

“Kids’ Skills” – Implementation and evaluation of the systemic solution- focused program

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2019

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Acknowledgments

This article has been translated into English by Alexandra Blickhan. Her assistance has been paid by own resources of the University of Osnabrück.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and or publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grand from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or non-for-profit sectors.

Abstract

This article describes the implementation and evaluation of the systemic solution-focused program “Kids’ Skills” in a day-care facility for children. The program, based on Ben Furman’s work, can be used to handle behavioral problems. Within a timeframe of six weeks, ten day-care teachers ($w = 9/ m = 1$; $M: 43.6/ SD: 10.65$) are trained in the program and receive support in implementing it with a child selected by them ($w = 6/ m = 4$; $M: 5.2/ SD: 0.92$). Pre- and post-implementation as well as follow-up interviews (five months later) investigate the effectiveness and acceptance of the program. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) is employed to perform a qualitative evaluation. Both within the timeframe of implementation and at the follow-up time, there is a notable improvement of symptoms in 6 of the 10 children, along with positive changes with regard to the children’s self-efficacy and self-esteem as well as an improved relationship between teacher and child. The program is received with wide acceptance and proves possible to be integrated well into the teachers’ day-to-day work. The present study contributes to previously limited research on “Kids’ Skills” and indicates the program’s implementation potential.

Keywords: „Kids Skills“, solution-focused, behavioural problems, implementation, evaluation

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Conflicts between Carsten (6 years old, name changed) and his friends regularly used to escalate, as Carsten tended to insist on his opinion and become “unruly” and “louder and louder” when he didn’t get his way. On the other hand, outside of his own field of interest, vehicles, he was anxious and had no confidence to try new activities.

How can teachers react to such behavior in children and facilitate changes while at the same time retaining and conveying a resource-oriented, respectful view of the child? The importance of an appreciative and approving attitude has been shown to have a positive effect on the mental health and development of children (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers & Reed, 2011). In resilience research, Masten (2007) proceeds from a “short list” of universal adaptive factors which make it possible for individuals to develop as well as withstand “adversities”. This “short list” includes “attachment relationships” with competent and caring adults in the family and/ or community, “self-regulatory systems for modulating emotion, arousal and behavior”, “positive views of self”, “self-efficacy”, “pleasure in mastery” and intrinsic motivation (O’Dougherty Wright, Masten & Narayan, 2013; Masten, 2001). Building and nurturing these adaptive systems should therefore constitute an essential feature of education in order to protect children against adversity. Educators who manifest a respectful attitude facilitate, on the one hand, the formation of secure attachment; on the other hand, they present the child with challenges he or she can successfully master (Masten et al., 2011). Luthar and Brown (2007) emphasize, as do Knitzer and Cohen (2007), both the necessity and the great unused potential of interventions in day-care facilities in light of the impossibility to reach all parents through programs. Teachers, too, are faced primarily with the educational challenge of realizing a respectful attitude in situations where children display behavioral problems. Especially in these circumstances, however, nurturing adaptive systems is to be

considered particularly important, as children who already display unusual behavior can be seen to be at risk.

In “Kids’ Skills”, Ben Furman (2004) claims to offer a program that helps make it possible to express such an attitude in problematic situations (interview with B. Furman; Bentner, 2013, p. 143). The concept is based on the fundamental idea to not pathologize problems and behavioral problems in children, but to turn problems into skills. “Kids’ Skills” thus presents a program for children to overcome psychosocial problems but also, first and foremost, enables adults to “approach children who display emotional or behavioral difficulties with the respect and appreciation they deserve” (interview with B. Furman; Bentner, 2013, p. 143). In its original form, “Kids’ Skills” was designed for children between four and twelve years of age, but with slight adaptations, it can also be applied with younger or older children and adolescents (Furman, 2004, 2010).

