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Masako N. Brauneis  
*St. Catherine University*

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The Effects of Peace Education on Children's Prosocial Behavior in an Early Childhood Classroom

Submitted on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

Masako N. Brauneis

Saint Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the effects of peace education on children's prosocial behavior. This action research implemented peace education for six weeks in an early childhood classroom of 19 children, in the U.S., ages three to six. Qualitative data including interviews, observational logs, field notes, and a journal were collected. Quantitative data included a tally sheet of incidents and surveys of the children. The research concluded that peace education affected children's prosocial behavior, increasing the number of prosocial behavior incidents, raising children's awareness, knowledge, and skills for prosocial behavior, while positively impacting children's prosocial behavior in the community. Further study was recommended to reinforce the findings by implementing peace education for a longer period of time, applying it in other classrooms, modifying activities and approaches to reach more children, such as those with special needs and behavioral problems, and educating parents in peace education at home.

*Keywords:* Early childhood education, Montessori, peace education, prosocial behavior

“Establishing lasting peace is the work of education” (Montessori, 1972/2007, p. 24) was the ambitious and hopeful declaration of Italian educator, physician, and scientist Dr. Maria Montessori in her speech before the European Congress for Peace in Brussels in 1936. She believed that revealing and nurturing a child’s inner peace could change the course of humanity and help to realize world peace. More than 80 years have passed since Dr. Montessori shared her vision for lasting peace through education. There are still conflicts in the world and issues such as economic inequality, climate change, pollution, inequality of opportunity, and violence which continue to bring fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and stress to our daily lives. Today’s children also face a number of unique challenges, such as school shootings, drugs, bullying, abuse, and targeted social media influence. Suicide rates are also rising among young people.

While education is recognized as part of the solution to helping children deal with these complex challenges, current education systems often focus more on academic performance than in providing a humanistic approach to nurturing the whole child, enabling them to develop their inner social and emotional health, skills to cope with difficult situations, and ability to work harmoniously with others. The Dalai Lama stated:

Often we pay attention only to providing them [children] with or improving the physical facilities for health, education, employment, and so on. And yet, what I feel equally important is that as parents and guardians of children we should demonstrate the real worth of basic moral values such as love, compassion, and universal responsibility in our own way of life (Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006, p. ix).

Children who possess “basic moral values such as love, compassion, and universal responsibility,” can bring about happiness within themselves and those around them, enabling them to act responsibly to create peace in society. Educators and researchers have studied and

promoted teaching “basic moral values” through a form of peace education to children.

However, there appear to have been limited studies on peace education, within which children are taught to act in a prosocial manner. Accordingly, there appears to be little public knowledge or acceptance of peace education’s effects.

Dr. Montessori indicated that “the child is both a hope and a promise of mankind” (Montessori, 2007, p. 31). “The work of education” plays a key role in supporting and guiding children in preparing them for their lives, while creating a better foundation for a more peaceful society. Peace education has the potential to set children on a trajectory of personal well-being and inner peace which could foster peace in society at large. Despite potential positive impacts, the effectiveness of peace education on children is not currently widely known. Investigating the effectiveness of peace education is important not only for its educational value, but also for its potential value to society. Therefore, this action research study was designed to investigate if peace education has any effects on children’s prosocial behavior.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This action research used the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) definition of peace education and Dr. Maria Montessori’s peace education theory as the grounding theoretical framework. In addition, Dr. Montessori’s theory of normalization serves as the framework of prosocial behavior.

### **Peace Education**

UNESCO (2008) defined peace education as teaching and providing learners with knowledge, skills, and information to actively promote and cultivate a culture of peace. More specifically, peace education teaches the concept that people must respect themselves and others while providing learners with communication, cooperation, and behavioral skills used in conflict

situations. The organization's peace education approach is based on its educational mission of fostering individuals' positive behaviors and attitudes, as stated in the first line of the organization's Constitution, "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 5).

Dr. Montessori's peace education theory emphasized the development of learners' inner peace, in particular their spirit, their value as an individual, and their understanding of "the times in which they live" (Montessori, 1972/2007, p. 30). She believed that "the problem of world peace can never be satisfactorily solved until we start with the child" (Standing, 1957, p. 157), and thus her theory focused on fostering children, as builders of society and shapers of the whole path of civilization, who are able to contribute to establish lasting peace in society.

Together, these theories provide this research with a framework of peace education. The UNESCO theory prioritizes concrete tools for interaction, while Dr. Montessori's theory focuses on the development of inner peace. These are complementary approaches combine to create a more complete and all-encompassing approach to peace education. The ultimate goal of peace education is to nurture children's inner peace and construct a new humanity of responsible individuals who nurture peace within themselves and in those around them, and thus in our whole society. Teaching children the skills of communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution will equip them to work towards peace in a challenging world.

### **Prosocial Behavior and Theory of Normalization**

It is possible to describe an ideal state of inner peace, however, it is often invisible and difficult to measure or quantify. In order to assess inner peace, this action research observed visible prosocial behavior as a manifestation of children's inner peace. Dr. Montessori's theory of normalization was used as a guide for the framework of prosocial behavior.

Dr. Montessori concluded through her observations of children that human nature is inherently good, therefore we each possess the ability to return to, or tap into, this true nature, which she called “normalization.” While “normal” in English is sometimes associated with ideas of conformity to a mainstream ideal, or even as the opposite of abnormal or undesirable behavior, Montessori’s definition speaks instead to an inner state of emotional and psychological stability. In her educational approach, normalization is cultivated and internalized through children’s deep concentration on works in a purposefully prepared learning environment. She described the “normal” child as “one who is precociously intelligent, who has learned to overcome himself and to live in peace, and who prefers a disciplined task to futile idleness” (Montessori, 1966, p. 148). More specifically, normalized children show characteristics including love of the environment, self-regulation, self-discipline, self-expression, helpfulness to others, sympathy for others, care for others, cooperation, and joy (Standing, 1957). This action research defined such normalized children’s characteristics as prosocial behavior.

### **Assessing the Efficacy of Peace Education**

With the theoretical framework discussed above, the action research observed children’s behavior, whether or not children used learned tools and displayed inner peace through prosocial behavior. In particular, the action research observed whether or not children positively interacted with each other, cooperated with their friends and teachers’ requests and needs, resolved conflicts in a peaceful manner, cared for the environment and friends, helped each other when needed, and demonstrated an understanding of/expressed positive feelings about concepts of peace and peace education. The observations were conducted before, during, and after the implementation of the peace education.

This research implemented the activities from *Honoring the Light of the Child* (McFarland, 2004) as the foundation for the peace education curriculum. McFarland is a Montessori teacher invested in peace education. The activities were selected because they align with the theories of peace education informing this action research, including aiming to foster inner peace by intentionally teaching about peace, love, and emotions, and giving tools for conflict resolution and promoting self-regulation. In addition to those activities, other songs, games, and stories were selected by the instructor to reinforce and complement the core teachings.

### **Review of Literature**

Humans have taught and studied many different approaches to living peacefully throughout history, such as religious teachings, community-based peace movements, and peace education programs through national and international organizations such as the United Nations. The modern peace education movement emerged as a concept alongside the growth of large-scale warfare during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after World War II it grew as a movement, and has since been explored and developed worldwide (Harris, 2008). Educators such as Dewey, Montessori, and Freire and scholars such as Betty Reardon, Ian Harris, and Johan Galtung have contributed to developing and shaping this field. Literature has shown the importance of teaching children about peace in early childhood, the benefits of peace education, and the need for aware adults as an integral part of the education.

### **Early Childhood and Peace Education**

Studies have suggested that early childhood is the optimal period for developing peaceful interactions among peers and peace-making skills because this is the period when children develop the cognitive capacity to understand themselves and others while beginning to learn and

acquire social skills and capabilities. Chopra (2017) argued that the healthy social skills at the core of peace building, including emotional regulations, critical thinking, and behavior regulation, are all developed in early childhood. Evans (1996) and Ilfeld (1996) pointed out that peace-making skills are often introduced too late and should be learned in early childhood.

During the last few decades, neuroscience studies have come to a new and deeper understanding of brain development. The findings have influenced and contributed to many areas in society, especially to the early childhood education field, as they have concluded that young children possess the ability to acquire enormous behavioral, social, linguistic, environmental, and cultural information and the quality of early experiences has a significant impact on foundational skill acquisition and the development of brain architecture in a way that later experiences do not (Tierney & Nelson, 2009). These scientific discoveries have also disrupted the historic view that younger children lack the ability to understand complex abstract concepts such as peace or the ability to cognitively grasp the perspective of others to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner (Zoeppritz, 2016). The studies have also reinforced the findings and beliefs of many educators, including Dr. Montessori, who understood young children's abilities and advocated for the importance of early childhood education as a foundation for their future as the future builders of society.

From her scientific observations, Dr. Montessori believed that young children are not only able to learn various life skills, such as peace-making skills, but that they are also naturally inclined toward peace and "the spirit of the child...can determine the course of human progress and lead it perhaps even to a higher form of civilization" (Montessori, 1966, p. 7). Shivji (2019) agreed with this point stating that:

...they [young children] are absent of judgments clouding their desire to connect with others. They reach out to others, work to understand, and then let go of misunderstandings, hurts, and misgivings, and run back out and play...Children possess instinctive qualities of openness and acceptance (p. 8).

From neuroscience to educational philosophy, research into early childhood agreed that early childhood is the optimal time to acquire foundational values and peace-making skills.

### **Benefits of Peace Education**

Research has observed positive effects on children's behavior and learning through peace education. Vestal and Jones' (2004) study showed that preschoolers gained skills to solve interpersonal conflicts. For this study, the researchers educated a group of teachers on peace concepts and a conflict resolution curriculum that they could use in the classroom and compared the children's behavior to children in other classrooms. They found that the children in the subject classrooms demonstrated significant gains in their ability to resolve conflicts. Wheeler & Stomfay-Stitz (2005) reported that a pre-K team in a Maryland school successfully developed a culture of peace with the use of a kindness jar which children could put a slip of paper into when they saw an act of kindness. The process created a culture of peace and kindness in the classroom. At first, the children reported acts that were done to them and eventually they observed kindness between others. The process created a compassionate, kind environment while the children also gained skills critical to bring about peaceful resolutions of difficult situations. Believing that empathy is one of the most essential skills for understanding the value of peace, Sagkal, Turnuklu & Totan (2012) researched the effectiveness of peace education in increasing children's empathy levels. They concluded that the group of children who received peace education showed greater empathy levels than the children in the control group.

Research has observed and suggested various elements for early childhood peace education to be effective. Alfonso (2014) proposed a focus on self-value and self-respect, appreciation of diversity, a sense of fairness and justice, and the awareness of interconnectedness, along with developing and promoting children's creativity and critical thinking skills. She believed that these elements help young children establish a strong understanding of respect for self, others, and the community, and to develop a global perspective. She also emphasized that these four elements should be promoted through creativity and critical thinking skills in the curriculum because they are an integral part of problem-solving skills. Another study from Walker, Myers-Bowman, & Myers-Walls (2007) discussed the importance of assessing young children's understanding of peacemaking strategies, and then helping them develop their strategies through prosocial behaviors and activism. By giving them a vocabulary of peace and rewarding their prosocial behaviors, instructors could help children broaden their viewpoint and inspire them to make a difference in society. McFarland (2008) stressed the importance of inner peace for peace education. She believed that "the more inner peace we have, the more harmony we will manifest in our relationships with other people and the environment" (McFarland, 2008, p. 3).

