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Examination of the messages preschool teachers use against undesirable behaviors of children

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The purpose of this study was to examine, through in-class observations, the messages preschool teachers use against children's undesirable behaviors, in order to warn the children and remove negative behaviors. The study group consisted of six preschool teachers. The messages used by preschool teachers against undesirable behaviors of children were observed with the "unstructured and nonparticipant observation" technique. Notes were taken, and voice recorder was used for recording data. In the analysis of the data obtained in the study, content analysis from qualitative research methods was used. According to the findings of the study, it was determined that in the face of the undesirable behaviors of children preschool teachers most commonly use solution messages from you-messages and least commonly use I-messages.

Key words: Preschool teacher, undesirable behaviors, messages used by teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Undesirable student behaviors such as not complying with classroom rules or teacher's instructions, not placing taken materials to their original places, complaining about other children, telling lies, deceiving, interrupting others, talking or making noise in a distractive way, showing physical aggression, preventing other children to participate in class activities and harming the tools and materials in classroom are commonly seen in preschool classes and observed by teachers in all preschool classes (Tertemiz, 2009; Ataman, 2003; Lewis and Doorlag, 1991). All kinds of behavior that hinders educational efforts in school are accepted as undesirable behaviors (Basar, 2008). Undesirable behaviors are inappropriate for the situation and environment and seek to hinder educational activities (Pala, 2005; Erden, 2001). These behaviors cause distraction and disturbance in the classroom and reduce the time spent for academic learning (Ozturk, 2008). Regardless of the grade they teach to, all teachers can face undesirable student behaviors. These undesirable behaviors distract both the teacher and the students and disturb the continuity of the learning process (Alkan, 2007; Atici, 2002; Aydin, 2004; Basar, 2008; Cemaloglu and Kayabasi, 2007; Neyisci-Karakas, 2005; Ozturk, 2008; Pala, 2005; Sadik, 2006;

Sahin, 2005; Senturk and Oral, 2008). Due to this reason teachers have to be knowledgeable on preventing and intervening to undesirable student behaviors (Ryan et al., 2003).

The primary task of teachers is to create a change in student behaviors, widely-accepted behavior, in line with the targets. However, while performing this primary task teachers also have to deal with nonacademic tasks such as determining those who do not participate in class works, arranging students' in-class activities and learning materials, developing the working conditions in the class and removing the factors that inhibit education. Arrangement of such tasks within the classroom is known as class management (Brown et al., 1982). Effective class management encourages students to manifest widely-accepted behaviors as well as preventing undesirable behaviors and their spread. In classes where a positive learning environment is established, widely-accepted student behaviors are supported by teachers (Wood, 1991).

Teachers may face many nonacademic problems in the classroom. In order to deal with these problems teachers have to possess *good communication skills and the skill for creating a positive class environment* (Gordon, 2003).

In daily life, for expressing negative and angry feelings towards others, expressions that emphasize on you-messages such as "After all, this is how *you* always behave, *you* are very inconsiderate" are commonly used. For setting the undesirable behaviors of students right, teachers often use expressions that emphasize on the you-messages such as "Why don't *you* pay attention? *You* disrupt the order of the class". Since you-messages usually imply a negatively judgmental expression that directly blames the individual to whom the message is sent, they lead the receivers of the message to adopt a defensive manner and shake their self confidence. Yet, while criticizing their students with you-messages teachers aim to remove the undesirable behaviors they observe in children. Eventually, although having a small positive effect on preventing the undesirable behavior, you-messages have much more negative effects in terms of damaging children's self-respect and harming their relation with their teachers (Cagdas, 2006; Gordon, 2000; Gordon, 2003).

On the other hand, when *I*-messages are used instead of *you*-messages, it is the teachers' feelings that are expressed, rather than messages that negatively judge the children. In this way, since the student does not face a negative judgment directed solely to its own personality, the relation between the teacher and the student does not deteriorate (Lay and Dopyera, 1987; Gordon, 2003).

In order to be effective, I-messages have to include three elements:

(i) A clear description of the problematic behavior has to be made,
(ii) The effects of the problematic behavior on the teacher have to be mentioned, and
(iii) Feelings related with the behavior have to be expressed.

