



“Does play improve student executive functioning and behaviour?”

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Nolan Jacob & Tia Giesbrecht

Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge

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Overview

Throughout our internships at R.I. Baker, a common issue that has arisen has been behavioural issues and lack of fundamental skills such as executive functions, motor skills, and the initiation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. This project will work alongside the goals and current work by staff to develop fundamental skills.

In an effort to answer the question of whether play affects behaviour and fundamental skills, this project will ask all teachers to submit the names of students they feel could either a) benefit from peer and adult attention, or b) need to work on executive functions. After teachers have submitted names, we will talk to the students proposed and give them a coveted invitation to our new lunch recess club, which will offer art studio one day a week, and board games another day of the week. Each week there will be a focus on one or two skills and students will not be aware of the hidden agenda of these workshops. At the beginning of the project, teachers will fill out surveys on the students they proposed. Once students begin attending the workshops, they must continue the full six weeks. At the end of the project, teachers will complete the same survey to assess if any changes have been identified.

Goals

1. Improve the community at R.I. Baker by helping those students who may be falling through the cracks get the attention that they need.
2. Improve students' overall success by teaching them very important skills such as time management and problem-solving that they will inevitably need to use in life.
3. Allow students to explore their own abilities by providing a structured space to show them that their skills are valued and "seen."
4. Decrease the amount of "doodling" and other minor distractions within the classroom by providing students an opportunity to channel their artistic inclinations.
5. Decrease behavioural issues within classrooms that result from students not being able to regulate themselves due to low executive functioning.
6. Encourage peer relationships and improve student skills to create and maintain healthy relationships.

Components and Considerations

There are many components to this project, including teacher and administrator support. The encouragement of teachers through proposing students and completing surveys will help with data collection and efficient running of the club in order to improve the student body and complete the above goals.

Additionally, students will need to come in with an open mind and a willingness to try and enjoy the experience.

Community Involvement

We are hoping, through this project, to get the community involved in this opportunity to help students grow their necessary life skills. We will be asking some local businesses to help supply resources (games) and lunch some days as this project will take place over the students' lunch periods. In particular, we are looking for the support of Round Table Board Games and Little Caesars, though other options may be considered.

There is the opportunity to ask for their sponsorship, by providing free advertisement through the school and district social media, posters within the school, newsletters to parents, and on the websites.

Information Collected

I. Data Obtained

The data collected will include information provided by teachers on the students' first and last name, grade level, and section. Attendance will be taken during each workshop and used to ensure the validity and accuracy of the research. Teachers will complete a survey at the beginning and end of the project which will be a quick and efficient way to garner information on any changes in student performance or attitude.

II. Presentation of Data

Once data has been collected, it will be presented through a web page that includes an overview of the project, the preparation beforehand, updates throughout the project including photographs and lesson plans, the data collected, concluding thoughts, and additional research. All information will omit identifying information

from students and their face. The webpage will be able to be shared by anyone, with enough detail that any teacher or school can implement the program.

Plan

Week 1 (February 3-7): **Impulse Control**

- Art studio: Paper Mache
- Board game: Blurt, Taboo

Week 2 (February 10-14): **Peer Relationships**

- Art studio: Paint or Draw Each Other
- Board game: Exploding Kittens, Uno

Week 3 (February 24-28): **Motor Skills**

- Art studio: Detail Sketching
- Board game: Operation, Jenga

Week 4 (March 2-6): **Self-Image & Anxiety**

- Art studio: 'I am' Art
- Board game: Totem, You Know

Week 5 (March 9-13): **Task Initiation**

- Art studio: Picture Switching
- Board game: Pictionary, Sushi Go

Week 6 (March 16-20): **Planning and Organizing**

- Art studio: Landscape Painting
- Board game: Chess, Sudoku

Related Research Questions

A number of other related questions are possible as a result of this research, and due to the time constraints will not be able to be answered. We will include these in our results, to indicate potential future research and considerations. The following are examples:

1. Was it the students' executive functioning that improved, or was it that they needed more attention from an adult?
2. Was it the students' executive functioning that improved, or was it building peer to peer relationships and feeling connected to other students that diminished behaviour issues?