The program consists in 15 steps shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The 15 steps of the program “Kids’ Skills” by Ben Furman

Step 1: Turn problems into skills

Adults deliberate which skill the child would have to master in order to overcome the difficulty

Step 2: Agree on a skill to be learnt

Adult and child together decide on a new skill to be learnt

Step 3: Discover the benefit of the skill

Discuss benefits the new skill will bring for the child and others around them

Step 4: Name the skill

The child chooses a (creative) name for the skill

Step 5: Pick a power figure

The child picks a character or an animal that is going to support their learning

Step 6: Invite helpers

The child asks children and adults whose help they would like for support

Step 7: Build trust

Discuss reasons why the child and others around them believe in the child's success

Step 8: Plan a celebration

Discuss how the child's success in learning the skill will be celebrated

Step 9: Describe the skill

The child is asked to describe or demonstrate the new skill

Step 10: Go public

If the child consents, others around them can be informed of the project to learn the new skill

Step 11: Practice the skill

The child practices their skill, depending on the specifics agreed on, either in real life or in roleplay

Step 12: Find a memory aid

Discuss with the child how they would like to be reminded of the new skill when they forget about it

Step 13: Celebrate success

If and when the child masters their skill, celebrate as planned

Step 14: Pass the skill on to others

To consolidate success, the child can help another child to learn the same skill

Step 15: Move on to the next skill

If the child continues to have difficulties, they can now start learning the next skill

In the following, it is described how these were implemented in the intervention in the case of Carsten in order to better illustrate the concept of the program and the intervention itself.

Carsten's day-care teacher, Ms. Klein, began the interview that initiated the program with appreciative feedback on Carsten's recent development (step 7). She then moved on to discussing the area that continued to present him with difficulties and described a conflict that had recently played out between Carsten and his friends, in the aftermath of which Carsten had been very sad. Her mirroring his feelings and expressing the desire to help him made him open to the suggestion to learn the skills of "staying calm in conflict situations" (steps 1 and 2). Ms. Klein explained that this was a skill his father must be quite proficient at as a truck driver, since driving a truck was very demanding, other drivers might "cause trouble" and it was important to stay calm in order to prevent a traffic accident from happening. Together, they discussed how the new skill might make Carsten's time in the day-care facility more enjoyable (step 3). Thus conflicts might escalate less frequently and he would be able to continue playing sooner. With the agreement of Carsten's mother, four copies of a photograph of Carsten and his father in front of the latter's truck had been printed, two in the size of a poster and two in a passport-photo format. Carsten glued one of the large pictures on a piece of cardboard and wrote the name of his skill, "LKW" ("truck"), on it (step 4). He was going to hang the second large picture in his room at home. Using the small pictures, Carsten and Ms. Klein made two keyring pendants as memory aids and a "power figure" (steps 5 and 12), one for his home and one for the day-care facility. As an additional reminder, they agreed on a "stop" hand gesture after their meeting. Carsten named no other helpers outside of another day-care teacher (step 6). The poster was put up in the day-care group and Carsten told all children and adults who showed interest what it meant (step 10).

Carsten was able to train his skill in all conflict situations occurring in the near future (step 11). In these situations, he would try to “stay calm”, reach for his keyring, take a deep breath and, if he didn’t think he could manage on his own, get help.

Engaging with Carsten’s problems thoroughly and suggesting possible solutions on the basis of “Kids’ Skills” helped Carsten make progress very soon. After a short while, he had mastered the skill of “staying calm” so well that a “toys afternoon” was planned according to his wishes (step 8). In the beginning, the “stop” sign worked well as a reminder and helped Carsten calm down and think. After a while, however, this reminder was no longer necessary. Still, he continued to wear the keyring pendant attached to his trousers. Carsten was able to resolve conflict situations with his friends and got along better with them. He gained more confidence, was more calm overall, and his desired behavior generalized to other areas. Thus he increasingly engaged in activities outside his personal area of interest and displayed less insecurity in doing so.

Contrary to earlier expectations, cooperation with Carsten’s parents was very constructive. Ms. Klein also noticed changes in herself. She developed greater empathy for Carsten, whom she had used to see primarily as an “offender”, and experienced and expressed her appreciation in a more authentic way.

State of research

The fundamental work “Kids’ Skills: Finding playful and practical solutions with children – a 15-step program for parents, teachers and therapists” (Furman, 2004) has been published in 15 languages, totaling 43000 sold copies (Bentner, 2013). Outside of numerous single-case studies from around the world (Furman, 2010), Bauer (2010), Mannhard, Zintler, Schneider and Holtz (2007) as well as Lindemann and Rosenbohm (2012) described the perceived successful implementation of “Kids’ Skills”.

In spite of how widely the program is applied in practice, its effectiveness has hardly been examined to date. Only one effectiveness study (Bentner, 2013) and a master's thesis (Gohier, 2006), which used practitioner surveys (online and via telephone) and a single-case study to evaluate the program, are known to the authors.