For instance, instead of saying "Do not talk with your friend while I tell you a story" it is possible to say "If you talk among yourselves while I'm telling you a story, I get distracted and disturbed". Afterwards, the teacher can also investigate why the students talk among each other. The teacher's clear and non-judgmental manner makes it easier for the children to express themselves clearly and directly (Navaro, 1995, 1987).

Effective communication skills have an important place in terms of teachers' professional and personal characteristics. In the most general sense, learning process is a communication process. In this process meaningfulness of the message exchange is closely related with the competencies of teachers. The quality of in-class communication is an important factor that affects students' personality development and success (Gordon, 2003). In times when student behaviors become deranging and unacceptable, it is necessary to send strong messages and emphasize that the rights of others

are violated. Such messages have to be relayed in a way that will not hurt students' feelings and cause them to feel pushed back into defense (Gordon, 2003, 2000; Tepeli and Ari, 2004).

According to the conducted studies, the most common method of response teachers used before undesirable behaviors of children is verbal warning (Martin et al., 1999; Sadik, 2004; Saglam et al., 2008; Sadik and Kaf Hasirci, 2008; Akgun et al., 2011; Uysal et al., 2010). In order to ensure that the undesirable behavior is removed, the messages sent to children have to be effective, yet not scold them. Determination of the quality of the messages teachers use against undesirable behaviors is important in terms of supporting teachers in this respect. In this context, the purpose of this study is to examine, through in-class observation, the messages preschool teachers use against undesirable behaviors for warning children and changing the undesirable behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Model of the study

This study, which aims to examine the messages preschool teachers use against undesirable behaviors of children for warning children and changing undesirable behaviors, was conducted on the bases of "qualitative research model".

Participants

Six preschool teachers working in preschool education institutions in Konya city center participated in this study. While the teachers represented as T1, T2 and T3 were newly appointed inexperienced teachers, T4, T5 and T6 were experienced teachers working for more than 15 years. All of the teachers who participated in the research were women, worked part-time as a teacher, and graduated from a four-year university education in the field of pre-school education.

T1 was 22 years of age and one-year teacher. Her class consisted of 12 girls, 14 boys totally 26 children, ranging in ages 59 to 65 months. She worked between the hours of 8:00 and 12:30 am.

T2 was 24 years of age and the first year in teaching. Her class consisted of 14 girls, 10 boys totally 24 children, ranging in ages 60 to 67 months. She worked between the hours of 8:00 and 12:30 am.

T3 was 25 years of age and two-year teacher. Her class consisted of 12 girls, 15 boys totally 27 children, ranging in ages 61 to 66 months. She worked between the hours of 12:30 and 17:00 pm.

T4 was 38 years of age and fifteen-year teacher. Her class consisted of 13 girls, 12 boys totally 25 children, ranging in ages 60 to 64 months. She worked between the hours of 12:30 and 17:00 pm.

T5 was 40 years of age and eighteen-year teacher. Her class consisted of 15 girls, 10 boys totally 25 children, ranging in ages 62 to 66 months. She worked between the hours of 12:30 and 17:00 pm.

T6 was 43 years of age and twenty-year teacher. Her class consisted of 9 girls, 14 boys totally 23 children, ranging in ages 61 to 67 months. She worked between the hours of 8:00 and 12:30 am.

In determining teachers participating to the research, variables such as volunteering participating in research, teachers' working hours, teachers' university degree in the field of pre-school education,

professional experience-inexperienced and working at schools having middle socio-economic level of children have been decisive.

