

The Hero within the Special Needs Child

Marisa Schuller

Wharton Elementary School

The grandest and simplest law of the Oracle within us is to do the best of which we are capable; in whatever situation we are placed. And every human being, however handicapped he may be, has capacity enough to obey it.

– Helen Keller

INTRODUCTION

Discovering the Hero in the Classroom: The Teacher

Imagine a sixth grader going to the classroom where her friend's mother teaches a self-contained special education class. Having never been to that room before, the student is awestruck upon entering. She watches several adults assisting a room full of exceptional children. It is at that moment she decides she wants to be a special education teacher, but not because it looks easy. Despite how difficult it may be, the work still looks gratifying. I was that student many years back walking the halls of Sidney Lanier Middle School. Though I could not have put it into words at the time, that teacher, Mrs. Martinez, was a hero to me. I admired her and appreciated her contribution to children with special needs. She worked with students who required extraordinary patience and the use of out-of-the-ordinary education techniques. Mrs. Martinez did all this without receiving outside recognition, honors or trophies. It was the love for her students and her profession that inspired her to return to school day after day.

I came full circle before finally teaching a self-contained special education class, much like Mrs. Martinez's. I started working in a psychologist's clinic where I was also learning about speech pathology and audiology. During that time, I began studying early childhood education at the University of Houston with the intention of following up my undergraduate education with a master's degree in communication disorders. Finally, after the need for adequate income overrode any plans to continue my education, I began teaching Life Skills at Wharton Elementary, a small school in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) where I have been for three years.

Shortly after beginning my first year of teaching, I saw the movie *The Miracle Worker* again. Suddenly, the ending scene had new meaning. With tears welling up in my eyes, I watched Helen Keller comprehend that words label the objects around her. However, it was when Helen asks who Annie Sullivan is that the tears began streaming down my face. Sullivan's months of teaching, re-teaching, modifying and persisting have paid off when Annie fingerspells into Helen's hand "T-E-A-C-H-E-R." It is at this point I encountered another personal hero: Annie Sullivan.

I must also mention another teacher/hero of mine, one who posthumously inspired me to follow my passion for teaching. Robert Berger was one of my teachers at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. Though I was an art student and he was a theatre teacher, we worked together many hours backstage when I volunteered in the Denney Theatre. He did not give me grades. Nor did he ever teach me in the classroom. Instead, he was a teacher in the truest sense: a mentor who poured knowledge into me and built my confidence. To this day I still use practical adages he taught me (right-y, tight-y, left-y, loose-y). In 1992, I graduated high school and Mr. Berger stopped teaching shortly thereafter. Though we lost touch for a few years, we met back up when he returned to teaching at Reagan High School where my father taught. After a short hiatus in the business world, he had decided that he loved teaching too much to be away from the classroom. When he lost his life during a store robbery, I knew I needed to finish my education and begin teaching. Like Mr. Berger, I thought wanted something different after I received my degree. For him it was a business of his own, for me it was to be a speech pathologist, which meant I could work with children without being a fulltime teacher. However, when it came down to it, we both wanted to be in the classroom.

Discovering the Hero in the Classroom: The Student

While it has been my personal aspiration to become a teacher/hero like Mrs. Martinez, Annie Sullivan and Mr. Berger, I also wanted to help my students see their own potential as heroes despite and because of their own limitations. And if Annie Sullivan can be an example of a hero for me, then Helen Keller can be one example for my students. Helen overcame physical handicaps and turned them into personal triumphs. She used the abilities she did have instead of lamenting the capacities she did not possess. Since the academic performance of a child is positively related to his or her social competence (Patrick), the Life Skills classroom is an excellent place to begin teaching my students about being the best they can possibly be both in their personal lives and in the lives of others. In other words, teach them to be heroes in the classroom, at school, in their families and in the neighborhood. My curriculum, "The Hero within the Special Needs Child" originates from the belief that every child can be a hero. Though the special needs child may never be a textbook example of a hero, my curriculum capitalizes on the unique talents of each student in order to help each one discover more about themselves, their classmates and the consequences (positive or negative) of their personal behaviors. With this knowledge, my students will be able to make their world a better place as well as make a difference in the lives of those around them.

