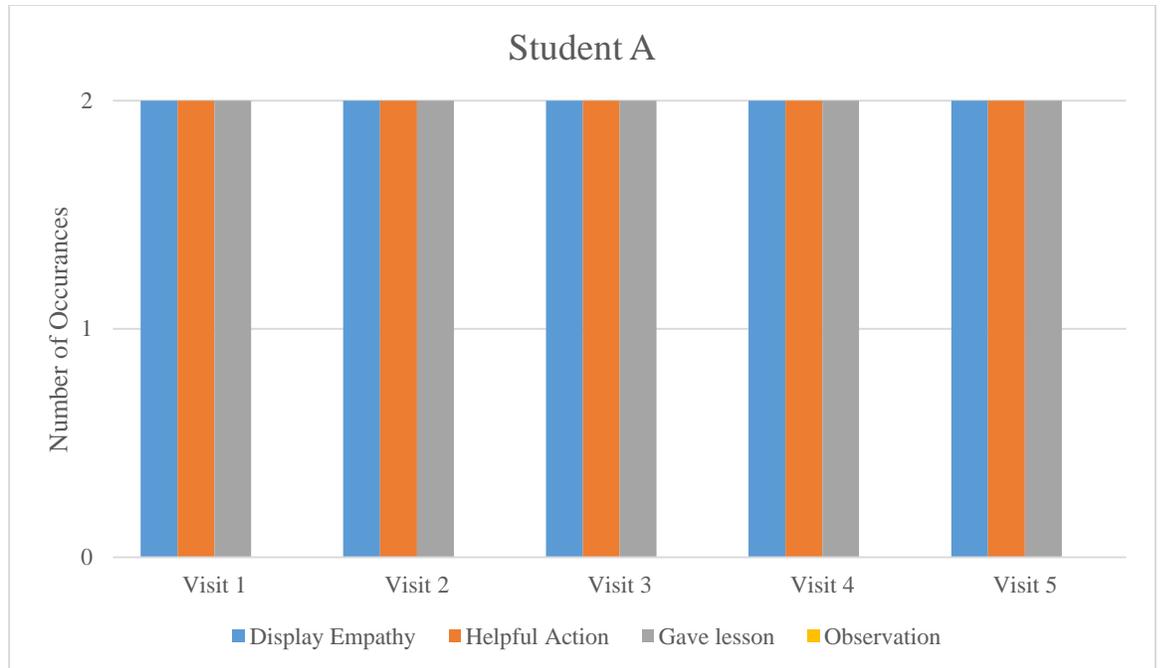
Figure 3. Student A Interview Responses

In Figure 3, the student displayed a consistent ability to give lessons to the toddler, display empathy and provide a helpful action. The student did not discuss any observations.

The toddler teacher only observed desired behaviors from this student and stated that this student needed a prompt to help a student on one occasion. This report is consistent with the student's report.
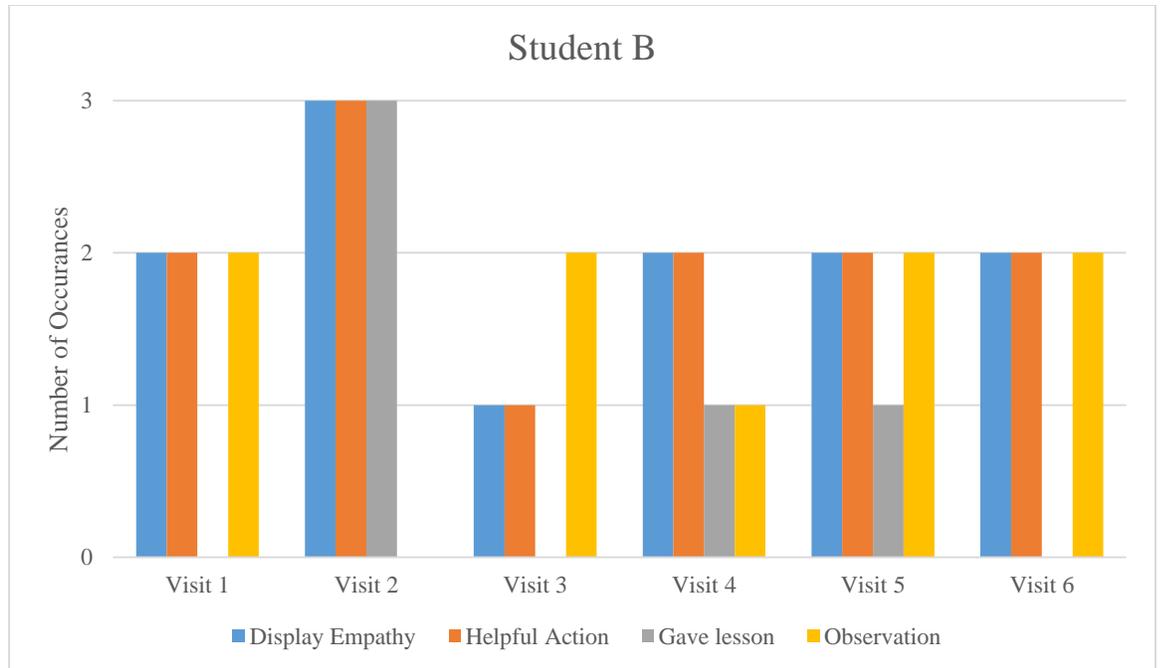
Figure 4. Student B Interview Response

In Figure 4 Student B displayed empathy and a helpful action for every event of every visit except the 3rd visit.   This student observed students 69% and gave lessons 38% of the time.