Although there have been studies about benefits and effectiveness of peace education, research showed that "it [peace education] has probably not developed as significantly during the last decades ... [and] peace education in schools and for the general public lags behind" (Galtung, 2008, p. 49-50). Zoeppritz (2016) also raised a concern about public disinterest in using education to develop moral, social, emotional, and humanistic aspects in children over strictly academic objectives and also a reticence to accept the idea of young children's capabilities for understanding complex abstract concepts such as peace.

**Role of Adults**

As for integrating peace education in the classroom, research also emphasized the importance of early childhood educators as bridges to peace, especially by serving as a good role model, building strong relationships with children, and continuing to grow as an educator. Crowfold (2005) and Vestal and Jones (2004) both raised the importance of the role of adults as behavioral models in the classroom, pointing out that young children understand peace concepts more effectively when the concepts are “caught” rather than “taught.” Alfonso (2014) stressed that early childhood educators should constantly seek and practice topics such as diversity and justice to lay the foundation for peace. Educators’ messages, thoughts, ideas, and perspectives will be sent to their children through their teaching and materials and thus they need to constantly evaluate their morals and values and carefully examine their teaching and materials (Goldstein, 2004). Research also discussed the importance of the adults’ capacity for building trusting and caring relationships as the essential foundation of effective peace education. Morris, Taylor, & Wilson (2000) concluded that early childhood educators must develop trusting relationships with the children such that young children will follow their teachings and believe that they are important. To remind educators of the importance of preparation in working with children, Montessori shared her belief:

The real preparation for education is a study of one’s self. The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character, it is a preparation of the spirit (Montessori, 1949/2011, p. 394).

These core elements are integral to the success of an educator implementing any curriculum, but are particularly important for peace education curriculum, because modeling peace and creating an environment of care and trust reflects the very ethos of peace education.

## **Conclusion**

Research has revealed that early childhood experiences significantly impact young children's social skills and capabilities, that peace education positively impacts children, and that the role of adults in peace education is integral to its effectiveness. Social valuation of peace education is low despite such critical findings. Further research on early childhood peace education will benefit the field and possibly raise public awareness and acceptance if it continues to document effectiveness. Perhaps then, as Dr. Montessori stated, "lasting peace" will prevail.

## **Methodology**

This action research utilized both quantitative and qualitative experimental design and investigated the effects of peace education, particularly children's prosocial behavior in an early childhood classroom. Multiple forms of data were collected to leverage triangulation (see Appendices A-F for the data forms). Qualitative data included interviews, observational logs, field notes, and a journal. Quantitative data was in the form of a tally sheet and surveys. These data collection methods observed the children's attitude, understanding, and skills toward prosocial behavior to determine the effects of peace education.

The population of this action research was a mixed-age class of 19 children consisting of 8 three-years old (two of these children turned three-years old during the intervention period), 7 four-years old, and 4 five-years old. The children were enrolled in a private Montessori school in a suburban neighborhood of a southwestern state in the U.S. There are two instructors in the class: the primary instructor conducting this research and an assistant teacher. 10 children had been with this primary instructor since they were 3 years old.

Peace education was provided to the children for six weeks, beginning in September, a month after the start of school. The instructor introduced one or two peace activities per week

from Sonnie McFarland's *Honoring the Light of the Child* during morning group (see Appendix G for implemented activities). The activities focused on recognizing inner peace and love in concrete ways by teaching methods of peaceful conflict resolution, identifying feelings, regulating emotions and behaviors, and positively contributing to the community. The twice daily group times also focused on songs, books, and games that dealt with peace, love, and kindness while encouraging pro-social behavior. The activity materials were available on the peace shelf throughout the six-week intervention period and a week after the intervention to continue collecting the data.

Data collection began one week before the implementation of the six-week peace education and continued one week after the completion. During this baseline data collection week, the instructor interviewed and surveyed the children. For the interviews, the instructor sat with one child at a time at a table for approximately five minutes to ask six questions during morning work time, six to seven children per morning for three days. She recorded the exact words that the children expressed, while avoiding any leading questions. The surveys included eight questions regarding each child's prosocial knowledge and skills. The instructor assessed each child on a strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree scale. She spent one to two minutes per survey, a total of approximately 30 minutes. The data provided information about the children's knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes toward prosocial behavior. The interviews included questions to gather information about children's understanding of peace/love, their own feelings, their choice of behavior with difficult situations, and their choice of contributions to their classroom as a part of the community. The survey included questions to gather information about children's cooperation skills and ability to manage their emotions, as measured with scales of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

During the study period, including a week before and after the six-week intervention, the tally, log, field notes, and the instructor's journal were collected daily, for five days a week, excluding Labor Day. The tally recorded the number of prosocial and non-prosocial behavior that occurred during the morning transition period and recess (11:45-12:30). The transition period from group time to lunch time was approximately 20 minutes each day (10:45-11:05). This transition consists of multiple phases, including lining up to go to the bathroom, going to the hallway to take off their smock, changing their indoor shoes to outside shoes, bringing their lunch box, and putting food on a plate to get ready for lunch. Recess was an unstructured, outdoor 45-minute play period, during which the children joined with another class of 18 children.

The log was a 20-minute narrative record conducted by the instructor in the morning, from 9:30-9:50. Each day the instructor sat on a chair in the same location, undisturbed. The field notes and journal were compiled daily by the instructor after school during a 10-15-minute period, while she was by herself. The field notes included weather, school events, social events, irregular schedule/activities (including substitute assistant teachers), and information about the health of the teacher and the children that may have affected their behavior. The journal included the instructor's self-assessment, children's comments, and overall thoughts of the day.

A week after completion of the intervention, the survey and interview were conducted again in the same manner as the pre-assessment. This data was compared with the baseline data to measure the effects of peace education.

To determine whether the peace education was effective on children's prosocial behavior, the data from each instrument was compiled, and examined to check for corroboration across instruments. The survey and the tally were analyzed quantitatively. For each survey question, the

number of each measured scale response was compared pre- and post-intervention. For the tallied data, the number of prosocial and non-prosocial incidents during transition and recess were summed daily and weekly. The weekly statistics were compared to observe fluctuations throughout the study period. The qualitative data, including the interview, the log, and the field notes, were compiled. Recorded words and phrases were examined and coded by contents and then categorized by themes, concepts, and patterns. The categorized data was interpreted to generate conclusions. All the data was then triangulated to determine conclusions of the key variables including children's attitude, understanding, and skills toward prosocial behavior. The triangulated data then led to conclusions regarding the effects of peace education on children's prosocial behavior.

### **Analysis of Data**

The purpose of this study was to investigate if peace education affects children's prosocial behavior. The research implemented peace education for six weeks in an early childhood (3-6 years old) classroom. This study collected six sources of data. An interview was conducted with each child to gather information about their understanding of and feelings about prosocial behavior. A survey was utilized to measure the children's attitudes towards prosocial behavior. Daily observations included a 20-minute log to observe the children's behavior during morning work, a tally to observe the children's behavior during transition and recess, field notes and a journal to record overall events and reflections.

A total of 19, 3-6-year-old children enrolled in a Montessori school in the U.S. participated in the study. There were 10 boys and 9 girls - 8 three-years old, 7 four-years old, and 4 five-years old, as shown in Table 1.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Boy</b>	<b>Girl</b>	<b>Total</b>
3	6	2	8
4	3	4	7
5	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	10	9	19

Table 1. Demographics. This table shows the number, age, and gender of participants in the study.

The research question was designed to investigate the effects of peace education on children's prosocial behavior. To answer this question, the researcher reviewed the surveys, interviews, observational logs, tally, field notes, and journal. The study examined whether there were any changes in the number of prosocial and non-prosocial behavior incidents during transition and recess, the children's understanding of prosocial behavior, and their attitudes towards and skills for enacting prosocial behavior.

### **Prosocial and Non-prosocial Behavior Incidents**

The researcher tallied instances of prosocial and non-prosocial interactions between the children during transition and recess. The prosocial and non-prosocial behavior events were summarized weekly during the 8-week period.

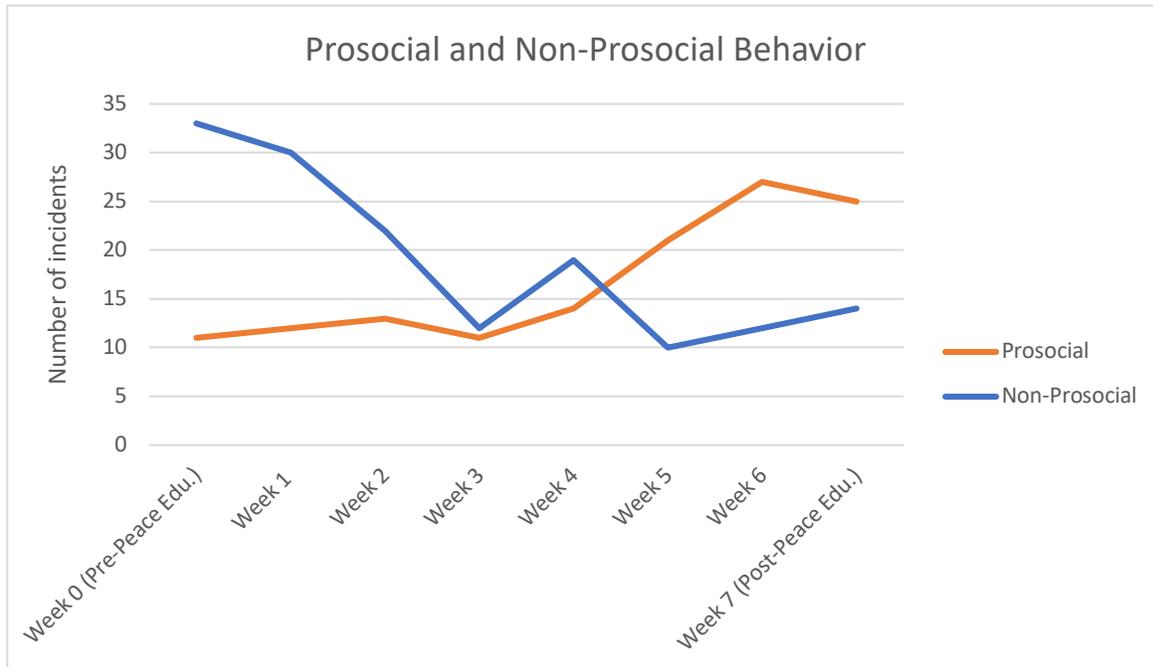


Figure 1. Prosocial and Non-prosocial Behavior. This figure illustrates the number of non-prosocial and pro-social behavior that occurred during the study period.

As shown in Figure 1, the non-prosocial behavior incidents decreased as the number of prosocial behavior incidents increased. The number of non-prosocial behavior incidents dropped steadily between weeks 1 and 3, increased again in week 4, and dropped again toward week 5. The instructor also observed in the journal a similar pattern of behavior--the number of non-prosocial incidents increased during week 3 and week 4. She commented that respiratory sickness and stomach flu may have been affecting the children's behavior. While non-prosocial behavior existed throughout the study period, the number of prosocial behavior incidents exceeded the number of non-prosocial behavior incidents near the middle of the peace education intervention.