As of the writing of this essay, the Life Skills class at Wharton Elementary School consists of seven students. They range in age from seven to eleven-years-old. There are two girls and five boys; three African-American students and four Latino students, two of which were not born in the United States. Three of the students are verbal while four are nonverbal or limited in their expressive communication. Of the three verbal students, one is Limited English Proficient (LEP) and of the nonverbal students, three are LEP (their

receptive language in English is limited). All of my students are either reduced lunch (two students) or free lunch (five students). Three students come from two-parent homes, one has lived in foster care intermittently during the past year and one is currently living in a homeless shelter. Two students live with one parent and an additional family member (a paternal uncle and a maternal grandmother).

The identification of mental retardation is a requirement to be enrolled in the Life Skills class, but there is a broad array of abilities within that label. For instance, one student is not toilet trained and communicates through physical aggression whereas another student fully takes care of restroom needs on his own and has made great gains in the mastery of English (his second language) in just one year. Other characteristics of the Wharton Life Skills student include speech impairment for which he or she receives weekly speech therapy (five students), a form of autism known as Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) (one student), and Down's syndrome (one student).

For the purpose of my curriculum "The Hero within the Special Needs Child," I define a hero as anyone who helps improve the life of another without thought to self, particularly in times of necessity. The curriculum includes ways to communicate individual feelings and emotions. It shows how to identify a hero. It offers instructions on becoming a hero while making the most of the physical, social and mental abilities, however limited they may be. My unit takes a closer look at how we characterize heroes as well as celebrates "small" acts of heroism, the truly significant, easily recognizable acts of heroism.

Throughout the lessons, the words "friend" and "helper" are used interchangeably for "hero," as these words are currently in the vocabulary of my students. To ensure better understanding of "hero," the students are given the opportunity to aid the teacher in creating a definition of a hero to be posted in the classroom. This definition will be made of written words as well as picture symbols. Due to the limited attention spans of the students, all discussions are brief and to-the-point. Discussion topics include bravery, determination, perseverance, forgiveness, compassion, fairness and curiosity. We will observe how these notions are presented in the available children's literature and how they relate to heroism.

As with the definition of "hero," other words are substituted in discussions of the above topics. For instance: not afraid or scared will be substituted for bravery, letting go for forgiveness, etc. To place new terminology in context and to keep it at the forefront of the students' minds, I will be careful to include new vocabulary throughout the school day when talking to the students. This will also aid in the familiarity of new words.

HOW TO TEACH HEROISM TO THE LIFE SKILLS STUDENT

Disability versus Ability

Initially, I was concerned with how I would teach heroism to students who have below average mental capabilities, minimal communicative abilities as well as difficulties with social, emotional and motor skills. The majority of my students do not have adequate verbal skills to convey their thoughts. I often find that my students make amusing sounds, have unusual personal habits and atypical motor skills that bring attention to them as being different, producing giggles and stares from other students. The behavior of a few of my students tends to be aggressive causing others to become afraid or defensive. While it will never be my intent to make my students like “everyone else,” I do not want my students’ behaviors to interfere with others getting to know them for who they are: unique students who have a lot to offer, albeit in an unconventional way. With these obstacles ahead, I wondered, how could I succeed in having such students define the word “hero”? What was I to do about the students who use physical aggression to communicate their dislikes (and sometimes their likes)? Would my class be able to perform heroic acts toward other people? How would my students be treated by those outside the class?

In light of Helen Keller’s quotation used at the beginning of this essay, however, I reminded myself that I did not need to focus on what the students could not do or how they might react negatively to others. Instead, I needed to consider each child on his or her terms. What better place to do this than the classroom? It is a natural setting that allows for informal observation, an effective method for gathering information (Dreikurs 1968). This leads to the need for a list of abilities each student possesses including mental, communication, motor and social skills. I developed an informal checklist, titled “Abilities Inventory.” It is found in appendix A and is based on the *Revised Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development* (Brigance 1991) and *An Experimental Curriculum for Young Mentally Retarded Children* (Connor and Talbot 1966).

The “Abilities Inventory” resulted in the need for an additional list, one that records the activities and tangible rewards each child likes. Such positive reinforcements include, but are not limited to toys, computer time, stickers and snacks. The second list, found in appendix B under the title “Incentive Inventory”, will provide incentives to encourage the children to perform their best. Ideas for the “Incentive Inventory” *Educational Psychology: Windows on Classrooms, 3rd Ed.* (Eggen and Kauchak 1997). Both the “Abilities Inventory” and the “Incentive Inventory” will assist me in individualizing the lessons and activities so each student can more easily reach his or her personal potential. Therefore, they will be completed before the curriculum unit begins. I envision “The Hero within the Special Needs Child” as a way for me to learn more about my students while assisting them in learning about themselves.