The toddler teacher noted this student needed guidance on how to give a lesson but only displayed desired behaviors during visits. This student was noted as being very helpful and engaging. These observations are consistent with the student's self-report.
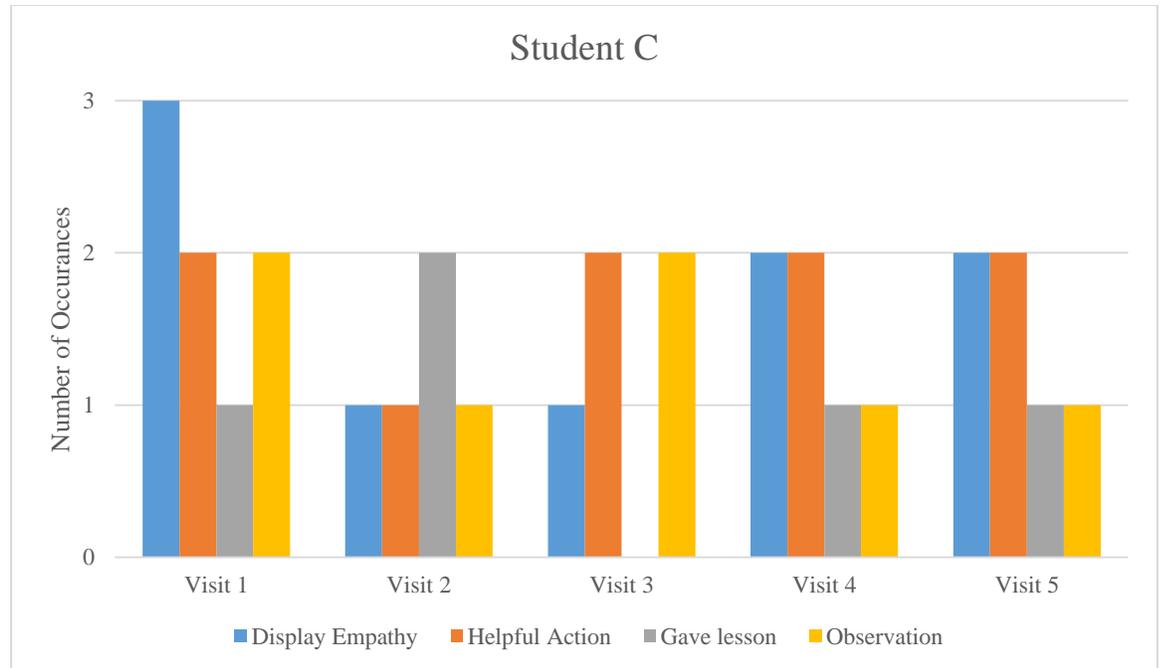
Figure 5. Student C Interview Response

In Figure 5 Student C displayed at least one action of empathy and helpful actions on the first three visits. Empathy and helpful actions were displayed on every event the last two visits. This student than gave lessons 63% of the time and observed 37% of the time.

The toddler teacher observed only desired behaviors for this student and noted this student was very engaged with the toddlers. The teacher shared that this student was very helpful and asked the student to stay in the toddler class longer one day to assist with an upset child. The toddler's teacher feedback is consistent with student C self-report.
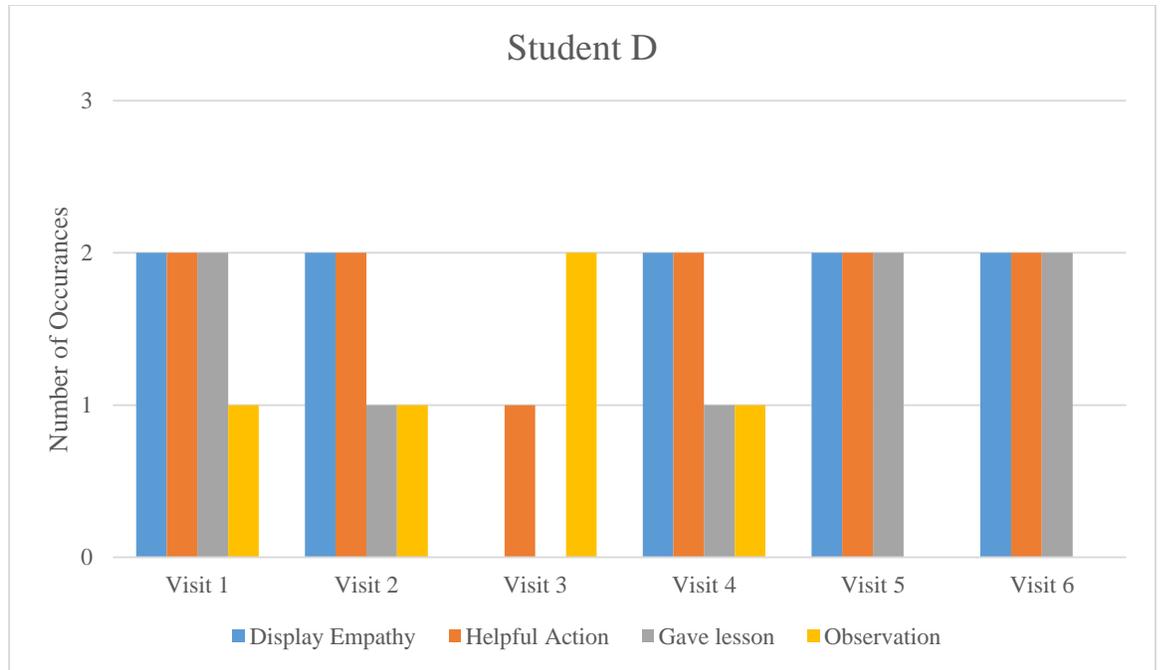
Figure 6. Student D Interview Responses

In Figure 6 the student displayed empathy and a helpful action the majority of the time. This student gave more lessons than observations. Only on one visit was the student unable to display empathy. The last two visits the student gave lessons, demonstrated empathy and provided helpful action.