Both in the online survey (N = 20; Stephan, 2013) and in the telephone survey (N = 10; Becker, 2013), practitioners expressed their satisfaction with the effectiveness of the program regarding the application with various behavioral problems. The time-frame determined for acquiring the skills was between three weeks and six months ($M = 2.6$ months). An optimal target group was presented by seven-to-twelve-year-olds, although with variations in the program, application with different age groups was also possible (Stephan, 2013). What was judged particularly positively by practitioners was the fundamentally benevolent, appreciative attitude on the part of the therapist or pedagogue, as well as the autonomy and increased sense of self-efficacy for the child (Becker, 2013). A lack of motivation on the part of the child or with respect to parents' cooperation as well as serious mental illness (such as severe ADHD symptoms, trauma) were named as possible causes for unsuccessful application (Stephan, 2013; Becker, 2013).

Gohier (2006) evaluated "Kids' Skills" using a single-case study and described, as particularly noteworthy results, increased feelings of connection within the case-study family as well as the child's increased sense of self-efficacy. During the eight-week intervention, the six-year-old girl had successfully learnt the new skill (to verbally express her needs). Limitations of the studies are presented, among other factors, by the sample sizes and selective surveying of practitioners, particularly in the telephone survey. Nevertheless, the results indicate the potential of the intervention program, which should be confirmed by further studies. In the present study, "Kids' Skills" was therefore applied in a day-care facility and evaluated with respect to its effectiveness and acceptance.

Method

The following describes the procedure and elements of the intervention, the sample of participants and the methodological approach. Materials for sample recruitment, interview scripts, transcripts and protocols as well as results, in the form of codes structured according to themes, can be accessed on www.osf.io upon request.

Design

A non-experimental field study with repeated measuring has tested the effectiveness and acceptance of the “Kids’ Skills” program (Furman, 2004). Changes in attitudes and behavior were surveyed in interviews at pre, post and follow-up time five months later. The sample was not contrasted with a control group.

Measures

To gather the data, specially designed semi-structured interviews conducted over a maximum time of one-and-a-half hours were employed. The focus in the pre-interview was on getting to know the children and day-care teachers and consequently included questions on sociodemographic data, the problem behavior as well as the child’s strengths and the teachers’ previous solutions. Both the post- and follow-up interviews were aimed to survey changes in attitude and behavior in both the children and the teachers, and to evaluate the teachers’ acceptance of the program.

Recruiting and sample description

Participants were initially recruited with the use of flyers and particularly their distribution in various institutions. Where applicable, the program was also presented to the heads of institutions. In the case of the present intervention, staff decided to participate in the program in a meeting.

Ten teachers ($f = 9$, $m = 1$) from the elementary division of a day-care facility participated in the intervention. The mean age was 43.6 years ($SD: 10.65$), the average

professional experience 21.85 years (*SD*: 12.06), and work hours 32.7 per week on average (*SD*: 5.10). Two teachers explicitly mentioned experience with the program “Faustlos” (“fist-free”, Cierpka, 2003) on which they drew in working with the children. The other teachers claimed to have employed no specific approaches in dealing with difficulties previously.

The children were four boys and six girls who were 5.2 years old on average (*SD*: 0.92). Five of these children were from migrant families. The difficulties due to which teachers chose these children ranged, in the broadest sense, from concentration and attention problems (four children) and social-emotional difficulties (three children) to selective mutism (one child) and a massive disregard for rules (one child). Therapeutic measures (e.g., logopedic therapy, ergotherapy) had only been taken in two children’s cases. All parents provided written statements of consent for their children’s participation in “Kids’ Skills”.

At the follow-up time, only 9 teachers ($f = 8, m = 1$) could be interviewed. The child supervised by the missing teacher was a four-year-old girl from a migrant family, on which consequently there are no data for the follow-up time. Five children entered school before the follow-up interviews; however, their teachers gathered information on them prior to the interviews and were thus able to speak for their continued development.