The daily log and journal observed a similar pattern of increasing pro-social behavior during the study period. Pro-social behavior episodes, including using kind words, helping friends, and cleaning the classroom, were recorded more often than non-prosocial behavior

starting in week 4. The intervention activities beginning in week 4 were particularly focused on prosocial behavior within a community setting. Notes recorded in the journal showed that one of the peace activities introduced during week 4 included placing a paper heart on a tree for a kind act. The instructor noted that, at first, children reported their kind acts to her as they placed hearts on the tree and then they started placing hearts on the tree when observing others' kind acts, as well as their own. Initially the children appeared to perform kind acts because they wanted to place hearts on the tree, then towards the end of the intervention the instructor observed some children performing kind acts without concern for placing the hearts. Though they dropped slightly in week 7, the data (Figure 1) also showed a steady increase in the number of prosocial behavior incidents.

### **Children's Self-Knowledge and Understanding of Prosocial Behavior**

The interviews showed children's knowledge of the meaning of love/peace, feelings, and cooperation skills. The interview results included the children's responses to each question, before and after the peace education intervention. While many children answered, "I don't know" for many questions before the intervention, more children demonstrated their knowledge of the meaning of love/peace, feelings, and cooperation skills after the intervention. Figure 2 shows the children's answer to the question, "What is love to you?" Before the intervention, 42% of children answered "I don't know" while everybody had a specific answer for this question after the intervention.

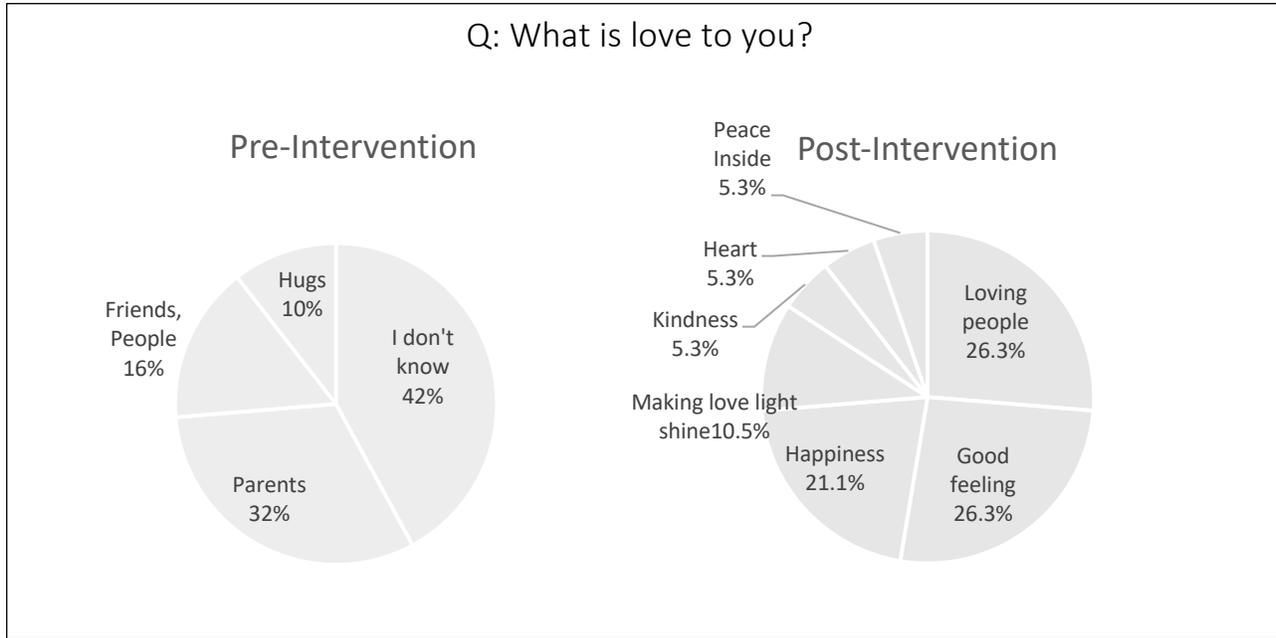


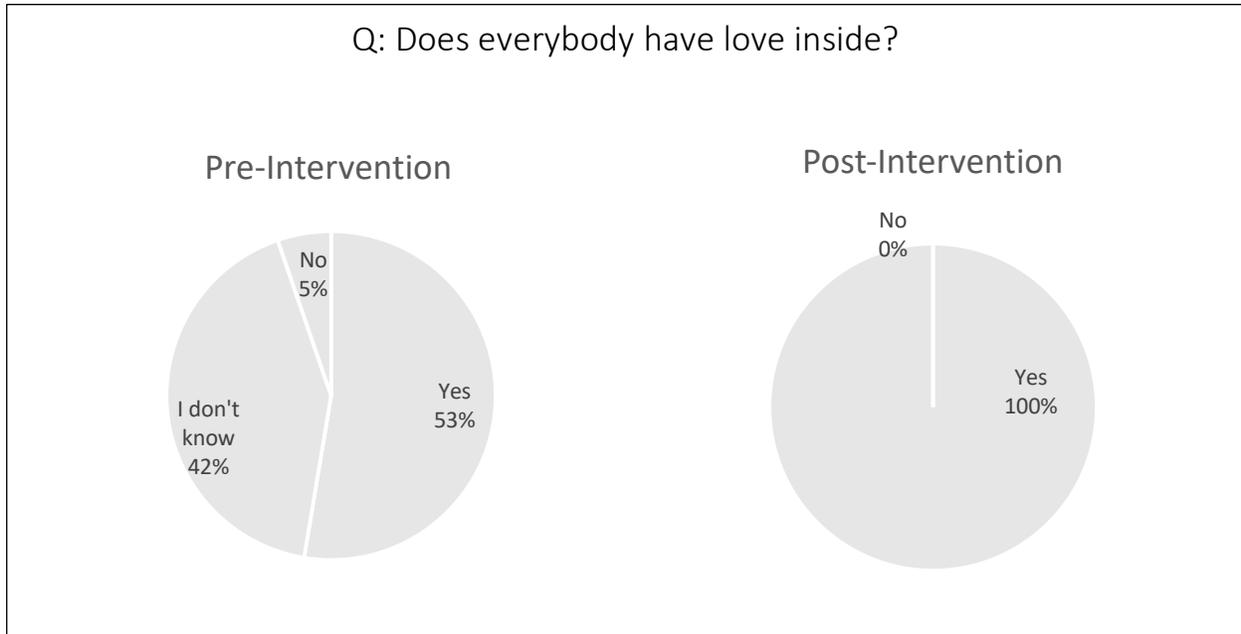
Figure 2. What is love to you? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what is love to you? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

Notes in the journal showed that throughout the intervention many children chose to wear a “love light,” a yellow felt circle that they wore on their chest. The love light was introduced to the class as a concrete symbol of love within an individual during the first week as a peace activity from *Honoring the Light of the Child* (McFarland, 2004). The instructor wore this love light throughout the intervention after she introduced it. As encouraged in the book, the instructor remarked to children, “You make my love light shine!” when she saw a child’s prosocial behavior. The instructor also noted that children often gave hugs to each other and said, “I love you” or “You make me feel good,” or “You make my love light shine” when they were putting their love lights on.

During the first and second week, the instructor also noted in the journal that she read books focusing on love. Some of the books during these weeks included *My Shining Light* (Misra, 2008), *Bear in Love* (Pinkwater, 2012), and *Mama, Do you love me?* (Boosse, 1991).

Children’s comments about the books, as recorded in the journal included “My love light shine because of my friends,” “We love each other,” and “I love my parents.”

As shown in Figure 3, children’s awareness and understanding of love within others, in response to the question, “Does everybody have love inside?” grew from 47% of children replying, “I don’t know” and “No” to 100% “Yes” responses after the intervention.



*Figure 3.* Does everybody have love inside? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, does everybody have love inside? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

The interview results also showed that more children were aware of their feelings. A series of interview questions asked children to describe what makes them feel happy, sad, mad, and scared. Figure 4 displays the children’s answers to the question, “What makes you happy?” The pre-intervention polling showed that 39% of the children answered “I don’t know” while after the intervention all of the children had an idea of something concrete that makes them happy, which indicates a better understanding of this abstract concept of the

feeling. Results about the other feelings followed the same pattern (see Appendix H for the results of questions for the other feelings).

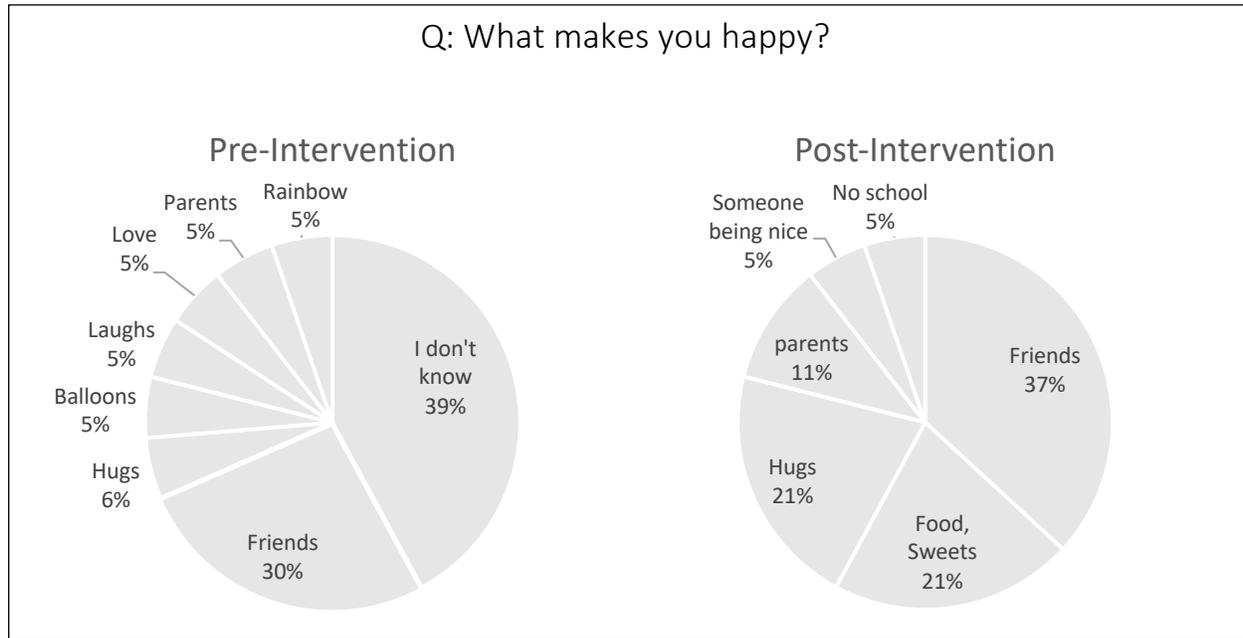


Figure 4. What makes you happy? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what makes you happy? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

Notes from the journal showed that the instructor introduced the activity of feelings in the sixth week. During the week, she noted in the log some signs of children’s understanding of feelings. These signs included children using the activity material explaining feelings to themselves. Children who could not read were observed “reading” aloud to themselves the book *Little Engine that Could* (Piper, 1992), which was also introduced during the week. This book is a suggested activity for the feeling activity in *Honoring the Light of the Child* (McFarland, 2004) to encourage children to see a connection between one’s mindset and one’s feelings.