Encouraging Participation

The use of a concrete incentive, while it may appear to oppose my definition of hero as selfless character, will be necessary in the beginning. Effective reinforcers are valid motivators in teaching behavioral strategies (on which much of my curriculum is based), especially for elementary students (Eggen and Kauchak 1997). My students tend to be more compliant when they have a prize in sight. The more desirable the reward, the more effective it is in providing motivation. At the same time, using motivators will be an opportunity to introduce the concept of personal satisfaction by diminishing the tangibles as the unit progresses while helping the students reflect more on their feelings that result from helping others and less on what they received from it. Initially, each student will receive a desired reward upon completing a “heroic” task. As the semester progresses, the reward will be given less frequently or in lesser amounts. As the rewards decrease, communication of how the recipient of the “heroic” deed may have felt will grow. Eventually, the discussions will turn to how the students felt after performing a particular deed. My aim is to allow the students to start where they are (usually, though not always in a self-centered mode) and bring them to a place where they are concerned about the feelings of others. Over time they should be more self-reflective about their feelings.

Methods of Teaching Heroism to Life Skills

Notably, I want to show my students how to think beyond themselves. I also want them to understand that people feel better when our actions toward them are kind. Good deeds might incline others to be more pleasant to us in return. Ironically, when we take care of the needs of others first, our own needs are usually met at the same time. For many of my special needs students, these are difficult concepts to contemplate and act upon. However, behavioral adaptations can be taught through modeling, repetition, and of course, the strategically planned reward. The unit will take the students through demonstrations of heroes throughout history, heroes in their own communities, in their families and finally, within themselves. As a final objective, the students will perform acts of heroic selflessness on a regular basis at school and outside of school.

Through personal experiences, I have found that Life Skills students are often influenced by the behaviors of others. If one student is being disruptive, the others are likely to join in. Likewise, if a regularly disruptive pupil is absent or displaying attentive behavior, the rest of the students seem better able to concentrate on the task at hand. Certainly this is true of any classroom, however with special needs children, they have less intrinsic motivation to learn and outside interruptions are particularly detrimental to their education.

With this tendency to be swayed by others, it is important for my students to discern between desirable behaviors and undesirable ones. The idea is that later down the path of life, when their peers may be involved in dangerous or illegal behavior, my students will be able to distinguish between right and wrong. The capacity to discern will make it

easier to make informed personal decisions. Research supports a positive correlation between being accepted by one's peers and success in school (Patrick 1997). Therefore, I feel it is imperative my students be successful in this or any curriculum and be taught appropriate social skills in hopes that they will make sensible decisions in both areas.

"The Hero within the Special Needs Child" will enrich the students by giving them the tools necessary to be productive citizens and good friends. My desire is to build character and foster friendships in elementary school Life Skills students. As they mature, they will master concepts to utilize in the teen and young adult years when they will be imperative. Ideally, my unit will also teach the students to be leaders by example so that they will have positive influences on those around them.

The focus of a Life Skills class, given the nature of the students, is less on academics than in traditional classes and more on social skills. Because of this, my curriculum will center on the social aspect of being a hero. The students will look at the behaviors of a hero, the characteristics of a hero and the emotions and feelings of that hero. Using simple vocabulary we will create a working definition of a hero based on children's literature, charts and classroom dramatizations. When they begin to understand how their behaviors, characteristics, emotions and feelings affect those around them, my students will be able to make decisions on personal behavior accordingly. This will aid them in socializing better with their general education peers as well as their Life Skills classmates.

There are many difficulties the Life Skills teacher faces in the classroom. Low motivation to learn, lack of communication and below average social and mental abilities are just a few. It is for these reasons that my unit will tap into many different modes of learning. Once the students' abilities and reward preferences are established, the lessons will use visual, auditory and tactile modes of presentation as well as include many points of interest to attract them into the subject and keep them interested. Literature, music and visual arts are among the methods used to initiate and keep their interest. The aim is to offer a broad variety of approaches in order to find that which will engage the student making learning more pleasurable (Greenspan and Wieder 1998).