Procedure

The intervention consists of four basic components: (1) an evening induction into the program, (2) preliminary talks to discuss the individual implementation of the program with teachers, (3) a one-to-one meeting between each teacher and child with the intervention leaders present, and (4) an intervision to address questions and difficulties (Perband, Haupts & Rogner, 2015). The one-to-one meeting between teacher and child formed the heart of the intervention and included a talk with the child about the implementation of the steps involved in “Kids’ Skills”. Moreover, the children were visited by the leaders of the intervention (A.P., N.H.) in their groups three times. These visits served several purposes: assessing the

children’s behavior, building a relationship between the intervention leaders and the children, gathering feedback on outcomes and motivating children to continue practicing. The effective period of time for the program covered by the pre- and post-interviews measured around six weeks, with another five months before the follow-up time. The timeframe of the program is shown in *Figure 1*.

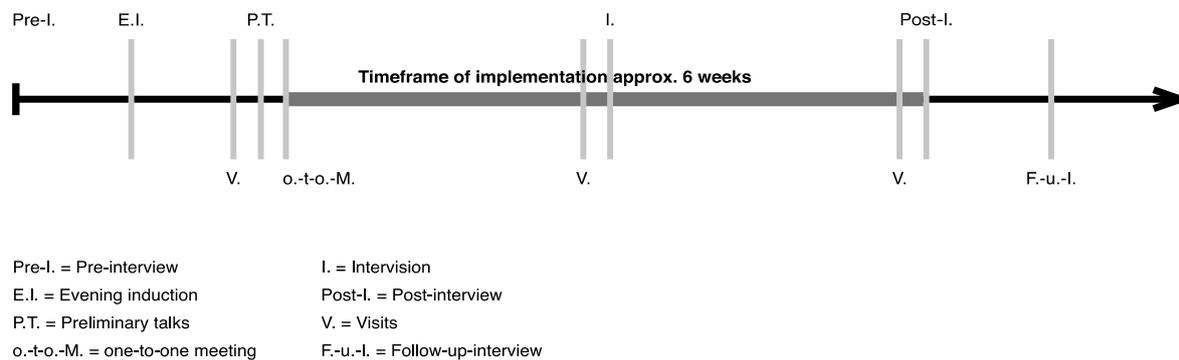


Figure 1. Timeframe of the program “Kids’ Skills”

Evaluation methods

The data were evaluated primarily with the use of the inductive *thematic analysis* following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013). Themes were identified on a semantic level. Deductive *thematic analysis* was employed for the evaluation of four constructs (sense of self-efficacy, appreciation, relationship and autonomy support) with themes on a latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcription of interviews was followed by coding carried out independently by the two first authors. The codes were then compared, analyzed and summarized into potential overarching themes. In the present study, statements clearly emphasized by more than one person were rated significant, coded and summarized under each theme. Fully redundant codes from the same person were removed by the authors. In addition, codes that could be grouped with more than one theme were duplicated. Concluding

the procedure, the coherence of the codes for each theme was, in turn, systematically tested, as was the relation between each theme and the others. As part of the complete analysis, the authors constructed a mind map (using the mind-mapping software “XMind”, downloadable free of charge from www.xmind.net/de).

Results

With respect to the research question about the effectiveness and acceptance of “Kids’ Skills”, the three interview times produced seven themes, as shown in *Figure 2*: (a) changes, (b) use of the program in future, (c) reasons for lack of success, (d) effect mechanisms, (e) possibilities for integration, (f) criticisms, and (g) suggestions for improvement. The themes “changes”, “effect” and “criticisms” were divided into subthemes. Some of the elements considered (self-efficacy, appreciation, relationship and autonomy support) were established deductively; the analysis of codes demonstrated that these themes could be categorized along the inductively produced themes.

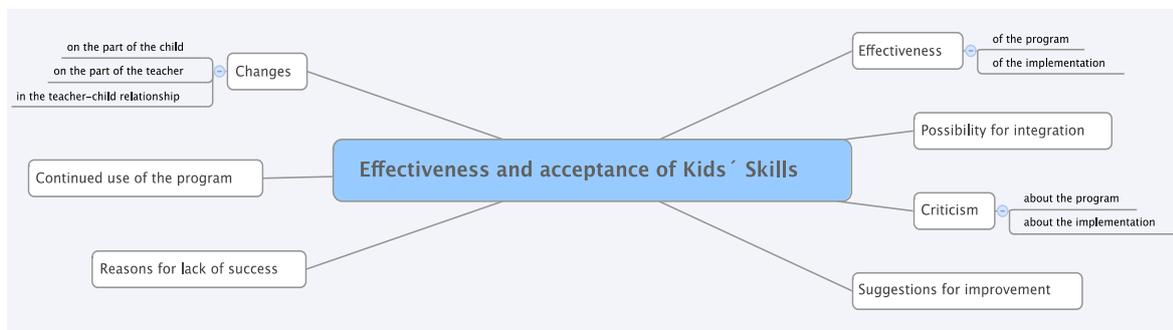


Figure 2. Graphical display of the themes and subthemes derived from a study implementing and evaluating the program “Kids’ Skills” by Ben Furman in a day-care facility for children