Interview data also showed children’s increase in their knowledge of how to deal with their feelings. Figure 5 displays the children’s answers to the question, “What do you do when

you feel sad?” 63% of the children didn’t have an awareness of how they dealt with sadness before the intervention. After the intervention, everybody offered a response as to how they deal with feelings of sadness. The same pattern was evident for how the children dealt with feeling mad and scared (see Appendix I for results).

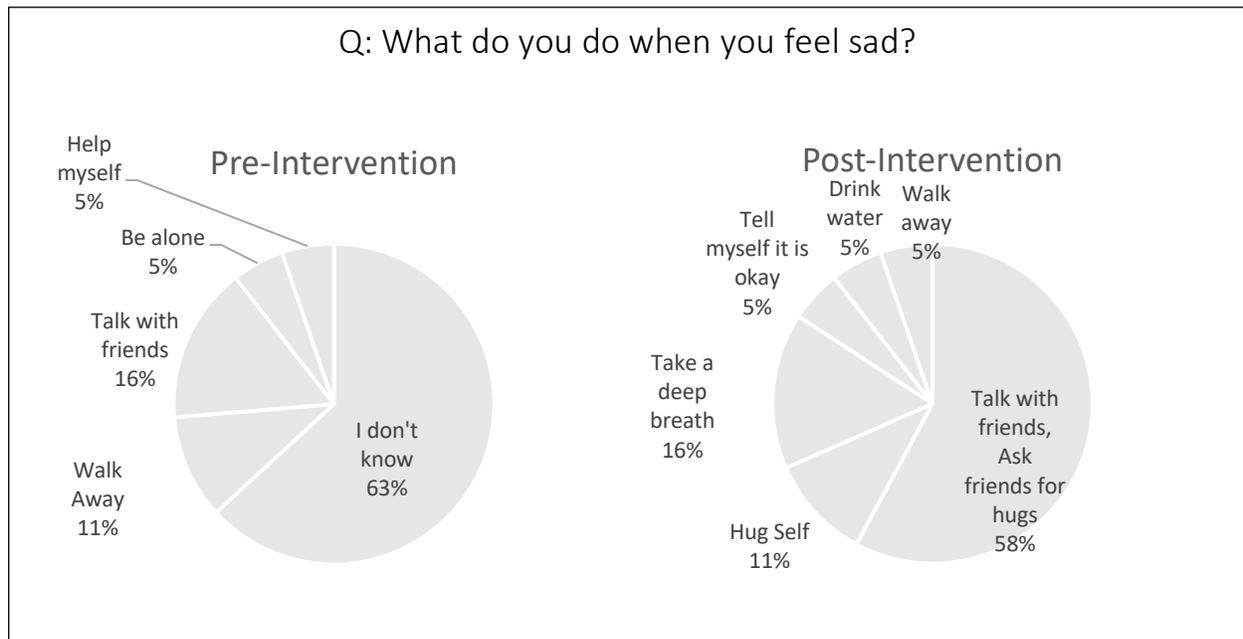
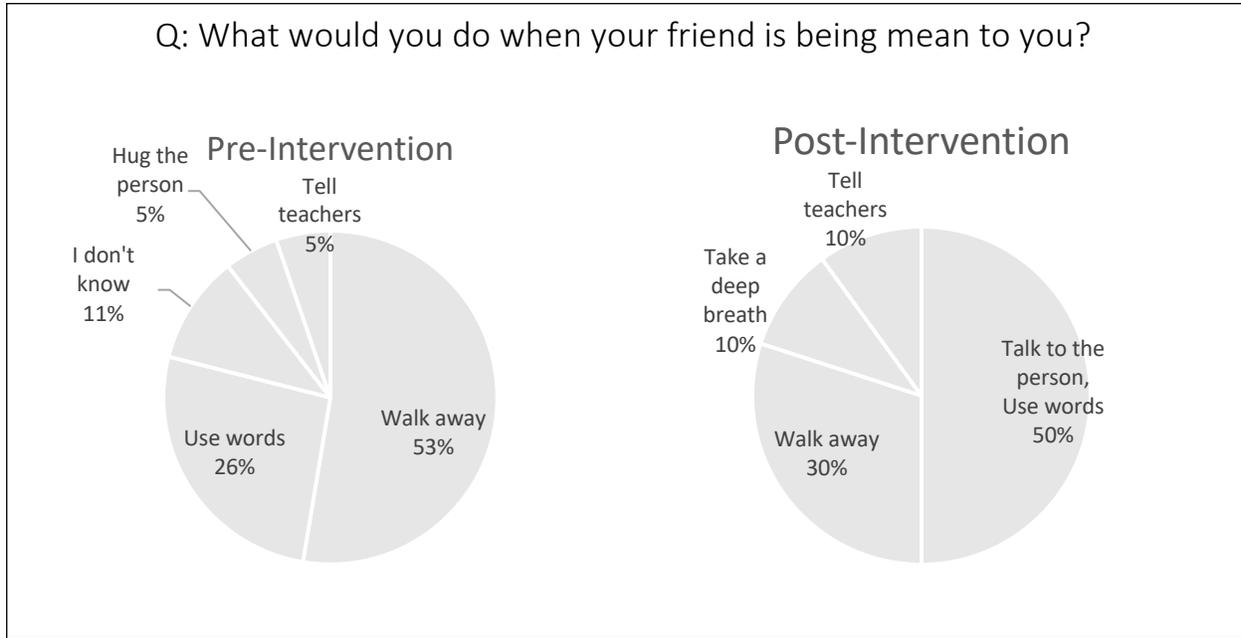


Figure 5. What do you do when you feel sad? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what do you do when you feel sad? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

Interview data also showed children’s increase in their knowledge of how to deal with their conflicts in a more positive, pro-social manner. Figure 6, “What would you do if your friend is being mean to you?” also recorded a significant change pre-and post-intervention. Pre-intervention, more than 50% of the children wanted to walk away from difficult situations while only 16% of the children wanted to talk about the situation with a friend. After the intervention, these numbers changed to 50% of the children indicating that they would talk with a friend about the situation.



*Figure 6.* What would you do when your friend is being mean to you? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what would you do when your friend is being mean to you? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

Another pattern that these results showed was that more children felt empowered to intervene to change the dynamics of a situation. For example, for the question “What would you do if your friend is crying on the playground?” in Figure 7, pre-intervention results showed that 47% of the children wanted to offer help to comfort the child while 89% of the children wanted to do that after the intervention. Similar results were observed in Figure 8, “What is one thing that you can do to make our classroom better?” where, post intervention, most of the children provided concrete examples of prosocial behavior. The interview results also indicated an increase in references to friends for their answers after the peace education intervention.

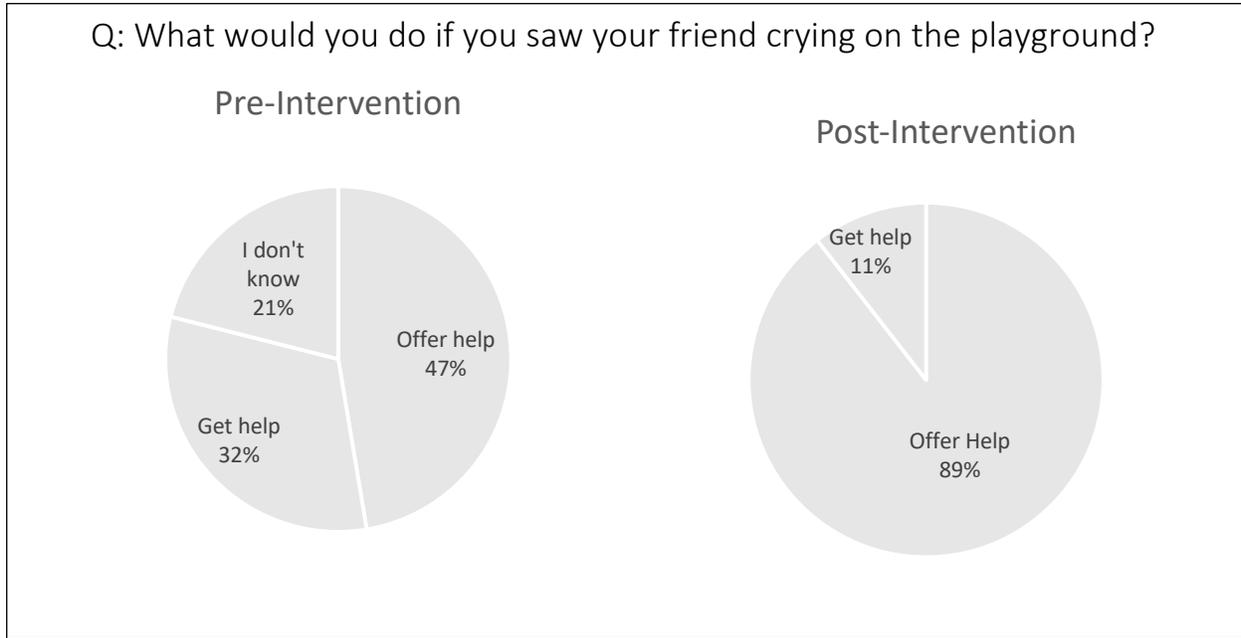


Figure 7. What would you do if you saw your friend crying on the playground? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what would you do if you saw your friend crying on the playground? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