Procedure

Qualities of the messages preschool teachers use against the undesirable behaviors of children are observed through the "unstructured and nonparticipant observation technique". Unstructured observation is a type of observation that provides, without having any defined structure prior to the observation, freedom to the observer in gathering and recording information. Gathering and recording information can be made through taking notes or keeping a diary. The observer has to assume the tasks of synthesizing, abstracting and organizing the information. In non-participant observation approach, the observer carries out the observation without having any external effect on the process observed (Yildirim and Simsek, 2006; Buyukozturk et al., 2008). According to this each teacher was observed for a total of 60 hours as three hours every working day (either from 09:00 to 12:00 or from 13:00 to 16:00 o'clock, since the teachers work half day shifts) for a period of four weeks. Since observations were done by a single observer, observation studies were carried out in three different time periods. In the first four-week period of time, T1 was observed in the morning and T4 was observed in the afternoon. In the second four-week period of time, T2 was observed in the morning and T3 was observed in the afternoon. In the third four-week period of time, T6 was observed in the morning and T5 was observed in the afternoon. These observations were made during leisure times and structured and routine activities. In line with the purpose of the study, the observing researcher recorded the messages teachers used against undesirable behaviors for warning children and changing negative behaviors, through voice recorder as descriptive notes.

Data analysis

In the analysis of the data obtained in the research content analysis from qualitative research methods was used. Accordingly the data collected from observing the participating preschool teachers were saved in a computerized environment separately for each observation. 45 pages of observation text written in this program were read sentence by sentence and the relative encodings were made. Categories were determined on the basis of these encodings. During the determination of the categories, the classification Gordon (1993) presented in his book "Teacher Effectiveness Training" for the messages teachers send trying to correct the undesirable behavior of children was used. According to this classification, while the solution, put-down and indirect messages, which can be characterized as ineffective or negative messages, were gathered under the group of you-messages, while the effective or positive messages were gathered under I-messages.

The messages used by teachers were subjected to content analysis in terms of solution messages, put-down messages, indirect messages and I-messages. Messages used by the teachers were assigned to the categories independently by the researchers and then their consistencies were evaluated. After the determination of the categories, indexes were prepared for these categories and in order to conduct numerical analysis frequency tables based on a simple control list that shows which teachers exhibit which behavior on which frequency was prepared (Buyukozturk et al., 2008).

RESULTS

Findings of the study were obtained on the basis of the observations made on the messages the teachers used against the undesirable behavior of the children.

Within the scope of the study the messages used by preschool teachers in order to warn the children and change undesirable behaviors were separated into two groups as you-messages and I-messages.

You-message categories and example messages

The categories of you-messages, which are used by teachers in class and characterized as inadequate in removing undesirable behaviors, and the example messages sent by the participating teachers to the children in class were presented below.

Solution messages

Solution messages exactly show the children how they can change their behaviors, what they should do and what they can do, or do better. These messages are only intended to change children's behaviors. Solution messages do not transmit the teacher's thoughts about children. However, many negative and false ideas occur in children who receive solution messages concerning with their teachers (Gordon, 2003, 2000).
Solution messages were gathered under five groups:

1. Ordering, commanding, directing,
T5 to the child who did not put the toy it played back to its original place: *"Put the toy you took to its place now."*
T2 to the child who sat to the table for lunch without washing his hands: *"Get up! Wash your hands now."*

2. Warning, threatening,
T4 to three children who did not want to complete their work: *"If you do not complete your work, you cannot watch cartoons today."*
T6 to the child who did not wait for his turn in game*: "If you don't get back to your line, I will exclude you from the game."*

3. Moralizing, preaching, giving "shoulds" and "oughts"
T2 to the child who hit and hurt his friend:*"Hitting your friend is not a good behavior."*
T5 to the child who tells lies to his friends: *"Children at your age should not lie."*

4. Teaching, making reason,
T2 to the child who drew on the story book with pastel pencil: *"Books are for reading, not for scratching on them."*
T4 to the children who want star symbols to be attached on their collars after seeing that the model student was rewarded with a star symbol: *"In order to earn the star you have to work better and follow the rules."*

5. Advising, offering solution,
T3 to the child who disrupted his friends' activity and upset his friend: *"If I were you, I would apologize from your friend."*
T1 to the child who does not want to share his toy cars with his friend: *"We should share our toys with our friends. If you don't share, nobody will want to become friends with you. You'll be lonely."*