The toddler teacher stated this student only displayed desired behaviors and once had to be reminded to use walking feet. This student was very nurturing, helpful, and the toddler students were very attracted to student D. This report was consistent with the student's self-report.
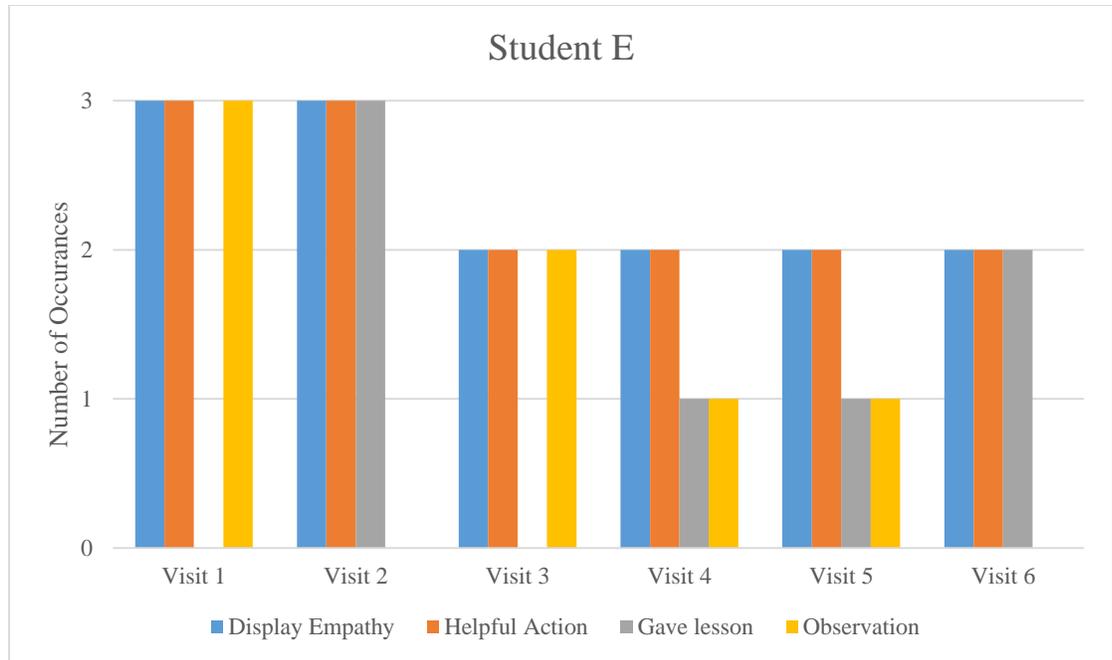
Figure 7. Student E Interview Response

In Figure 7 the student displayed a consistent ability to demonstrate empathy and helpful actions throughout the six visits. The student gave seven lessons and discussed seven observations.

The toddler teacher observed only desired behaviors from this student. The toddler teacher acknowledged that student E was attentive to the needs of others, used encouraging words and approached the teachers to help with potty training. The toddler's teacher report was consistent with the student's self-report.
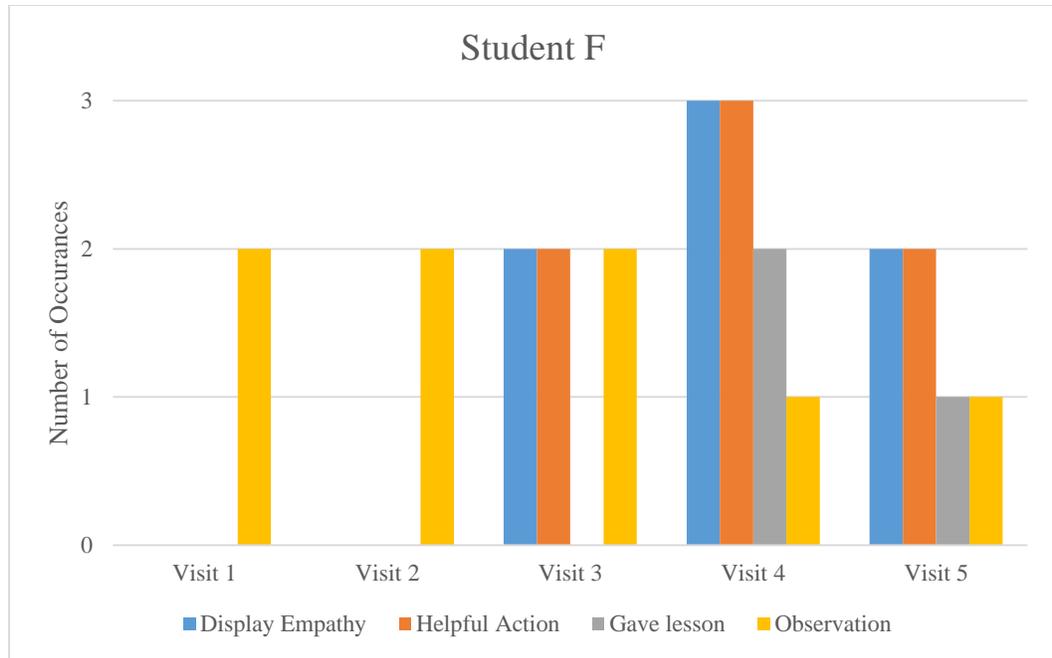
Figure 8. Student F Interview Response

In Figure 8 the student observed without interacting the first two visits to the toddler classroom. Starting with the third visit the student displayed the ability to show empathy and helpful action, and begun to give toddler lessons on visit 4 and 5.

The toddler teacher observed student F needed direction from the teacher to assist students. The student was found not paying attention to the toddler students and working parallel with them. This student did respond to direction and then engaged with the toddler students. This feedback is consistent with the student's self-report.
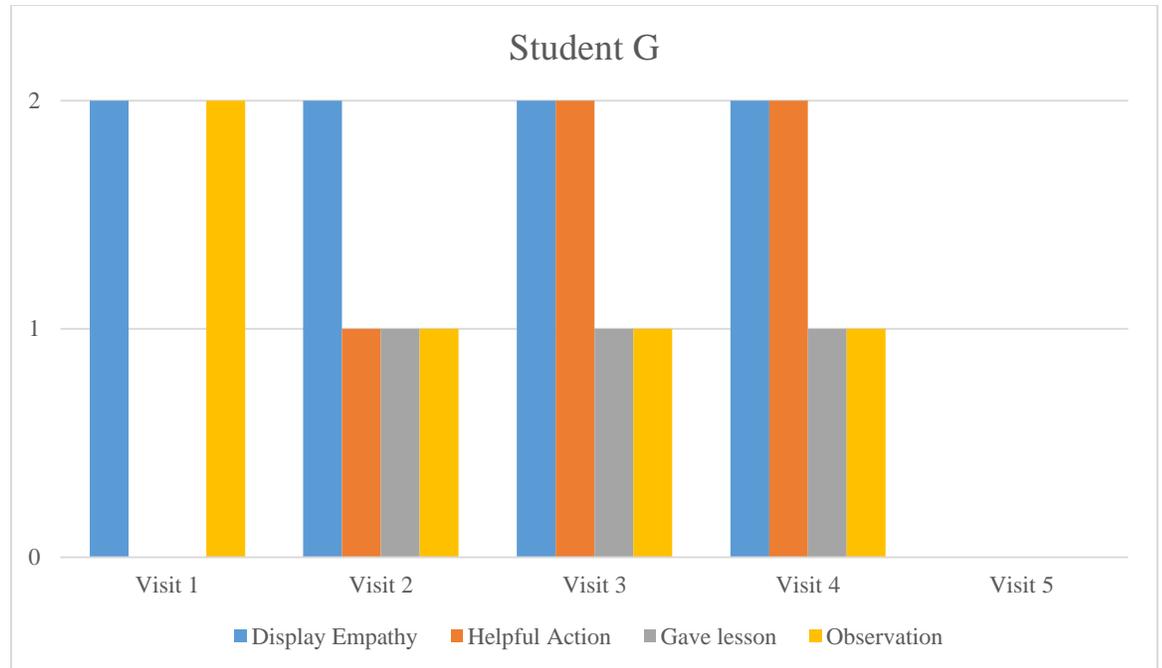
Figure 9. Student G Interview Response