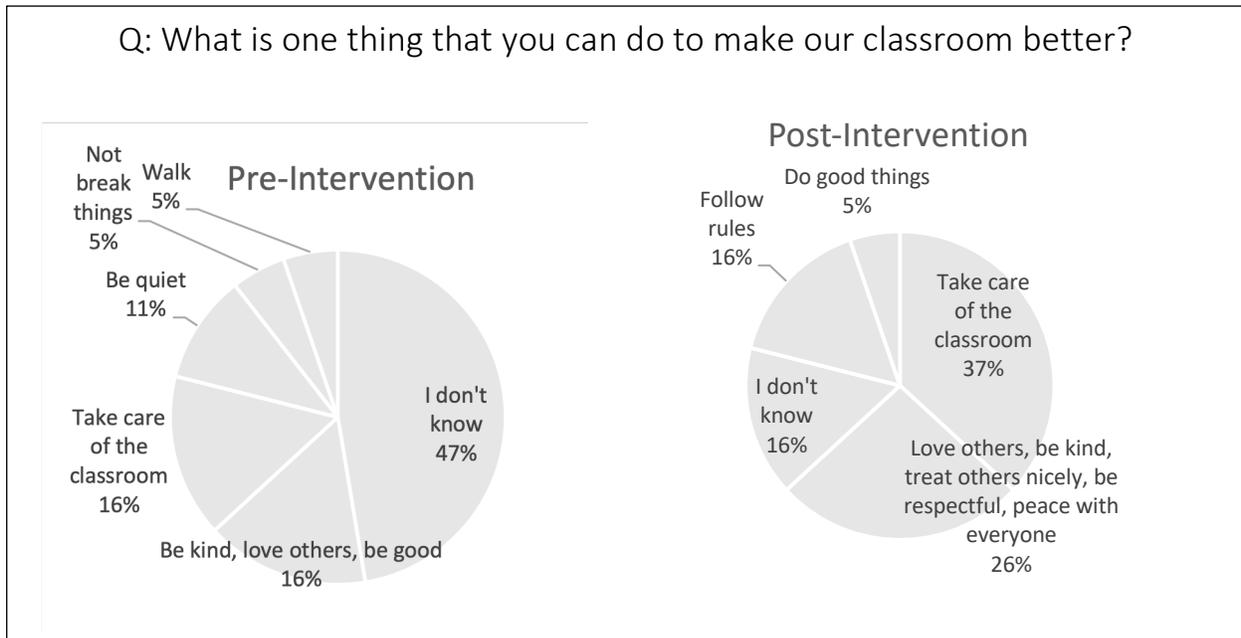
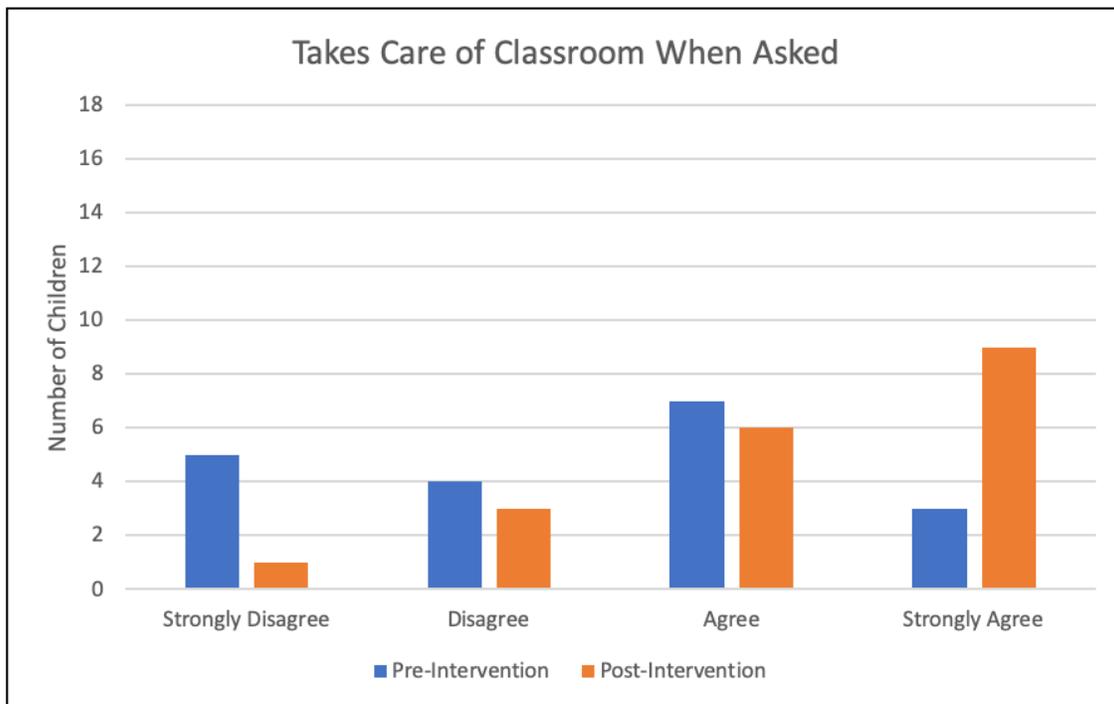


Figure 8. What is one thing that you can do to make our classroom better? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what is one thing that you can do to make our classroom better? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

**Children’s Attitudes and Prosocial Behavior Skills**

The research measured the children’s prosocial behavior by their level of cooperation, understanding of various feelings, ability to regulate their emotions, and knowledge of and ability to resolve conflicts. Figure 9 and Figure 10 show the number of children who “take care of classroom” and who “take care of classroom without being asked.” This question was used to measure children’s level of prosocial behavior, indicating their ability to cooperate with teachers and their showing care for the community. The latter was considered a higher level of prosocial skills, demonstrating that the skills had been internalized. Both figures displayed more children exhibited prosocial behavior after the intervention. These results were also supported by comments in the instructor’s journal. Notes recorded in the journal showed that children participated in classroom chores and cleaning saying, “We all help clean” and “I can water plants.”



*Figure 9.* Takes Care of Classroom When Asked. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who take care of the classroom when asked, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

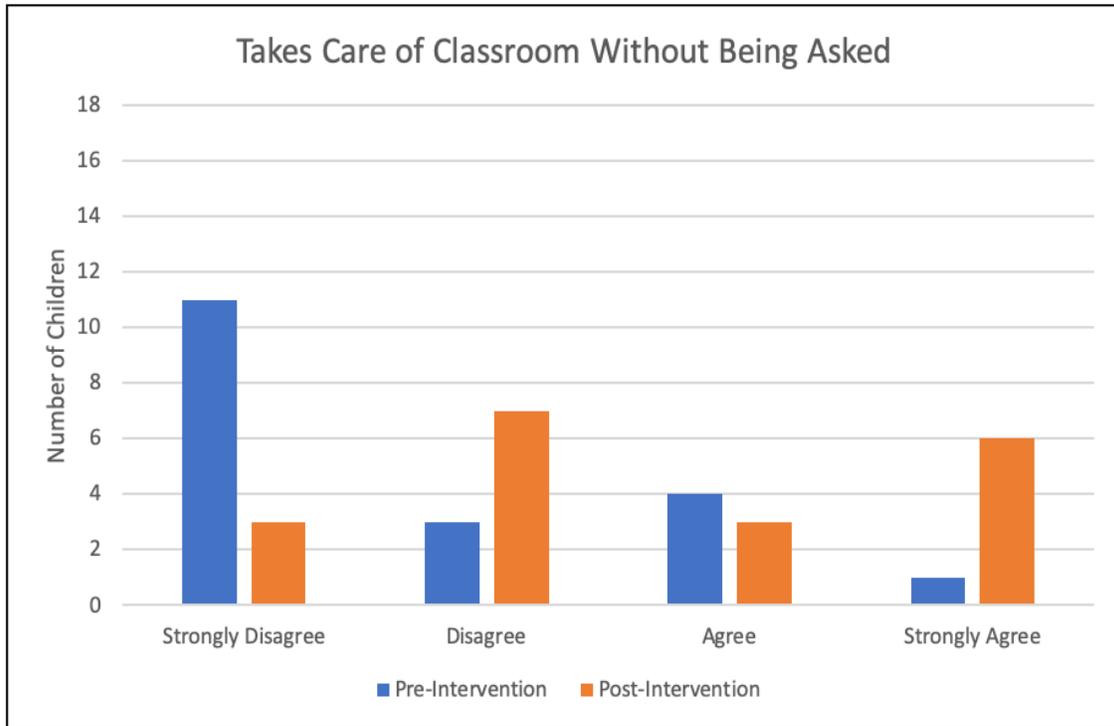
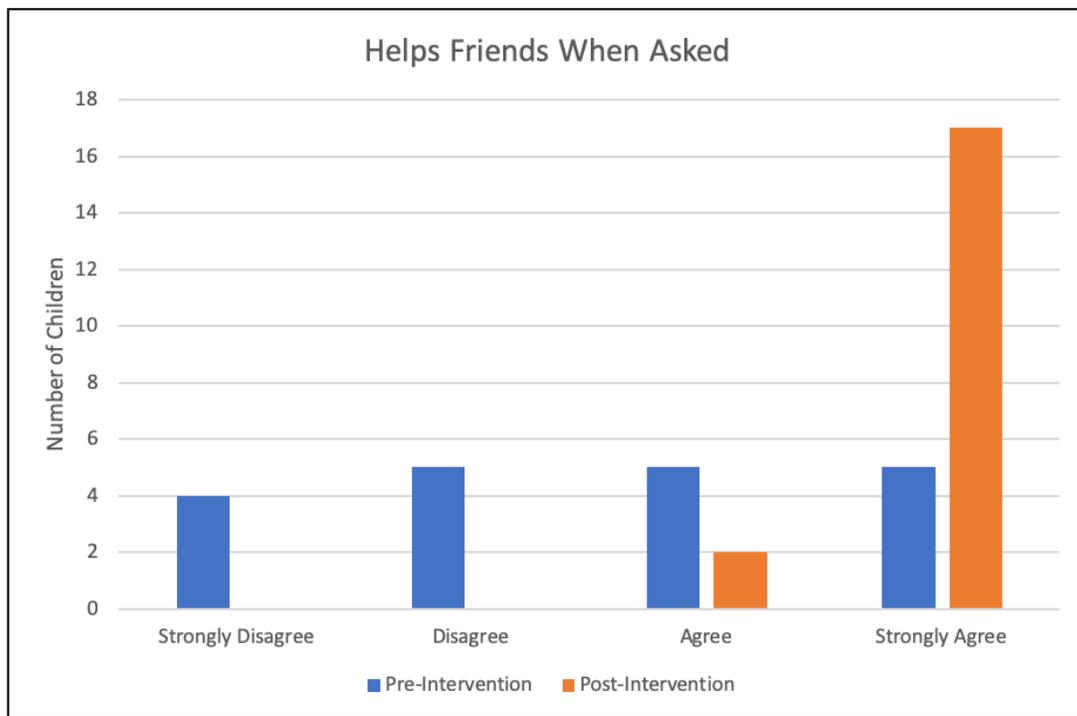


Figure 10. Takes Care of Classroom Without Being Asked. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who take care of the classroom without being asked, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

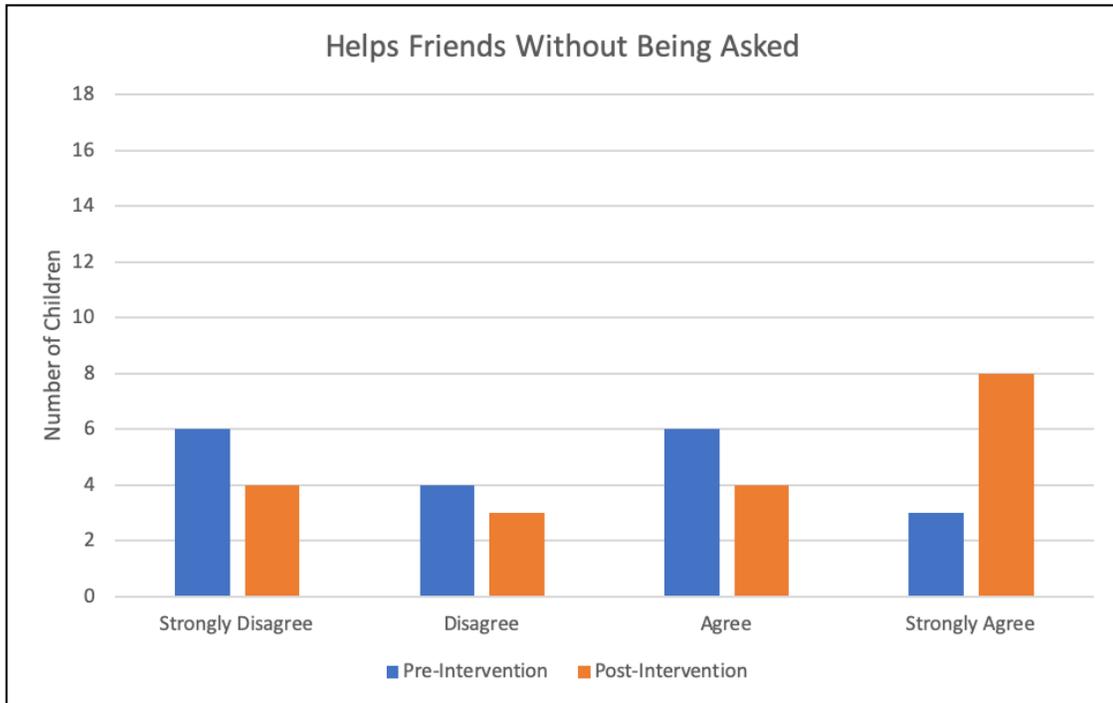
Figure 11 and 12 show the number of children who “help friends when asked” and the number of children who “help friends without being asked,” before and after the intervention. This question was used to measure children’s level of prosocial behavior, indicating their ability to cooperate with friends and teachers and their showing care for others. Both figures displayed more children were willing to help friends after the intervention. In the daily log, the instructor noted her observation of children helping others without being asked. For example, a child dropped a box filled with small wooden alphabet letters. Four children came to help saying, “Can I help you?” When a child was struggling with his buttons, another child came to him saying, “I can help you.”