Put-down messages

The most negative damaging messages are put-down messages. These messages underestimate the child, interrogate his personality, and undermine the self-image of child. The messages carry sarcasm, evaluation, judgment and criticism. These messages lead to the problem of creating the request. They do not give information to the child about the teacher and his/her problems as confronted with solution messages. Put-down messages are disregarded by children, or reinforce their feelings of inadequacy. The basic message is intended for the child's personality-self-esteem, not for undesirable behavior (Gordon, 2003; Navaro, 1995).
Put-down messages are gathered under six groups:

1. Judging, criticizing, blaming, not sharing the same opinion:
T4 to the child who deliberately hit his friend during a game that includes running in the class: *"You don't listen at all, you are a very naughty boy."*
T2 to the child who carelessly cut out the circle on paper*: "How poorly did you cut this. After all, you always take the easy way."*

2. Calling names, ridiculing:
T5 to the children who could not properly imitate soldiers during a game: "*I cannot hear your footsteps, what kind of soldiers are you?"*
T6 to the child who does not want to stay in school and moans to go home: *"You act like a baby, it's so beneath you."*

3. Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing:
T1 to the child who distracts the class with various moves while the teacher is telling story to the children in the class: *"You do these in order to distract your friends and prevent them from listening to the story"*
T4 to the child who wants to go to the toilet when a story is being told in the classroom: "*You're pretending that you need to go to the toilet because you don't want to listen to the story, don't you?"*

4. Praising, agreeing, giving positive evaluation:
T4 to the child who reluctantly tries to paint: *"See, you can paint nicely when you put effort in it".*
T3 to two children who fought with each other and dis-

turbed the order of the class: *"Both of you are respectful and thoughtful boys. I am sure that you can find a way to agree without fighting."*

5. Giving confidence, supporting, sharing feelings:
T2 to the child who wants to keep playing with play cards although it's time for lunch: *"I know that you like this game very much but we need to eat lunch soon.*
T6 to the child who wants to play with the same doll everyday and does not want to share it with her friend: *"You like this doll very much, but the toys in the classroom belongs to all of us."*

6. Questioning, probing:
T1 to the child who stands and occasionally walks while eating*: "Why don't you eat while sitting?"*
T6 to the child who upset his friend by knocking down the tower he made: *"Why did you knock down the tower your made? Do you think you make a good thing by disrupting your friend's game?"*

Indirect messages

These included mocking, taunting, teasing and abashing. Teachers occasionally use indirect messages because they think indirect messages are less erosive and hurtful according to put down and solution messages. They expect children can perceive the essence of these messages despite the fact that these messages are very well hidden. However, these messages are rarely useful because they are usually not comprehensible. Even they are comprehensible, children think teachers behave slyly and indirectly not clearly and directly (Gordon, 2003).
   T3 to the child who gives orders to and directs his friends as he wants*: "Since when are you the teacher of this class?"*
T5 to the child who insists on playing the game he wants although there is something else studied in the classroom*: "You are a complete stubborn goat, you only lack the horns."*

I-message category and example messages;

Examples of the messages relayed by the participating teachers to the children and that are included in the category of I-messages, which are more effective in negating undesirable behaviors, were presented below:

T1 to the children who put the toys to other places than their original places after playing with them: *"When you put the toys to other places after you play I need to rearrange them at the end of the day. And that tires and frustrates me a lot."*
T3 to the child who constantly interrupts the teachers' important conversation with another child: *"I am talking*

something important with your friend. I forget what to say if you constantly ask for something. I will be really happy if you allow me to speak without interrupting."

Distribution of the you-messages (solution messages, put-down messages and indirect messages) and I-messages used by the teachers is presented in Table 1.

Examining Table 1, which presents the distribution of the messages relayed by the teachers against the undesirable behaviors of children, shows that the most relayed messages by the teachers are "ordering, directing" messages (299). This is followed by "advising, offering solution" messages and "questioning, probing" messages. Also, examining the table generally shows that the six teachers mostly use solution messages, followed by put-down messages. Frequency of use of indirect messages among you-messages follows the use of I-messages. In terms of the teachers' individual frequencies of using the messages, while solution messages were most used by T5, the teacher who used them the least was T3. Put-down messages were most used by T6, least used by T2 and indirect messages were most used by T5 and least used by T2 and T6. I-messages, on the other hand, were most used by T3 and least used by T4.

