

ARC '16

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Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Pillar

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/qfarc.2016.SSHAOP3200>

An Exploratory Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Prosocial Behaviors in Preschool Children

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Children's social development is generally facilitated in the context of the unique, socialization experiences that they encounter at school and at. Such experiences are likely to manifest themselves in prosocial behaviors (e.g., helping, collaborating, and empathizing with peers), or aggressive behaviors (e.g., hitting, bullying, manipulating, rejecting, and teasing). Schools today are fraught with challenging behaviors that lead to stressful and difficult environments for both students and teachers alike. Anecdotal evidence and empirical research point out to the rise of violent and aggressive acts among school-age children. Anecdotal support, from conversations with local school teachers, pre-service teachers' classroom observations, and round-table discussions with both faculty members and students about the rise of children's aggressive behavior acts in schools motivated our study. We believe that it is essential to conduct a study that would help us gain a working familiarity with the extent to which children's prosocial behaviors are present in the preschool classroom. This is critical because students who exhibit antisocial behaviors are even more challenged with the prospect of social competence and academic success as continual conflict is likely to invade their thought processes and disturbs their ability to learn. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the occurrences of prosocial behaviors in preschool children according to the perceptions of their teachers, examine if variations of prosocial behaviors exist among boys and girls, and analyze whether variations of prosocial behaviors exist among children in Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2.

Thirty teachers from different preschool centers in the community participated in the study. They provided information about their perceptions of prosocial behavior of each child in their classes. The instrument that was used in this study is the Prosocial Behaviors of Children Questionnaire, which consists of 19 items. Four subscale scores are calculated by adding individual items: Prosocial Behavior and Social Competence subscale; School Adjustment subscale; Peer Preferred Behavior subscale; and Teacher Preferred Behavior subscale. A high score on any of the four subscales denotes a great amount of prosocial behavior. Teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they

Cite this article as: Semmar Y, Al-Thani T. (2016). An Exploratory Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Prosocial Behaviors in Preschool Children. Qatar Foundation Annual Research Conference Proceedings 2016: SSHAOP3200 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/qfarc.2016.SSHAOP3200>.

observed specific prosocial behaviors in the children of their class, using a 5-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and frequently). The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and then back-translated to English. The final "Arabic" version was piloted in the Early Childhood Center at Qatar University with the participation of four preschool teachers. The first part of the study relied on having the teachers complete the prosocial behaviors of children questionnaire. This type of self-reporting measure, which is based on teachers' observations and interactions with their students, is commonly used in early childhood education research. The second phase of this investigation employed a causal comparative design in which the researchers tested whether children's prosocial behaviors are related to gender and age. Causal-comparative methods aim at investigating whether one or more preexisting conditions have possibly caused subsequent differences in the groups of participants. The causal-comparative approach also has the advantage of establishing relationships that might be studied experimentally at later points in time.