In figure 9 the student displayed empathy and observation on the first visit. Following this empathy was revealed the following three visit with an increase in helpful action. The student observed and gave lessons following the first visit. The last visit the student did not want to report any events and asked to leave the toddler class.

Student G was observed by the toddler teacher displaying both desired and undesired behaviors. Student G was noted listening and using a quiet voice on all visits. Student G was also observed ignoring others, not paying attention and running in class. The toddler teacher noted that Student G spent a lot of time in the observation chair watching and asked to go back to the elementary class visit four and five. The desire to go back to class on the fourth visit was not relayed during the interview. The toddler teacher's report gave different insight than the student's self-report.
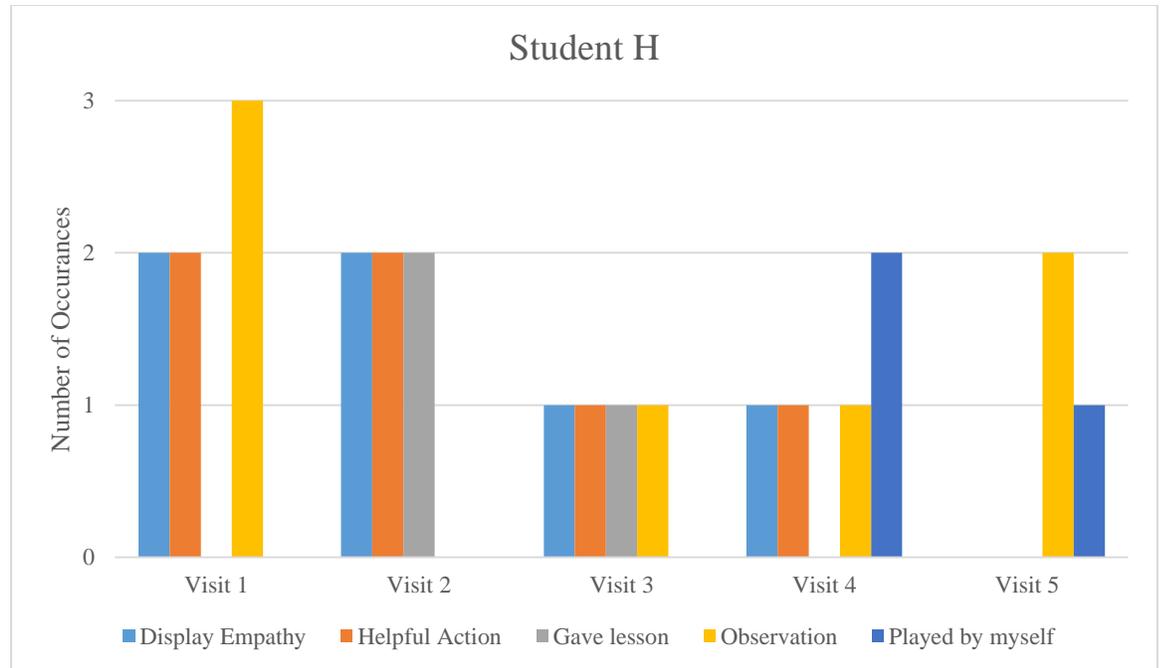
Figure 10. Student H Interview Response

In figure 10 student H reported a decrease in demonstrating empathy and helpful action over the course of the visits. The desire to give toddlers lesson decreased. As these behaviors decreased, a new practice emerged in the interview: playing by himself.

The toddler teacher observed both desired and undesired behaviors for student H. This student required direction from a teacher to interact with toddler students during the work period. However, during circle time this student assisted toddlers at circle. The toddler teacher noted he always used a quiet voice and comforted the students. The toddler teacher noted on visit four and five he wanted to choose work to do independently and needed direction to interact with the students. The toddler teacher's report gave additional insight and noted helpful actions where the student did not report any.
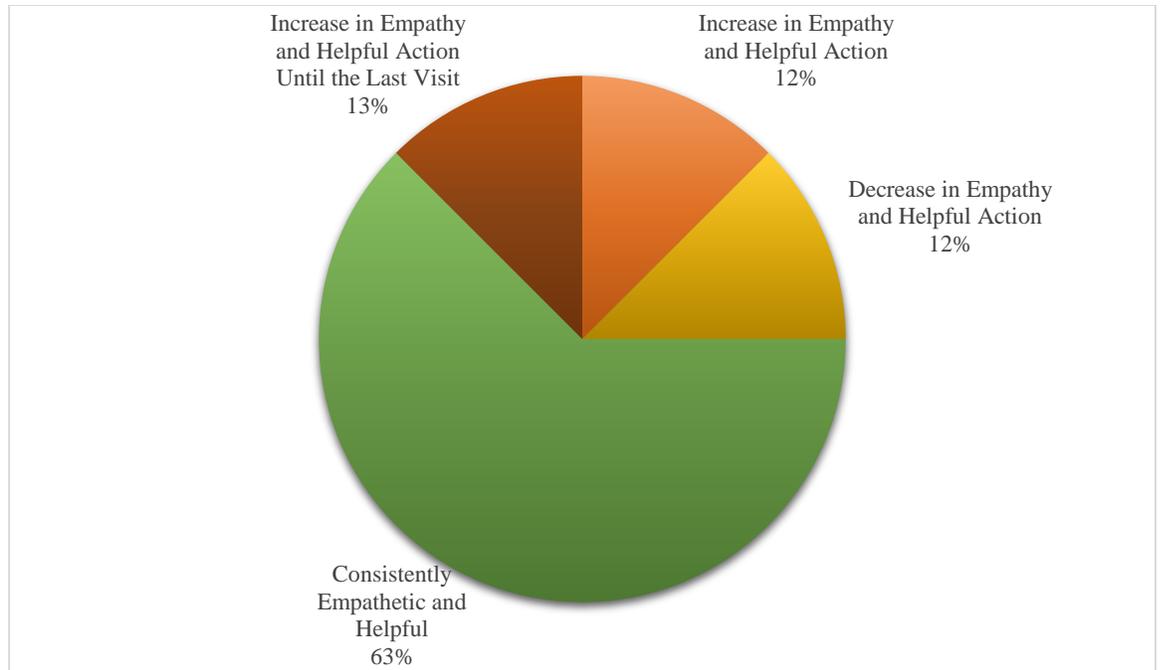
Figure 10. Amount of Students which Displayed Empathetic and Helpful