Integrating the Curriculum into the Classroom

The various modes and methods of learning mentioned above will be used to present the activities from the Functional Academic Curriculum for Exception Students (F.A.C.E.S.) from which my students' Individual Educational Plan (IEP) objectives are developed. F.A.C.E.S is the required curriculum for HISD Life Skills and consists of five modules: Math, Science, Social Studies, Personal Health and Vocational. The social studies module will be most effective for teaching heroism to my students and consequently, "The Hero within the Special Needs Child" will be incorporated into the daily social studies hour. Specifically, I will utilize the following F.A.C.E.S. social studies objectives: (1) identifying a friend, (2) exhibiting sympathetic behavior and concern for others, (3)

identifying ways personal behaviors affect others, and (4) identifying ways peers are alike and different.

“The Hero within the Special Needs Child” will last four weeks and it will be presented early in the fall semester. However, to reinforce the positive behaviors, the topic of heroism will continue throughout the school year with a permanent “Hero Learning Center” and weekly “Hero Hour” sessions. In these exercises, the students will think of ways they can be nice to others. They will talk about deeds they can perform, both openly and anonymously. Early in the unit, the students will focus on discovering their own behaviors and feelings. I feel this is extremely important because the majority of my students are non-communicative. They have difficulty defining their own wants and needs, feelings and emotions. Without understanding one’s own emotions and feelings, it is difficult for anyone to know how to act positively toward others. However, when these special children can express positive emotions and what makes them feel good, they can more easily behave with regard to others in a pleasant manner. Identifying and communicating feelings will be taught with books, “feelings” cards and using Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) symbols. For PECS, I use Boardmaker for Windows to create my picture symbols; however, any comparable software will suffice.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Lessons Plans and Take-Home Activities

All activities in my curriculum will have an introduction to attract the students to the lesson. This might be a song about friendship, an art project or an excitement-filled story. This learning experience will provide a gateway from something the pupils enjoy to something from which they can learn. These introductory activities will be used to foster socialization as well. For example, each student may be given a component of the supplies needed. Each student will then have to communicate to the others what they need to complete the activity.

The classroom activities will entail defining a hero, looking for heroic characteristics in classmates and school faculty. My students will decide on acts of heroism that each of them can perform him/herself. While I will include mostly group activities in the curriculum lesson plans, individual activities will be created for the students to take home. These activities will be geared toward involving the whole family with my students. The intent is to extend the knowledge learned in school with the focus on heroes they may know in the neighborhood and how to be a hero in their own neighborhood.

For many Life Skills students, being able to generalize information is problematic. The take-home activities will help the students learn in a setting other than the classroom. A secondary intent of the take-home activities is to give the parents something tangible to foster communication and help them bond with their children. Because of this, the reports of these activities will not need to be returned to me. Instead, the exercises will give the

parents topics to discuss that are familiar to the student and allow them to use the “homework” at their discretion in a relaxed environment. There will be no rushing to finish before a deadline making the work less effective.

“I Can Help” is an example of a take-home activity that will be given to the students. A list of ways the child can help at home will be given to the students after a role-playing lesson (discussed next). The list will include 10 to 15 possibilities such as setting the table, cleaning up after a meal and feeding the pet. These are all objectives found in the F.A.C.E.S modules and are, therefore, taught in class. From the “I Can Help” list each student will select one choice that he or she would like to try at home. This gives them responsibility and increases the chance that the chore will be completed. The child will then choose rewards to be given upon task completion. Consistent with rewards given in the classroom, the rewards will be more plentiful when “I Can Help” is first sent home. They may want TV time, ice cream and extra playtime. When sent home subsequent times, the rewards will be limited to one or two and eventually to none at all. In contrast, the number of tasks chosen will increase with every time the list is sent home. The “I Can Help” list will be sent home at the end of each week of the curriculum. If, after talking with the parents, the response to the list is positive, I will consider sending the list home every week for the remainder of the school year.

As students begin to identify their own emotions, the focus will shift to how personal behaviors affect those around them. Hero-based literature will be used during read-aloud sessions. Students will then reenact the stories presented. Pretend play, though structured in this case, develops abstract thinking, which is important to most of what we do in the world (Greenspan and Wieder 1998). The fact that it will be structured and often repetitive will be valuable because it will allow the child to know what comes next.