Figure 10 displayed a large difference in “strongly agree” after the intervention. This indicated that the instructors strongly agreed that 17 children would now help friends when they

were asked. As shown earlier, the instructor observed that with the peace education activity of placing hearts on a tree for kind acts, children noticed their own prosocial behavior as well as others’ prosocial behavior. The instructor also mentioned in the journal that she discussed with children how to be good friends, especially during week 5 and 6. She used children’s literature such as *Good People Everywhere* (Gillen, 2012) and *May I Bring a Friend?* (Schenk de Regniers, 1971) to discuss this topic. Children’s comments, as recorded in the journal, showed signs of their awareness and ways to be good friends including “We help each other” and “When my friend is sad, I will give her a hug.” Such kind words and acts were noted more often starting about week 4 which was aligned with the number of prosocial incidents shown in Figure 10.



*Figure 11.* Helps Friends When Asked. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who help friends when asked, pre-intervention and post-intervention.



*Figure 12.* Helps Friends Without Being Asked. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who help friends without being asked, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

Figure 13 shows the number of children who know how to express their feelings and Figure 14 shows the number of children who can regulate their emotions, before and after the intervention. Both figures illustrated more children displayed abilities to express and deal with their feelings after the intervention. Figure 12 especially displayed a large difference in “strongly agree,” indicating that the instructor strongly agreed that 17 children had now developed the abilities to express their feelings. These results supported the interview results shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5, displaying an increase in children’s knowledge of their own feelings and ways to regulate their feelings. Children’s comments about showing their feelings such as “That makes me sad” recorded in the daily log also supported these results.

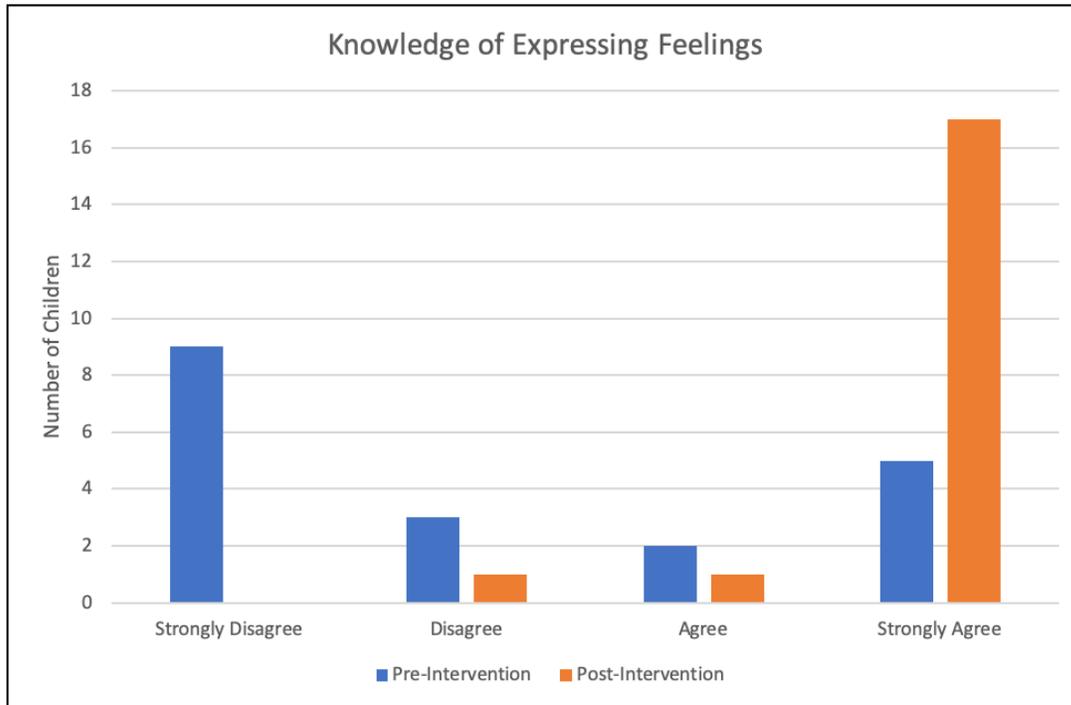


Figure 13. Knowledge of Expressing Feelings. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who know how to express their feelings, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

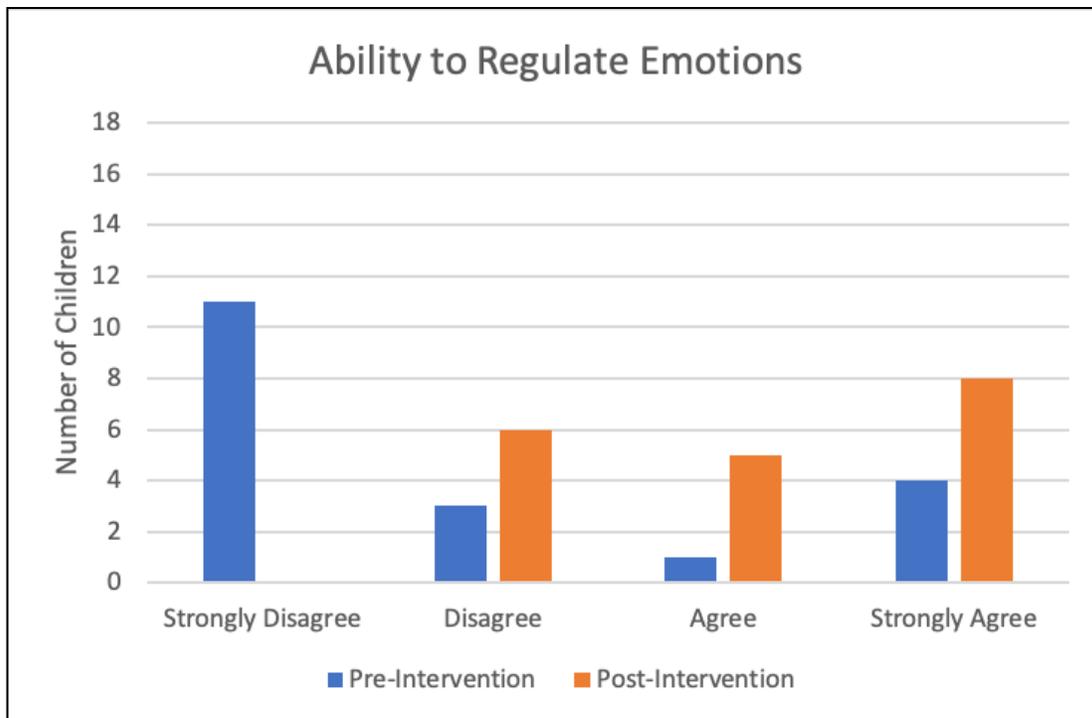


Figure 14. Ability to Regulate Emotions. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who can regulate their emotions, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

Figure 15 displayed the number of children who know how to resolve conflicts and Figure 16 displayed the number of children who can actually resolve conflicts by themselves, pre-intervention and post-intervention. Both figures illustrate that more children displayed knowledge about conflict resolution and their ability to resolve conflicts after the intervention. This is similar to Figure 6, which shows the children's knowledge of conflict resolution. The instructor noted in the journal that she discussed how to positively resolve conflicts by demonstrating conflict resolution as a peace education activity and practicing with the children. The activity involved a "peace rose," which is utilized as a talking stick, during conversations to resolve conflicts between children. She introduced the peace rose with a book called *The Peace Rose* (Jewell, 2006).

Figure 16 shows no changes with "strongly agree" while displaying a large increase in "agree." The instructor commented in the journal that many children demonstrated conflict resolution skills. She observed that children often used words to solve conflicts with or without the peace rose. However, she also noted that many children reported to their conflicts to her and she had to encourage them to work things out with the peace rose. Some notes also show that the younger children wanted to use the peace rose, but they asked her to be a mediator or she had to help them. One incident included when a child wanted to resolve a conflict with his friend, but the friend didn't want to discuss the conflict and ran away from him. The child chased after his friend with the peace rose, saying "I need to talk to you." The instructor asked both of them to stop and talk with each other. In the journal, she commented that she seldom saw children consistently independently resolving their conflicts.

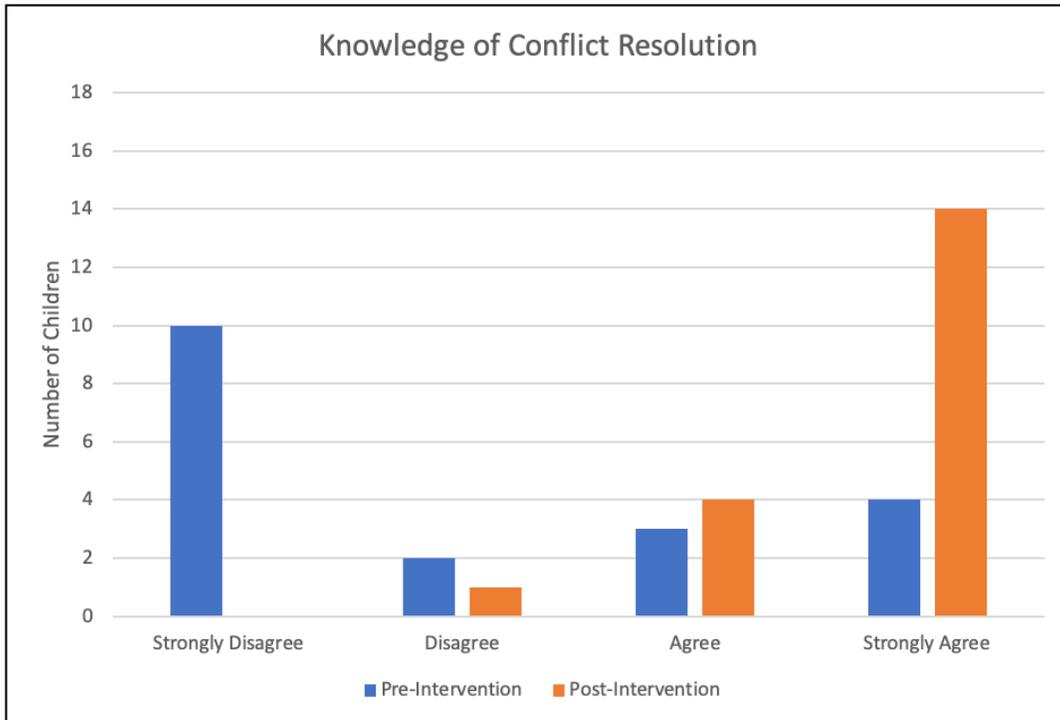


Figure 15. Knowledge of Conflict Resolution. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who know how to resolve conflicts, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