While 37% of the solution messages were used by inexperienced teachers, 63% were used by the teachers who were experienced for more than 15 years. 41% of the used put-down messages were relayed by inexperienced teachers, while 59% of them were used by the experienced teachers. As for the indirect messages, which were least used by the participating teachers, while 22% of them were relayed by inexperienced teachers, 78% were relayed by teachers who had more than 15 years of experience. Concerning the total you-messages, 62% of the total 1160 you-messages relayed by the teachers were used by experienced teachers, while it was determined that 38% of these messages were relayed by the new teachers. Also, 58% of the total of 99 I-message used during the observations were relayed by the new teachers, while 42% of them were relayed by teachers who had more than 15 years of experience. The teacher who used the most I-messages during the 60 hours of observation was T3.

DISCUSSION

In this section the results presented in the findings section were discussed in the light of the related literature and the suggestions developed in consideration of these results are presented.

According to the findings of this study, which aims to examine, through in-class observation, the messages preschool teachers use against undesirable behaviors of children for warning the children and changing such behaviors, the you-messages used by the teachers are much more than the I-messages. The teachers who participated in the study mostly used solution messages that include message categories such as "ordering, directing", "warning, threatening", "moralizing, preaching", "teaching, making reason" and "advising, offering solution", followed by the put-down messages including message categories such as "judging, criticizing", "calling names, ridiculing", "interpreting, analyzing", "praising, agreeing", "giving confidence, supporting" and "questioning probing". However, expressing negative feelings, criticizing and emphasizing on displeasure through you-messages raises negative feelings and results in the receiver. The child feels pushed away, unloved and rejected, and its self confidence gets shaken. Particularly using words and names such as idiot or naughty are highly damaging for the self-esteem of children (Navaro, 1987; Gordon, 2003). After a while, the child may believe that these are true. Other than the damages to personality, expressions of discontent and criticism given through you-messages cause the child to resist, get angry and therefore to disobey (Navaro, 1995). This finding of the study is an indication that preschool teachers are inadequate on the ways of relaying I-messages and insufficiently informed on the facts that the solution, *put-down* and indirect messages they use can cause such extends of negative effects on children, and that I-messages do not ham the teacher-student communication and are the most effective in correcting undesirable behaviors.

In a similar study, Dobbs et al. (2004) recorded 153 preschool students and their teachers in classroom with a video camera and encoded their behaviors. According to the findings of the study, the teachers frequently used order sentences against undesirable behaviors. The teachers tried to control the children through order sentences, even in times when the children did not exhibit any undesirable behavior, and focused more on the children who did exhibit undesirable behaviors. Similarly, the teachers that participated in this study mostly used the "ordering, directing" solution messages among you-messages.

Likewise, in the research conducted by Uysal et al. (2010) it was determined that preschool teachers mostly use "verbal warnings", "nonverbal warnings" and "Type 1 punishment (scolding, threatening, etc.)" against undesirable behaviors. In the studies that examined the methods used by teachers to deal with problematic behaviors in preschool classes, conducted by Sadik and Kaf Hasirci (2008), Martin et al. (1999), Sadik (2003), and Saglam et al. (2008), it was determined that the teachers use "verbal warning" at the first place. During the studies teachers were observed and it was determined that the teachers tend to give orders such as "*sit down, be quiet, focus on your work, do not complain*" loudly when faced with undesirable behaviors of children. Akgun et al. (2011) determined in their study that the total negative expressions used by preschool teachers during in-class

Table 1. Messages used by the teachers according to their professional experiences.