Changes

Changes on the part of the child. At the post-interview time, three children had completely mastered their respective skill; correspondingly, there was a comprehensive *improvement of symptoms*. The teacher of one child with selective mutism, for instance,

reported in various instances that the child was now speaking “loudly and clearly” and “maintaining eye contact quite consistently”. A generalization of the desired behavior over and above the skill to be learned was observable in two of these children and another girl. While the program was intended to help one child learn, for example, to stay calm in conflict situations, it was also reported that “he’s no longer sitting like that like fidgeting, nervous and he doesn’t have that anymore”. In three other children, there was also a marked improvement in the problem behavior, although they tended to forget their skills more frequently than the former, and learning was consequently not considered completed. A notable initial change regarding the undesirable behavior had given way to long-lasting relapses in two children at the post-interview time. This was reflected in the following statements: “and then, when you remind her, then there are also these, eh, times when it’s different again, but then afterwards she does quickly forget again”. One teacher reported a supposed improvement in the boy she was supervising. Since she appeared, however, to the authors to have understood the implementation of the program differently than intended, it does not seem very adequate to assume a relation between the changes and the program. Aside from this boy, there were no changes regarding the problem behavior over the effective time of circa six weeks in only one of the ten children. Six children had established the new skill they were learning to varying degrees. At the time of the follow-up interview, four out of nine children had mastered their skill; three were continuing to practice it, with alternating phases of forgetting and mastering the skill; two children had not learned the desired skill.

Furthermore, the program had demonstrable effects on the children’s *sense of self-esteem*. This effect was explicitly mentioned by four teachers. “Kids’ Skills” gave the children the impression that “I am special”. The children were also able to sense that they were being accepted the way they are. Older children especially were proud of the new skills

they had learned. One teacher described this as follows: “And in the end it all amounts to this confidence that’s being strengthened”.

In terms of *self-efficacy*, the following data were gathered. Even in the pre-interview, five teachers reported the children’s confidence to be able to make changes regarding the present difficulties. This mostly consisted, however, in a generalized child-like assurance and was questioned by three of the same teachers in statements during the post-interview. In the pre-interview, three teachers voiced doubts in the child’s coping abilities. Three other teachers explicitly reported to doubt the child’s awareness of the problems and could therefore not answer the question how manageable they assumed the difficulties to be. In the post- and follow-up interviews, four teachers reported children’s assumptions to be able to do something about their problem behaviors themselves, for example in the following statement: “then of course she said yes, she knew that she could do that now”. A different, stronger awareness of problems was present in two children (one child in the follow-up interview). In two others, this awareness was still lacking, while two children had a situation-dependent awareness of problems.

Changes on the part of the teacher. In the context of “Kids’ Skills”, some teachers gained *insight* that influenced their work. Three teachers reported an increased awareness of some children’s difficult domestic environment; for instance, one of them voiced their understanding of “how bad things are for some children, especially those who are in this project, almost makes me cry”. One teacher reported to have “noticed that, basically when you really work on that with the child, that then you achieve that kind of outcome much quicker”. The pointlessness of “nagging” was described by one teacher as follows: “You just have to stay calm with her as well, so, I’ve realized that as well. It doesn’t do any good with anyone when you go on nagging about that kind of thing.” Another mentioned having “initially misjudged” the boy she was supervising and now had “a completely different view

of him”, concluding that “you have to listen better”. One teacher gained an understanding for the importance of being “a partner who accepts him” to the child she was supervising.