Behaviors in the Toddler Classroom During The Toddler Mentor Program

The data shows that overall, five of the eight students consistently displayed

behaviors of empathy and helpful action throughout the toddler visits. One student

showed an increase in the ability to display empathy and helpful action in the toddler

classroom over the course of the program. One student demonstrated a decrease in the

ability to display empathy and helpful action in the toddler classroom. Lastly, one

student displayed an increase to display empathy and helpful action until the last visit

where the student chose not to interact with the toddlers.

Following every visit, the elementary students were asked if they had fun and

would like to return to the toddler class for another visit. The response was yes 100% of

the time by all the students.

The students were observed as a group for twenty minutes in class and at recess

Pre- Implementation, during and Post implementation of the program. The goal of this

observation was to see if there would be an increase in desired behaviors outside the

toddler classroom. A tally mark/initial system was used to note desired and undesired

behaviors (See Appendix B and Appendix D). The desired behaviors included: comfort a

student, listen to what is being said, acknowledge feelings of other students, use a quiet

voice and hug a student. The undesired behaviors: included ignoring someone who is

upset, talk over other, do not pay attention to others in class, use a loud voice and hit or

touch a student in a disrespectful way.
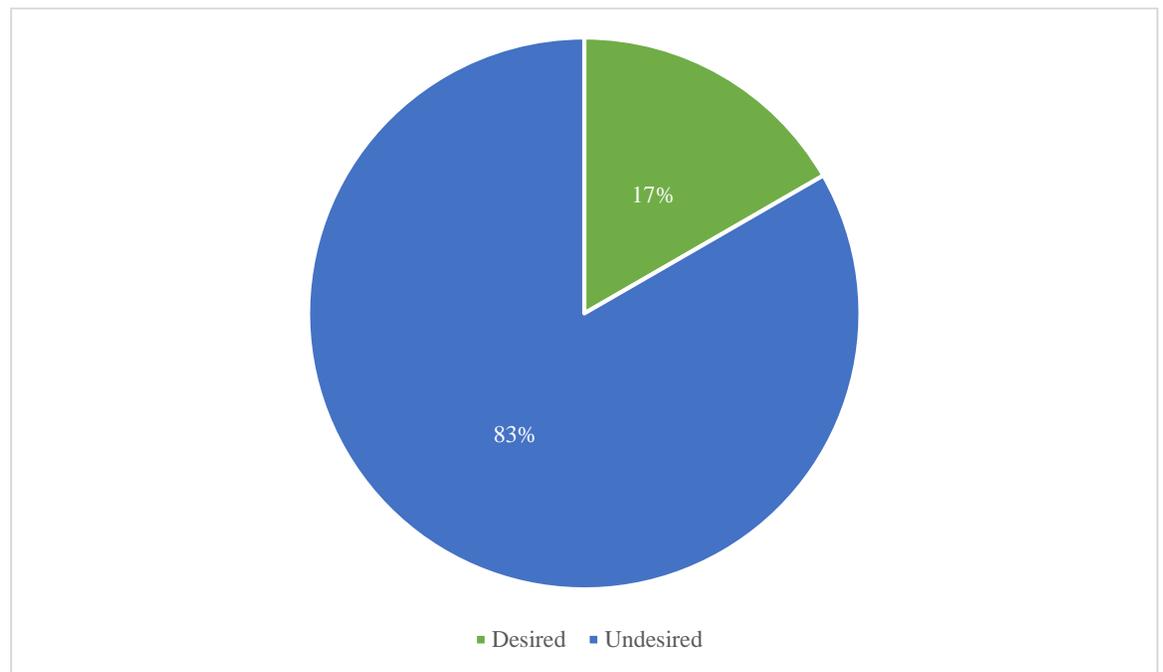

Figure 11. Classroom Behaviors of the Elementary Students Observed Pre-
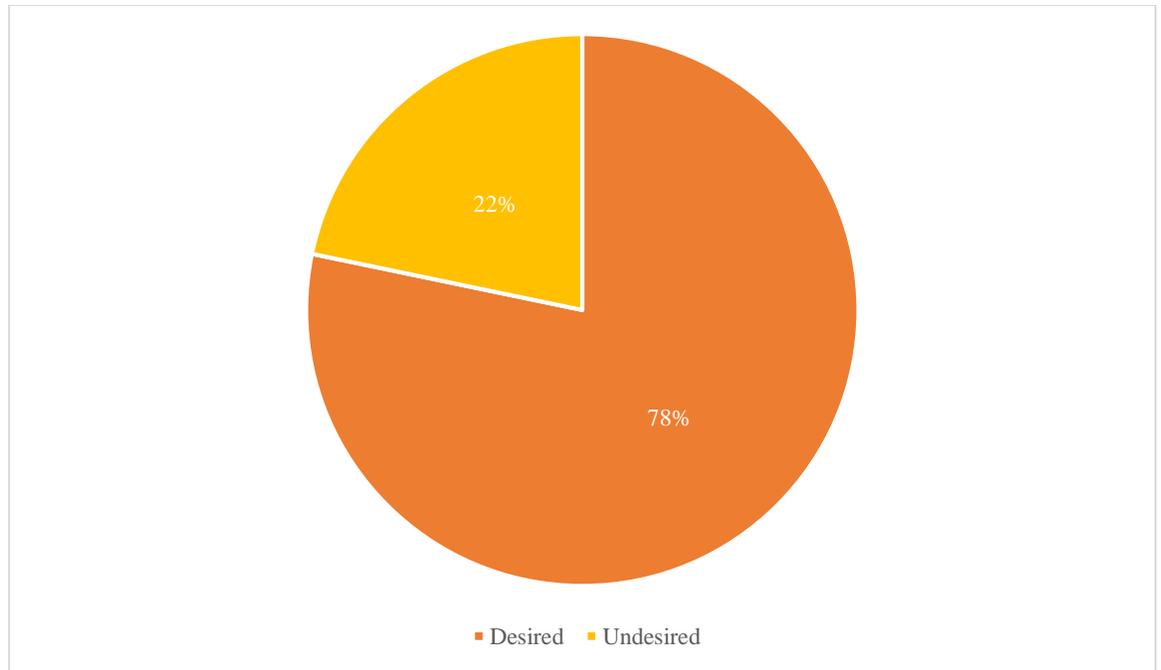
Implementation of the Toddler Mentor Program