Messages		Teachers and their professional experience								Final total
		0-2 years of experience				15 years and more experience				
		T1	T2	T3	Total	T4	T5	T6	Total	
Solution messages	Ordering, directing	45	33	25	103	55	76	65	196	299
	Warning, threatening	27	27	13	67	8	16	25	49	116
	Moralizing, preaching	7	10	8	25	24	21	15	60	85
	Teaching, making reason	9	5	8	22	6	15	11	32	54
	Advising, offering solution	15	16	18	49	40	46	28	114	163
	Total	103	91	72	266	133	174	144	451	717
Put-down messages	Judging, criticizing	8	3	3	14	19	21	24	64	78
	Calling names, ridiculing	-	3	7	10	5	3	8	16	26
	Interpreting, analyzing	19	19	14	52	19	-	25	44	96
	Praising, agreeing	1	11	22	34	10	16	-	26	60
	Giving confidence	9	1	5	15	14	-	18	32	47
	Questioning, probing	25	12	11	48	18	21	31	70	118
	Total	62	52	62	173	85	61	106	252	425
Indirect messages	Use of indirect messages	1	-	3	4	4	10	-	14	18
	Total	1	-	3	4	4	10	-	14	18
Total You-Messages		166	143	137	443	222	245	250	717	1160
I-Messages	Use of I-Messages	19	13	25	57	22	13	7	42	99
Total I-Messages		19	13	25	57	5	9	7	42	99

activities are much more than the positive expressions. Researchers state that this may originate from teachers' adoption of acting reactive and trying to suppress inappropriate behaviors as a class management strategy, instead of teaching the proper and new ways of behavior to the children (Iflazoglu and Bulut, 2004; Bulut and Iflazoglu, 2006).

Another finding of the study was the fact that while 42% of the you-messages were used by teachers who had more than 15 years of experience while 58% of them were relayed by newly appointed inexperienced teachers.

Examining the literature brings up similar findings. Martin and Baldwin (1994) carried out a study in order to examine the differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of the reactions given to undesirable behaviors in class. Findings of that study were collected from a total of 238 teachers with 55% inexperienced and 45% experienced teachers. In the conclusion of the study it was determined that experienced teachers were more intervening than the inexperienced teachers.

In their study, Sezgin and Duran (2010) determined that teachers' levels in facing undesirable student behaviors, and using preventive strategies and inter-vening methods against such behaviors vary according to their professional experiences. According to the findings of the study preventive strategies against problematic behaviors are used more by teachers who had experience between 1 to 10 years. As the professional experience of teachers increase, their level in using preventive strategies against undesirable behaviors decreases.

This may result from the point that newly appointed teachers are more skilful on the messages to be used against children's undesirable behaviors and can make more effort on this since their knowledge is fresher. This may be also indicate that newly appointed teachers approach more sensitively to the information and programs published in media, books and conferences on communication with people, and have the means to criticize and negate their own behaviors. Still, in this study the newly appointed teachers only infrequently used I-messages. This indicates that the information provided in universities concerning the proper ways in communicating with children is inadequate. In case that the teachers are better trained during both their education and while they perform as teachers on the effective messages that need to be sent against undesirable children behaviors and on how to establish communication with children, they will posses more successful communication skills.

Examining study conclusions on class management

shows that teachers are inadequate in many dimensions of class management (Mag, 2012; Akgun et al., 2011; Aydin, 2004; Neyisci-Karakas, 2005; Martin and Baldwin, 1994; Senturk and Oral, 2008). These inadequacies have to be rectified. On the other hand, there are also studies that conclude that significant number of teachers attain class management competency within the scope of their own experiences, or in other words they obtain class management skills through trial and error method (Turnuklu, 2000; Turnuklu and Yildiz, 2002; Ozata, 2004; Karakoc, 1998). However, trial and error is an ineffective way of learning that requires high amounts of time, effort and financial expense. Therefore, obtainment of the knowledge and skills that are necessary to properly perform an occupation should not be through trial and error.

Researches show that the trainings given to teachers based on the feedbacks on their performances provide positive progression for the creation of effective class management strategies and that undesirable behaviors observed in children decrease after these trainings (Slay, 1980; Noell et al., 2000; Filcheck et al., 2004; Gal, 2006; Slider et al., 2006). With this purpose, it can be arranged that preschool teachers receive in-service trainings for enabling them to use their class management skills in an effective way. It is suggested that in-service trainings should be provided in a form of applied training supported with visuals and tips, instead of a didactic narration. It is also important to carry out studies based on giving feedbacks on teachers' performances.

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