Each of the teachers demonstrated generally *appreciative behavior* from the beginning. This was in part explicitly reported by them and otherwise evident in the interactions between them and the children. Following the child’s problematic behavior, most teachers reacted with (where necessary, repeated) reprimanding and instructions. Four of them reported expressing their negative affect by letting the child feel their annoyance through reduced friendliness, nagging or the use of more drastic expressions such as snapping, shaking or having another child kick the one with the problematic behavior so that they might experience what that feels like. The latter events had, according to the two teachers reporting them, been absolute exceptions and acts of desperation they had later judged themselves to have been inadequate. The post- and follow-up interviews showed that changes in appreciation were more qualitative than quantitative in nature. Thus teachers praised more deliberately and, due to a perceived stronger internalization of an appreciative attitude, “more automatically”. The more intense observation of children also led to a more frequent realization of situations where the child demonstrated progress.

In the pre-interviews, four teachers said they already worked with the children in an *autonomy-supporting* way. The other six teachers involved the child less or hardly at all, working mostly with (when necessary, repeated) telling-off and clear instructions; in four of the cases, teachers attempted to talk to the children, involve them and provide support for self-regulation (e.g. in the form of perspective-taking, structure), albeit with limited success. In the post- and follow-up interviews, many teachers reported attempts to provide more constructive ways of support for the child than before. Thus nine teachers reported constantly using the memory aid. This strategy replaced repeated admonishments and nagging in four of the six previously described cases. One teacher used the memory aids as a reward or a means

of punishment. One child had not understood the purpose of the memory aid. In general, many of the teachers experienced involving the child as useful, and some reported having internalized this idea in their own mind.

In the pre-interview, teachers reported being affected by the problem behavior in their own *emotional state* to varying degrees. While only one teacher experienced no emotional strain caused by the undesired behavior, the other nine felt stressed most of the time. The children's changes in behavior, where they occurred, produced some relief for six teachers. One teacher in particular, who had felt quite helpless, annoyed and upset at the start of the program, said that she was now "able to handle situations better in general" and on another occasion that she was "more motivated, maybe also just, yeah because I know that I have a program ... I have something to fall back on ... I have this kind of help". The sense of relief also facilitated appreciative behavior and a positive view of the child in question. There is also overlap with the theme of changes in the relationship since the teachers' positive and negative affect towards the children, as described in this context, constitute an influential factor or alternatively an aspect of the relationship between them.

Changes in the teacher-child relationship. In the post-interviews, four teachers explicitly mentioned a "deeper", "closer" and "more positive" relationship. One teacher described this as follows: "That made our relationship yet more positive, that is because I can approach her a lot more as well, because now she's also opening up about things about herself that I can respond to". For three teachers, "Kids' Skills" was "absolutely a relief" in dealing with problems, with two teachers stating "I do feel that I get along with him better as well". They also reported being more calm when skills were being forgotten. Only one teacher described her reaction when the child she was supervising constantly forgot the new skill as follows: "only I did feel a little disappointed after like the first couple of days,

because it had been working so well then”. In the follow-up interviews, seven teachers reported positive effects from the program on their relationship with the children.

Continued use of the program

At the time of the follow-up interview, five of the nine teachers had applied the program working with at least one other child. One teacher was planning its use very concretely, saying she had “talked to the mother already uh and would like to start the program in January”. Three teachers wanted to continue implementing the program, but had no specific plans. Thus all of the teachers interviewed intended to continue using the program in future.

The changes in the teachers’ behavior and attitudes, as described in *Changes on the part of the teacher*, were generalized over and above working with the child in question. Outside of the explicit work with “Kids’ Skills”, too, six teachers reported having a more positive view of all children, less of a focus on performance and a more solution-oriented and “child-oriented” outlook, and talking to the children more than “nagging”. One teacher, for instance, stated the following:

first this principle of abilities to begin with very uh very resource-oriented and that I keep like remembering ... that uh I try to do very often and that eh has definitely also had this effect that is this focusing on abilities, taking small steps uh to get to that kind of outcome

She continued, “so I was always taking care not to be so performance-oriented all the time”. To support future use of the program, the vice-director intended to monitor its continued application on the part of her co-workers.

One teacher also mentioned a personal program paralleling “Kids’ Skills”, in which she was using the approach in her professional and personal life as well as with adults. In this context, “Kids’ Skills” had become her own personal “Power Word (/Figure)”:

That's [other teacher's name]'s and my own personal "My Skills" program (laughing) yeah, really, I use it for myself. Yeah, yeah, it's really true, so you have to watch basically how to approach these situations in a positive way.