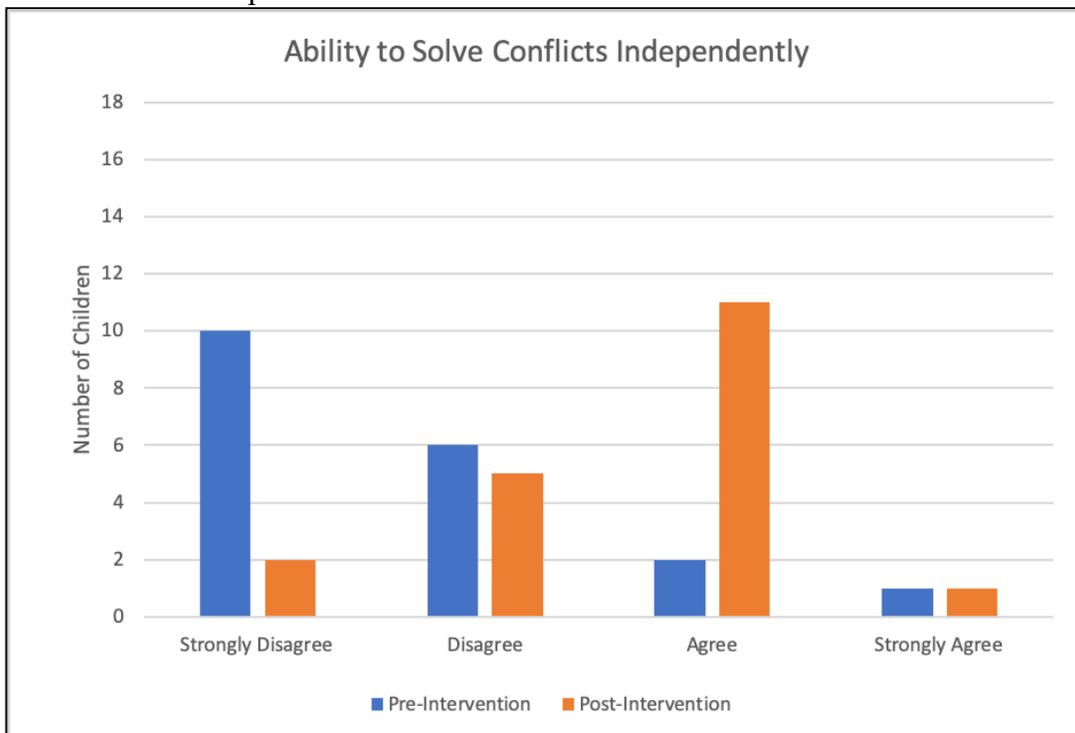


Figure 16. Ability to Solve Conflicts Independently. This figure illustrates the survey result of the number of children who can independently resolve conflicts, pre-intervention and post-intervention.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether peace education affected children's prosocial behavior. To investigate the research question, the study implemented a six-week peace education intervention in an early childhood classroom of 19 children. The research examined whether there were any changes in the number of prosocial and non-prosocial behavior incidents during transition and recess, the children's knowledge and understanding of prosocial behavior, and in their attitudes and skills for enacting prosocial behavior.

The study found that during and after the peace education intervention, the number of non-prosocial behavior incidents decreased as the number of prosocial behavior incidents increased. The results also displayed that more children had knowledge in dealing with their feelings and conflicts after the intervention. In addition, more children exhibited prosocial behavior, including cooperating with friends and teachers and expressing their feelings and using interpersonal skills to resolve conflicts as a result of the intervention.

Based on the findings, the study concluded that peace education affected children's prosocial behavior. More specifically the intervention increased the number of prosocial behavior incidents and raised children's awareness, knowledge, and skills for prosocial behavior. Children also displayed an enhanced positive attitude toward themselves and others, and more cooperative, socially positive behavior in the community.

Literature review discussed the importance of peace education during early childhood when children are developing various cognitive capacity and social skills. As Tierney & Nelson (2009) concluded from their research, young children have the ability to process complex information, behaviors, and abstract concepts like peace. In addition, through appropriate approaches, peace education benefits children's behavior. The literature also discussed how

aware adults can help children develop positive social skills during the skill acquisition period. This research, which integrated an appropriate peace education approach by an aware adult in a classroom, supported previous literature's findings in concluding that peace education had positive effects on children's prosocial behavior.

For recommendations, the instructor should consider studying the effects of peace education a longer period of time, involving other teachers' to implement it in their classrooms to see if there are similar effects, modifying activities and approaches to reach more children with special needs and behavioral problems, and educating parents in peace education at home.

In addition, in this study, the peace education intervention had positive results. However, the study sample was small, implemented in one location, and used a limited approach over a short time period. To better study the effectiveness of peace education and approaches, future researchers should consider investigating the effects with a larger population, over a longer period of time (three to five years or longer), with a comparison of targeted and non-targeted groups, in different locations, with different age groups, with different approaches for various needs, and/or with a comparison of the effectiveness between early childhood groups and older children.

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Appendix A

Interview Form Sample

Name:

Age:

Time:

1. What is love to you?
2. Does everyone have love inside?
3. What makes you happy?
4. What makes you sad? What do you do when you feel sad?
5. What makes you mad? What do you do when you feel mad?
6. What are you afraid of/what would make you scared? What do you do when you feel scared?
7. What would you do when your friend is being mean to you? (e.g. take your work away, hit you)
8. What would you do if you saw your friend crying on the playground because she/he is hurt?
9. What is one thing that you can do to make our classroom better?

## Appendix B

## Survey Form Sample

**Date:**

**Name:**

**Time:**

1. The child takes care of the classroom.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
2. The child helps others in need when asked.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
3. The child helps others in need without being asked.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
4. The child knows how to express his/her feelings in words.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
5. The child can regulate his/her emotions.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
6. The child knows a way to solve conflicts.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
7. The child can solve conflicts when they occur.  
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

Appendix C

Observation Tally Form Sample

Date		Date	
Transition Time		Transition Time	
Prosocial Behavior		Prosocial Behavior	
Non-Prosocial Behavior		Non-Prosocial Behavior	
Recess		Recess	
Prosocial Behavior		Prosocial Behavior	
Non-Prosocial Behavior		Non-Prosocial Behavior	
Date		Date	
Transition Time		Transition Time	
Prosocial Behavior		Prosocial Behavior	
Non-Prosocial Behavior		Non-Prosocial Behavior	
Recess		Recess	
Prosocial Behavior		Prosocial Behavior	
Non-Prosocial Behavior		Non-Prosocial Behavior	
Date		Comments:	
Transition Time			
Prosocial Behavior			
Non-Prosocial Behavior			
Recess			
Prosocial Behavior			
Non-Prosocial Behavior			

Appendix D

Observational Log Form Sample

Date:

Time:

Observation:

Appendix E

Field Notes Form Sample

Date:

Weather:

Number of children:

Absence and reason:

Teachers:

Special events/schedule:

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Comments:

Appendix F

Journal Form Sample

Date:

Reflections:

## Appendix G

Implemented Activities Referred in *Honoring the Light of the Child* (McFarland, 2004).

**Week 1: See My Love and Everyone Has a Love Light**

See My Love aims to help children to see there is love and peace inside themselves. The materials include a human-shaped piece of paper with a cut-out and a flashlight. Everyone Has a Love Light gives children a concrete symbol of their inner light of love and peace. The materials are yellow felt circles that each child can wear.

**Week 2: Awareness of the Love Light Through Silence**

This activity aims to help children recognize the feeling of love and peace within themselves and provide them with an opportunity to learn how to calm themselves through the practice of silence. The materials are a candle and a lotus-flower shaped candle holder.

**Week 3: Black Elk's Medicine Wheel Vision of Peace**

This activity aims to help children make better choice for their acts. The materials involve a "medicine wheel" that represents directions of one's own behavior choices, peaceful or more difficult/challenging choices, a small tree, small silk flowers and birds. Children put flowers and birds on the tree in the center of the medicine wheel.

**Week 4: Good Kind Deeds Tree**

This activity aims to encourage children to act in kind and thoughtful ways and to recognize kind and thoughtful acts. The materials are a paper tree and cut-out paper hearts.

**Week 5: Mind and Emotions**

Mind aims to give children concrete symbols of positive mind and negative mind. The materials include a face showing two different minds, a positive happy face and a negative sad face when it is turned and *The Little Engine that Could* (Piper, 1992). Emotions aims to help children

recognize and identify four basic emotions: happy, sad, mad, and afraid. The materials are four different cards showing the basic emotions and a mirror.

**Week 6: Resolving Conflict Peacefully**

This activity aims to give a process to resolve conflicts in a prosocial manner. The materials are a silk flower rose and *The Peace Rose* (Jewell, 2006).

Appendix H

Interview Data Results Associated with Feelings: Sad, Mad, and Scared

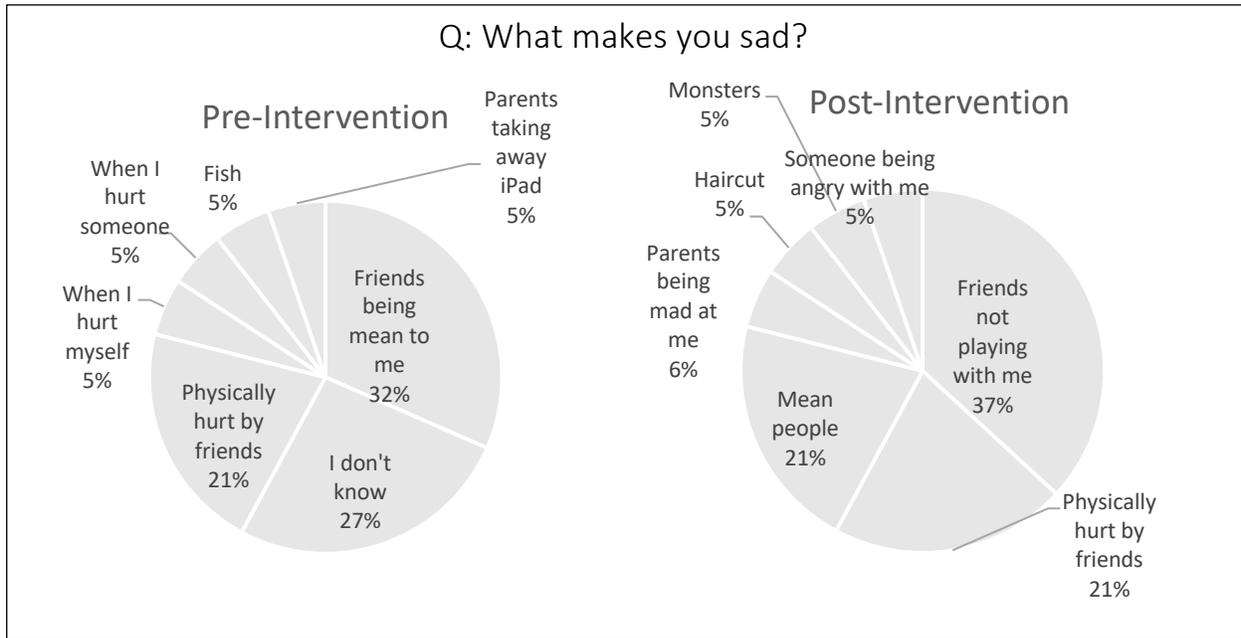


Figure A. What makes you sad? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what makes you sad? The answers before the intervention shows on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention shows on the right pie chart.