Figure 12. Classroom Behaviors of the Elementary Students Observed During

The Implementation of the Toddler Mentor Program

Figure 13. Classroom Behaviors of the Elementary Students Observed Following

the Implementation of Toddler Mentor Program

This data suggests there was an increase in desired behaviors displayed in the classroom following the implementation of the Elementary Toddler Mentor Program. Figure 12 displays a 59% increase in observed desired behaviors during the study. Figure 13 displays a 55% increase in desired behavior observed in the classroom following the study.

Figure 14. Recess Behaviors of the Elementary Students Observed Pre-Implementation of the Toddler Mentor Program

Figure 15. Recess Behaviors of the Elementary Students Observed During the
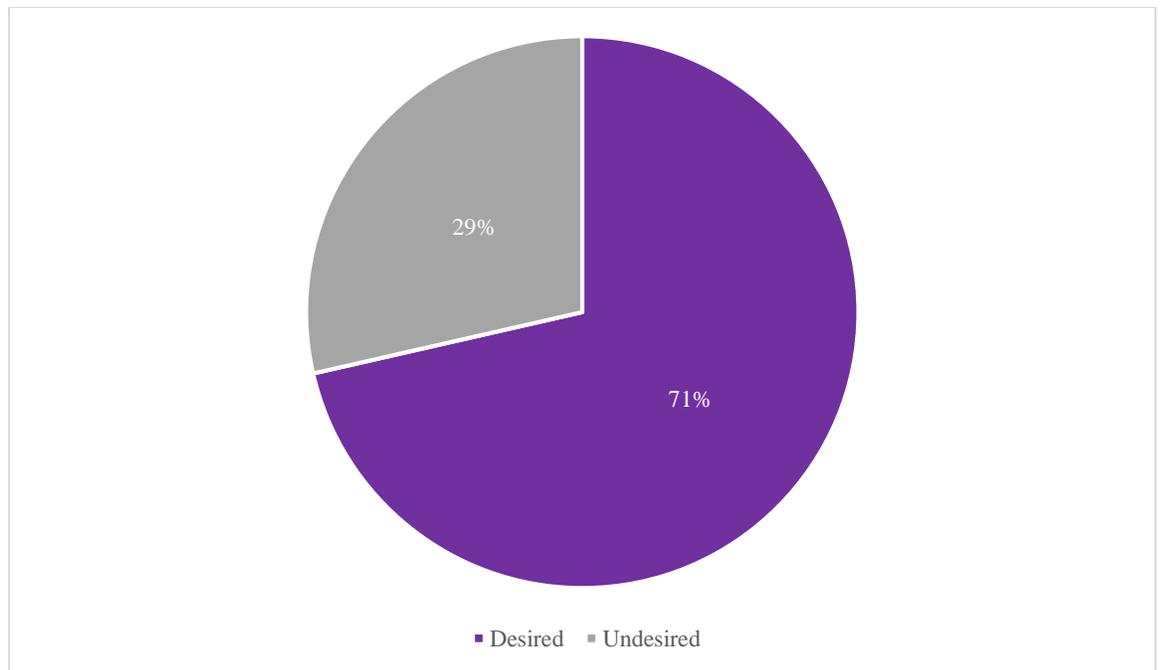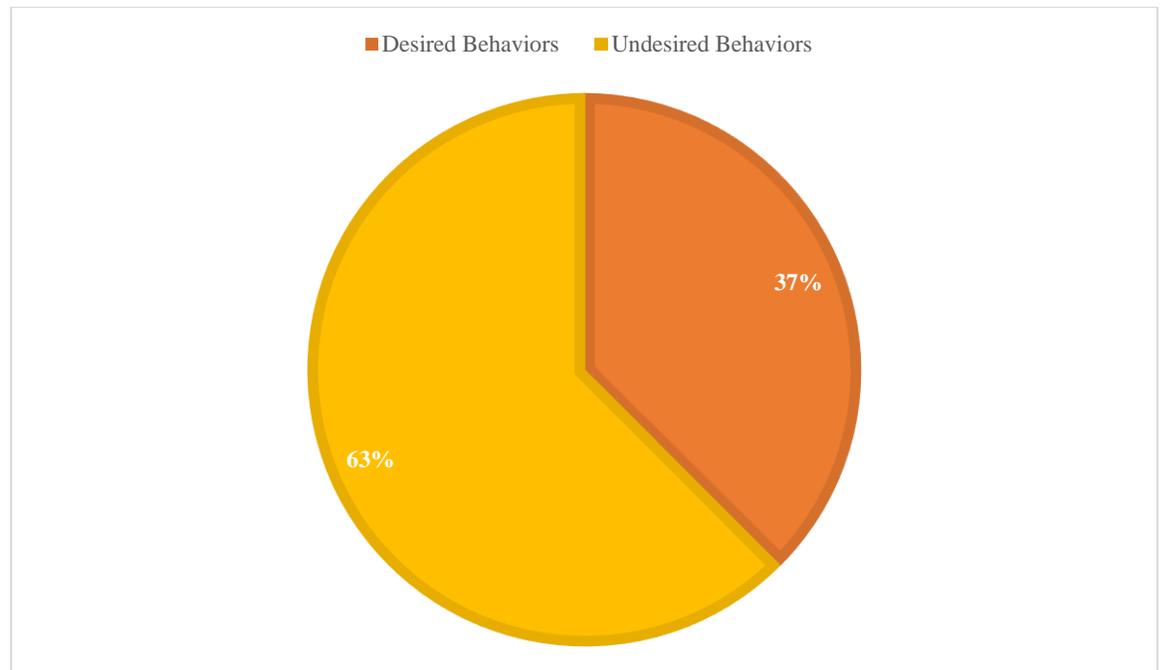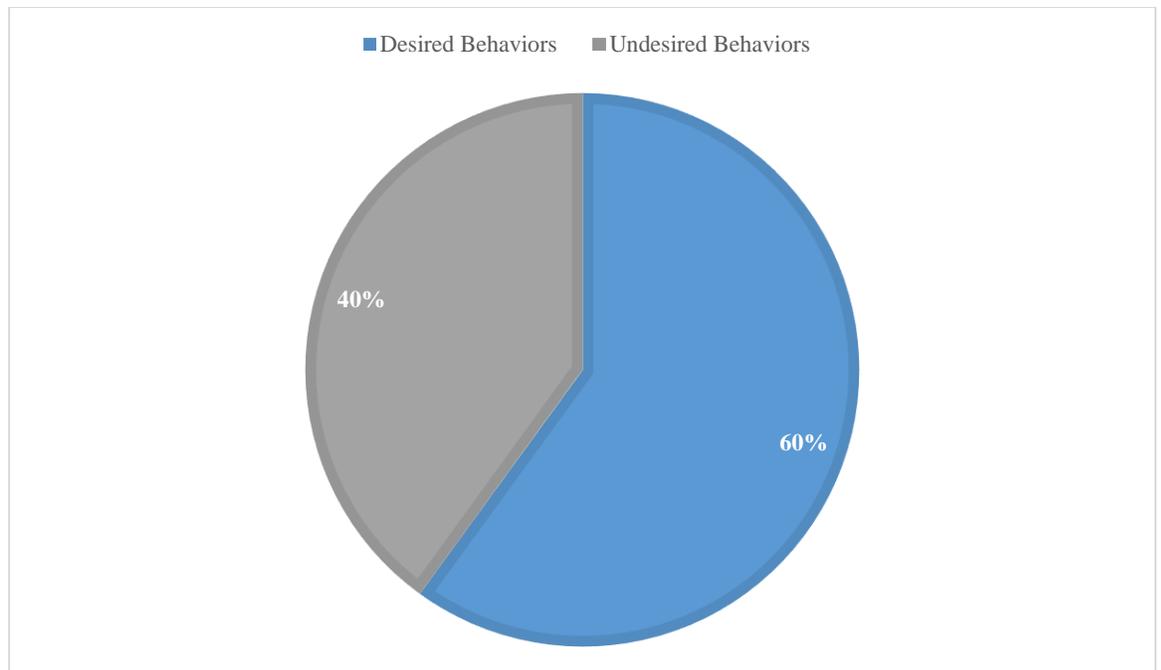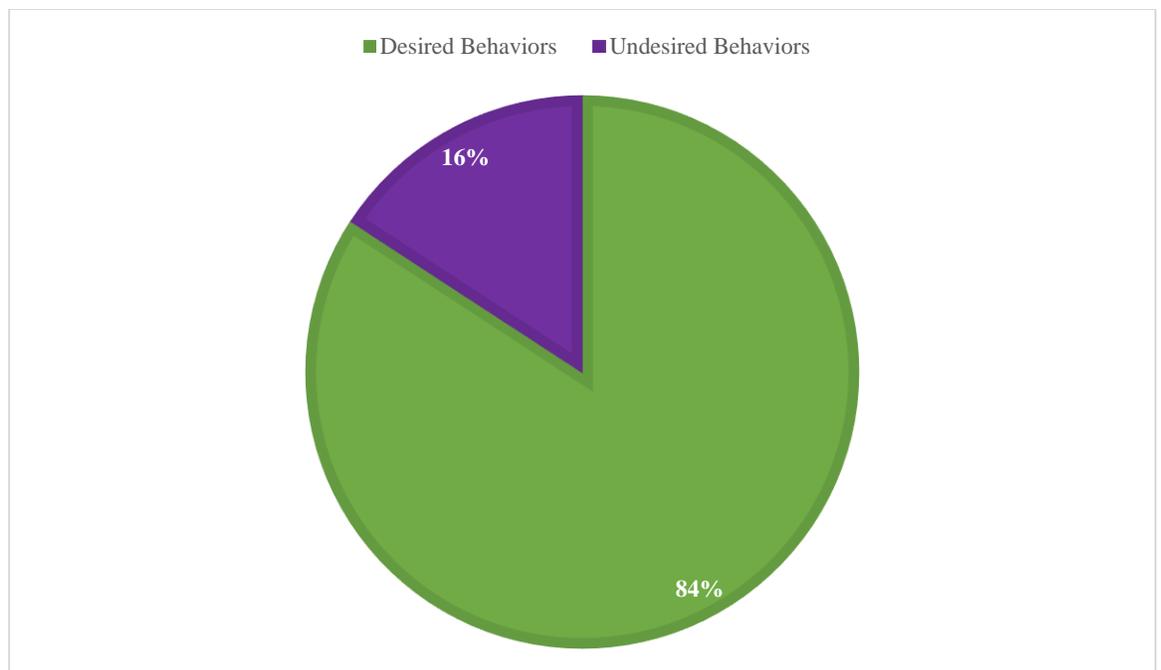
Toddler Mentor Program

Figure 16. Recess Behaviors of the Elementary Students Observed

Following the Toddler Mentor Program

The data in Figure 15 shows a 23% increase in desired behaviors at recess from September to the fourth week of the Elementary Toddler Mentor Program. The data in Figure 16 shows a 44% increase in desired behaviors at recess week seven following the program.

During the fourth week of the program the Elementary Students engaged in a group discussion. The topic of the discussion was Toddlers' feelings. The students collectively identified the different toddler actions the toddlers do that display how they feel. They were able to identify happy, sad, mad, angry, jealous, scared and excited. The students discussed if the toddler did not have an expression, what actions the students would take to try and identify what the toddler needed. This led to the observation that sometimes toddlers need to go to the bathroom or are uncomfortable in their diaper. The students role played different situations to act out for one another. In the end, the students were asked if they thought it was important to help toddlers. They all agreed it was.