Reasons for lack of success

The desired outcomes could not be achieved in all cases. The explanations teachers gave for this were inquired after and are presented in the following. Alongside other factors, four teachers named a stressful familial environment as a reason for a lack of success, which according to them impeded change. One teacher was of the opinion that

basically you have to approach this quite differently, our hands are kind of tied as well there, I've tried a lot there, but it's just difficult and ... the mum did pay attention to it as well in the beginning, but then at some point she didn't any more, did she.

Stating "that this task was just too complex" and "maybe we should have started in an even simpler way", two teachers listed the difficultness or complexity of skills as a reason for ill success. Furthermore, one teacher mentioned a lack of understanding on the part of the child, "this connection, I think she didn't even understand it, that is, this benefit from it". One teacher criticized some colleagues' lack of consistency in implementing the program, as well as attempts to generalize it to any problematic behavior whatsoever, "that ended up being completely beside the point".

Effectiveness

Effectiveness of the program. The *positive, resource-oriented view* of the child constituted a particularly decisive aspect with respect to the perceived positive effect of the program, which was emphasized by six teachers in the post-interview and by seven in the follow-up. One teacher, for example, phrased this as follows:

it's just good right not just to look at those deficits all the time, but yeah to encourage the child in what they can do, to then find a new way right and that then changes the parents' view as well and ours and then that changes the child as well.

She continued, "if we change, the child changes".

Another reason for the positive effect of the program was seen by five teachers in "really *engaging closely*" with the child and their undesirable and desired behavior. Three teachers explicitly mentioned the child's freedom of choice and autonomy as an important factor that motivated the child to cooperate:

And then they were really thinking and then yeah and then this enthusiasm that like was there as well and this commitment, like for children you know it's like, right, I've said that now and now I have to keep at it a bit as well, that children are so persistent as well.

In the post- and follow-up interviews, four teachers explicitly made reference to the high *motivational effect* of the program. This, according to the teachers' views, relied in part on the memory aids and reminders (power figure, poster, name of the skill). Asked about the positive aspects of the program, one teacher responded:

I could mention everything now about the program couldn't I, that, I never would have thought, that there's this kind of positive means of support, like the poster, this kind of reminder, we didn't really know that, did we, we wouldn't have done it like that really, we'll keep doing that kind of thing.

Two teachers reported a sort of chain reaction in the group they supervised, which caused a number of children to want to learn a skill and make a poster as well, such that it was "like an independent dynamic in the group, not just with us, but with the children as well."

Particular aspects were also positively remarked upon, such as the possibility to handle steps in a flexible way, and the fact that the program requires no written documentation whatsoever.

Effectiveness of the implementation. The *intervision*, as part of the implementation of “Kids’ Skills”, was met with particular approval from the interviewees. Six teachers explicitly described it as positive. One of them said the following: “This meeting with everyone and you, I liked that a lot, hearing how the others were getting on with difficult children and how they’re dealing with it, I found that very helpful.” The competent and friendly *support from the intervention leaders* was also highlighted as helpful by four teachers. *Single mentions* concerned the phrasing aids in the script, the opportunity for reflection provided by the interviews, the induction evening and the group exercises during that event.

Possibility for integration

A general lack of *time* was perceived as a challenge in implementing the program, too, “that we have little time here for certain things, I think that’s known, we’ve said that several times”. Nevertheless, all teachers called the program “feasible”, with an adequate “cost-benefit ratio”. One teacher explicitly described how an increase in experience made the implementation of the program easier: “I had no idea then, it was more time-consuming, as it were, all of it, wasn’t it, now of course I can take it easier and it doesn’t take all this time.” Three teachers reported fearing they wouldn’t *understand* “Kids’ Skills” at the beginning of the program, but realizing that this was not the case.

Additionally, *feedback* from parents and the group was important for how well the program could be integrated. Over the course of the program, only half of the supported children’s parents showed an interest, which mostly manifested in occasional inquiries, as illustrated by the following quote: “when we sat here together, she [mother] asked again and

occasionally over the course of it.” In one case, the parents became actively involved in implementing the program. Other parents demonstrated a lack of interest, as evident from statements like the following: “Then that was signed [referring to the parents’ written consent] and they didn’t ask after it again.” However, in no case was the realization of the program jeopardized since even disinterested parents gave their consent and left further responsibility with the teachers. In addition, there were parents who voiced considerable interest in the program with the teachers although their own child was not taking part in “Kids’ Skills”.