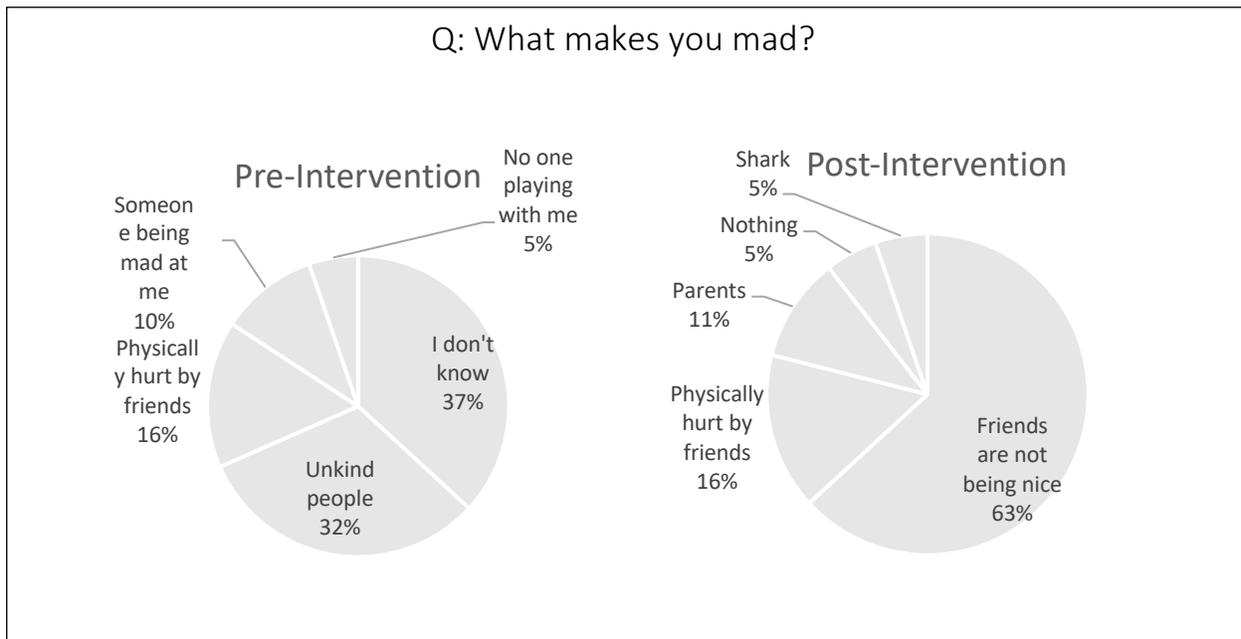


Figure B. What makes you mad? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what makes you mad? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

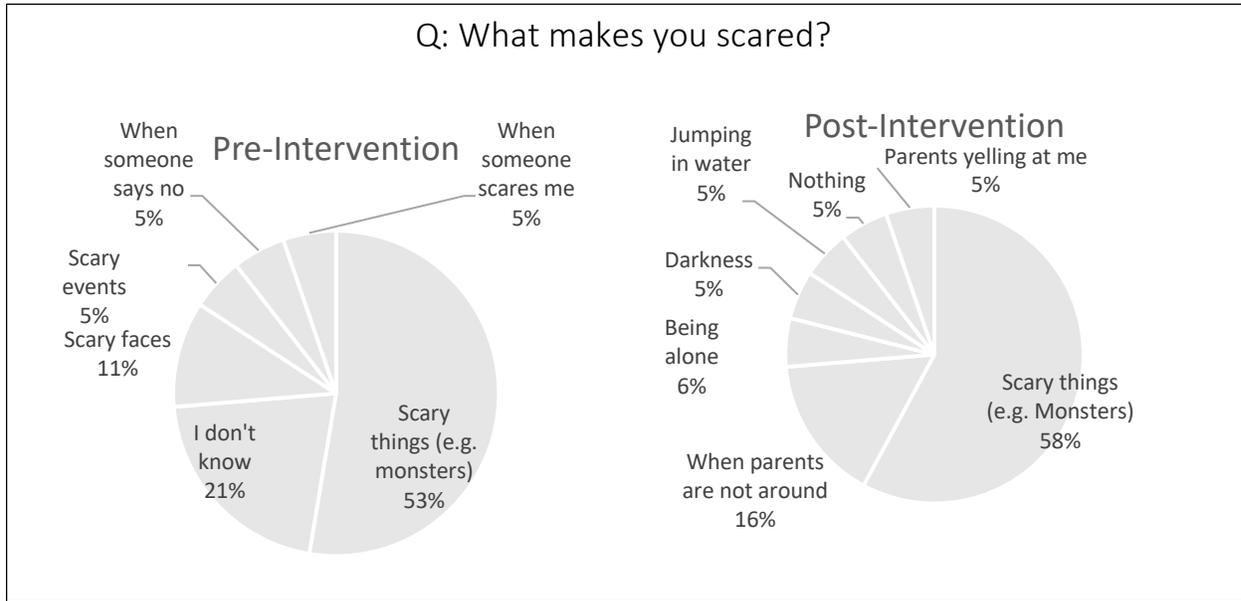


Figure C. What makes you scared? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what makes you scared? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

Appendix I

Interview Data Results Associated with Emotional Regulation Skills: Mad and Scared

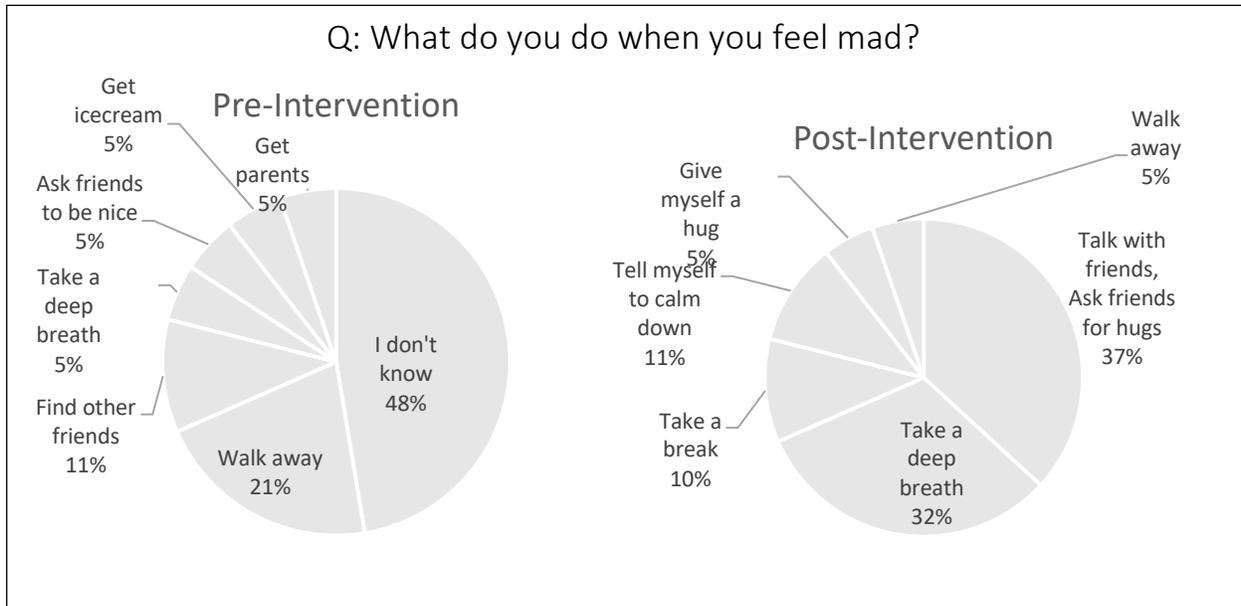


Figure D. What do you do when you feel mad? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what do you do when you feel mad? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.

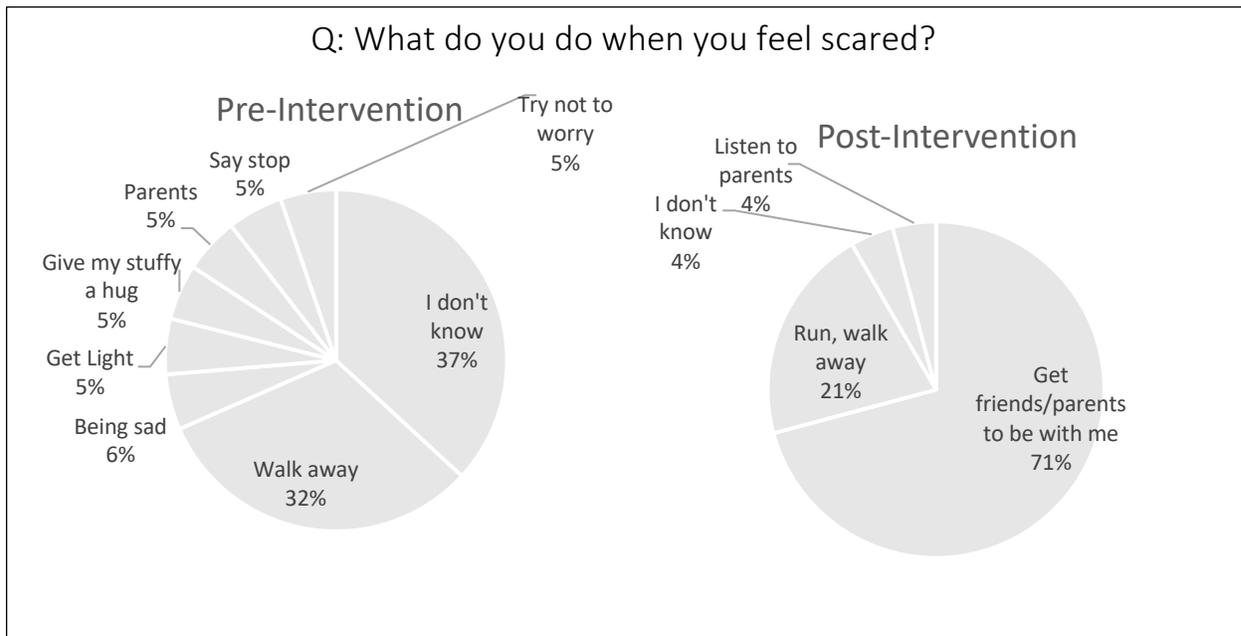


Figure E. What would you do when you feel scared? This figure illustrates children’s answers to the interview question, what do you do when you feel scared? The answers before the intervention are shown on the left pie chart and the answers after the intervention are shown on the right pie chart.