The final discussion took place week seven of the program. The students felt the best experience was helping and playing with the toddlers. The group identified the most challenging experience was seeing them crying and changing diapers. These responses displayed the qualities of concern, helping, and compassion which are traits of empathy.

All the elementary students thought they would like to continue to be a mentor. They reported that by being a mentor it helps prepare them be a better babysitter and they liked making the children happy. This response displayed future planning of actions to help others.

Action Plan

The purpose of this action research project was to determine if there would be improved development of empathy in the elementary students as a result of being involved the Toddler Mentor Program. My research indicated that elementary students working with toddlers developed elementary students opportunities to develop skills such as empathy, helpfulness, kindness, and respect.

The interaction with the toddlers varied though two common themes emerged. The elementary students assisted with lessons in the toddler classroom and helped toddlers resolve conflicts. Other activities that took place were the elementary students observed the toddler and the elementary student played parallel in the toddler classroom. Research showed that the female elementary students displayed empathy consistently in the toddler class. The male elementary students demonstrated the greatest changes in empathetic behavior in the toddler class during the program. Overall, the program provided the elementary student with the opportunity to focus primarily on social-emotional development when in the toddler environment.

Another benefit observed was an increased sense of community in our school among the toddler and elementary students. The toddlers developed a relationship with the elementary students. On more than one occasion, the toddler would go home and talk about the elementary student. At our group assemblies, the toddlers would gravitate toward the familiar faces of the elementary students. This increase in trust between the two age groups benefits our school community as a whole and provides a bridge bringing families together.

The mentor program provided a chance for the elementary students to create a community among themselves. During the group discussions, the students were excited to share their stories about the experience. There were many smiles and laughter. The students expressed a greater sense of responsibility to the smaller students in the school. The students became leaders in the school, role modeling the positive relationship with the younger students. This sense of responsibility created a bond between the toddler and elementary students.

The results of the research gave insight to provide more guidance in the mentor program. The male students needed more direction during their visits. Creating weekly lessons for the elementary participants on how to give one specific lesson on the work in the toddler classroom might lead to more interaction with the toddlers during their visit. With this training, the elementary boys may have been more likely to approach toddler students in the earlier visits.   The elementary students then would have the experience of the lesson and possibly a greater confidence to give the lessons to the toddler students.

Another improvement that could be made would be to have the outdoor environment available for the elementary students to assist the toddlers. The elementary students were not able to assist during the toddler outdoor time. At our school, the vast sand area surrounded by a path for trikes provides the environment for gross motor skills to develop. Certain elementary students are drawn to these large motor activities more than the works in the classroom. By providing more choices in ways to aid the toddlers, the elementary students may increase their helpful interactions.

To gain a greater understanding of the benefits of the Toddler Mentor Program, a longer period of study would be recommended with a larger number of participants.

Collecting data over a longer period could determine if empathy and helpful actions would continue to occur in the toddler classroom. It could also provide more information regarding if the student's behavior outside the classroom is positively affected.

The three-year age span in the Montessori Classroom has been developed to provide the older students with the opportunity to teach the younger students in the class. One might think the opportunity for the elementary student to be a role model, teacher and helper are already developed. However, there is much to be gained from the elementary student practicing these skills in the toddler class. Working as a mentor with students so young provides the elementary student the opportunity to practice empathy, kindness, respect and helpfulness in an environment without distractions. The elementary student does not have to be concerned with the reactions of their peers in the toddler classroom. The elementary student does not have to be concerned with other expectations in the elementary classroom, such as getting their work done. The elementary student can focus on one goal, mentoring the toddlers.

As the elementary students continue to grow and learn, the Toddler Mentor Program provides an additional environment for social-emotional growth. As the research has shown, throughout time there have been a variety of programs with the goal to provide the opportunity for students to develop social skills such as empathy. With an increase in the development of these programs, a decrease in negative behaviors, such as aggression, bullying, and self-destructive behaviors was noted. The growth in empathy can lead to the development of positive characteristics, with a sense of responsibility to others around them and increase in self-confidence. The elementary student can volunteer, role model, teach others, be helpful, express kindness and relate to another's

person feelings. The Toddler Mentor program can provide elementary students with an

opportunity to develop a strong foundation for their success at school and in the

community.

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Appendix A
Feelings Chart

Figure 17. Child Feelings Poster. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix B
RECESS OBSERVATION FORM

Name	Initials	Notes	Desired	Undesired

Appendix C
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Date	Class Time
Comfort a student	Ignore someone who is upset
Listen to what is being said	Talk over others
Acknowledge feelings of the other students	Do not pay attention to others in class
Use a quiet voice	Use a loud voice
Hug a student	Hit a student

Appendix D
SCENARIOS

A child in class has lost his toy at recess. There are tears coming from his eyes.

How does the child feel?

A child in class has lost his toy at recess. There are tears coming from his eyes.

How do you feel? What do you do?

A child in class is sitting alone reading a book. How does the child feel?

A child in class is sitting alone reading a book. How do you feel? What do you

do?

A child in class drops the moveable alphabet. How does the child feel?

A child in class drops the moveable alphabet. How do you feel? What do you do?

A child has completed their work. How does the child feel?

A child has completed their work. How do you feel? What do you do?

The cage of the chinchilla was left opened and the class pet has escaped. How

does the student who is the zoologist feel?

The cage of the chinchilla was left opened and the class pet has escaped.   How do

you feel?

What do you do?

Appendix E
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL GUIDE

Event	Thought	My feelings	Other's feeling	My Action
T cried	T cried because he could not have the toy	I felt sad for him	T felt angry	I went over and helped him find a new toy

Appendix F
GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are you enjoying working with the toddlers?

2. How do you know how they are feeling?

3. Do you think it is important to help toddlers?

4. Do you think helping the toddlers helps you understand their feelings?

Appendix G
FINAL GROUP QUESTIONS

Pass the peace object and students can share any thoughts about their experience in the toddler classroom.

1. What is the best experience you had in the toddler classroom?

2. What was the most challenging experience you had in the toddler classroom?

3. Do you think you are as thoughtful with your peers in class as you are with the toddlers?

4. Would you like to continue being a toddler mentor?

5. Why?