Feedback about the implementation of “Kids’ Skills” from other children in the groups varied. While the teachers of one group reported “this kind of positive chain reaction in our group” that caused a number of children to want to learn a skill too, the program was “not that salient” for the children in the other groups. In the follow-up interviews, two teachers from the latter groups did, however, report that the other children in their group had noticed the positive changes in the children participating in “Kids’ Skills” and told the teachers about it.

Criticisms

Criticisms about the program. Only the *celebration* was met with criticism from some teachers, with one teacher saying the following: “like I said, I’ve said this before, setting a date for this party at first I thought, but I think that’s also always very like how you handle that in a differentiating kind of way”. Whether or not this step was appropriate would depend, according to this teacher, on the individual child in question:

There are children where I think they’d love it if you talked about it in our morning circle some time or if you had a real party if someone’s achieved something, I can imagine that – now with [name of a child] I couldn’t imagine it.

Criticisms about the implementation. Two teachers criticized the unfamiliar situation of the *individual meeting*.

Mh that situation right here, when we made the poster, I thought that was quite strange, even though I was, um yeah, I don't know, if that might have just been strange for the children here, I don't know if you'd just use a different room as well and a smaller table because that was this big table right here ... especially this room, I think I haven't been here all year with the children.

Suggestions for improvement

Six teachers expressed a desire to “kind of like involve the *parents* more”, for instance by way of an “*induction evening*”. A longer *effective time* would have been perceived as helpful by three teachers: “a longer time yeah, yeah, that's the kind of things which the next time what you'd approach differently”. Outside of these suggestions, which were mentioned repeatedly, there were *individual suggestions for improvement* like a memory aid for the teacher to avoid falling back into old habits, more frequent visits and increased support from the intervention leaders, as well as training in “Kids' Skills” for the other teachers working at the day-care facility.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness and acceptance of the program “Kids' Skills” in a children's day-care facility. During the effective time of six weeks, three out of ten children were able to master the desired skill completely, while three others had also acquired it but needed occasional reminders to demonstrate their skill. Teachers also reported an increase in children's self-esteem and in the quality of their relationship. They especially approved of the program's resource-oriented outlook and its requirement to engage closely with the child, as well as the considerable motivational effect of the approach. Regarding the conduction of the study, teachers particularly highlighted the

intervention and the support from the intervention leaders. In spite of the general lack of time, it was perceived that “Kids’ Skills” could be integrated into daily routines.

The acquisition of skills was not, however, successful in every case. For the purpose of a triangulation, the following will discuss reasons for a lack of success which the authors perceived by way of unsystematic, participating observations. These hypotheses are based on teachers’ statements – within as well as outside of the interviews – and on encounters with the children, which were subsequently structured and interpreted. The authors are also of the opinion that a current over-taxing of the child (e.g. by a difficult familial situation), an overly difficult or ill-defined skill and a lack of continuity can adversely affect success in implementing the program. In part, the reasons for a lack of success can, in the authors’ view, be summarized in a lack of comprehension for the program on the part of the child and/ or the teacher.

Observing the children in their daily lives or interviewing the children themselves, albeit not possible for monetary reasons as part of the present study, is to be advised for further research. Using additional data such as observation by others or surveying the children’s subjective experience, would be helpful to a triangulation.

The present study illustrates that integrating “Kids’ Skills” into institutions such as day-care facilities offers many chances. The program benefitted children for whom a change was necessary, but whose parents would, according to the teacher’s estimations, neither have consented to actively participating in the program nor cooperated in a structured way. Thus the program meets the demands of Luthar and Brown (2007) as well as Knitzer and Cohen (2007) for interventions in day-care facilities for just that group of children. “Kids’ Skills” may also promote many of the previously described universal adaptive systems (Masten, 2007) which make possible adaptation in spite of difficulties, and positive development. With adequate use of the program, attachment relationships, self-regulation and a positive view of

the self as well as perceived self-efficacy on the part of the child are improved. Children's behavioral difficulties are met by "Kids' Skills" with the simultaneous building of resources, which satisfies Masten and Coatsworth's (1998) requirement for an effective intervention to cover both aspects: competence-building and problem reduction.

Future research should focus more on the children's perspective, be it by way of systematic observation of behavior or interviews with the children. Replication studies to further test the effectiveness of the program would also be desirable. The present study, however, contributes to research confirming the positive effect of "Kids' Skills" and permits the conclusion that the use and dissemination of this approach are to be recommended.

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