For the autistic child, the predictability of certain fairy tales such as *The Billy Goats Gruff* will be ideal. The three Billy goats do and say the same thing and the troll repeats his lines each time. Such a fairy tale will be a launching point for stories with more clear heroes in them (e.g. *Cinderella*, *Mulan*, *the Wizard of Oz*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, etc.). With each scenario, we will use costumes and props to act out the stories. This will keep their attention and get students involved. Because I average five students in my class, each student would be able to play a part. Doing this would give an opportunity for them to experience being the protagonist and antagonist in each situation.

Fables will be selected for their inclusion of many different cultures and the presence of protagonists who are disabled in some form or another. Specific attention will be given to presenting books about heroes from the countries and cultures represented in the classroom: African American, Mexican and Guatemalan. If the opportunity allows, parents will be asked to present a story of a lesson about a hero in their culture. These heroes do not have to be the ones known worldwide, but can be a relative or friend of the student or student’s family.

Expanding on the role-playing, the students will act out ways to conduct themselves in public settings. They will design ways to entertain friends and how to lend a hand when others are hurt or in trouble. With assistance, they will also think up ways to spread “random acts of kindness”- deeds that are seen and unseen, ones in which they do not expect something in return. Examples of such acts that will be suggested are picking up trash on the playground, making a ‘thinking of you’ card for someone and/or leaving a small gift in the box of a teacher or staff member. As the year progresses, the students will be encouraged to think of these acts with less assistance from the teacher. The teacher will enable the students to begin to change their behaviors by giving compliments and helping them to work without assistance. In the process, I will informally evaluate the students throughout the year to make sure the objectives are being met.

During all lessons and exercises, I will focus on finding a balance between presentation and support. It is crucial for the presentation to be animated in order to “woo the child into interaction” (Greenspan and Wieder 1998). All the while, I will also avoid over-stimulating which can lead to the loss of concentration. This is a fine line that every teacher has to walk, but it is extremely important to the Life Skills teacher. Any student without interest in the activity at hand and you risk passing up a teachable moment. One unmanageable student and there is a risk of losing control of the whole class. This can be difficult in the beginning but the “Abilities Inventory” and the “Incentive Inventory” are designed to give the teacher as much insight into the child, before the curriculum is enacted, as possible.

There are ways I will give support to my students throughout the curriculum. Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D. suggests several in her publication *Learning Structures Inside the Head* (1997). A few of the most essential (in my opinion) are: giving adequate wait time, giving specific praise and the reasons for that praise, desisting (not bringing attention to every negative behavior), asking questions that require more thought and telling students why their answers are right or wrong. Additionally, respect and gentleness are important for student learning and it begins with the teacher’s attitude toward her students. Temple Grandin explains it well in her book *Thinking in Pictures* (1995) when she states she “understood the ideas of reciprocity and gentleness...needed to (be) cultivated toward other people.” However, it took her receiving these things first.

Every teacher is aware of the importance of these notions, but I for one often forget in the middle of teaching and when student behavior is less than desired. It is for this reason that I will be reminding myself of these hints throughout the four weeks of the curriculum and for all my teaching endeavors.

Beyond the Curriculum

The Learning Center will be an integral part of the curriculum. It will be created at the end of the unit using the books and activities that seemed to interest the students the most. The “Hero Learning Center” will stay in the classroom for the remainder of the

year and will be available during social studies and during free time. This will help the students remember what was learned during the unit and will continue to promote self-awareness and helping others. In the Center there will be books about heroes that the students can read. While none of my students currently reads in the traditional sense, they will be able to look through the pictures. They will be reminded of the activities and dramatizations the class did in conjunction with each book. The teacher will be on hand to read the books to them or encourage the students to make up their own stories to go along with the pictures.

Any presentations by parents will be placed in a classroom memory book complete with pictures and picture symbols. The memory book will be located in the Learning Center and can be shared among the students or with visitors to the room. This will allow the students to communicate about those events while having a personal connection with them. Also included in the Center will be paper and pencils so the students can create cards or write letters to others. The writing will be done by dictation, copying or picture symbols. Because one focus of the unit will be on personal emotions, there will be emotion charts available for the students to indicate their current emotions. This exercise will also be used when their behaviors are causing problems in the classroom. The students (or the teacher) can go to the Center and point to the picture that best indicates their current mood so others can better understand why they may be crying or upset. When appropriate, the Center will be changed to keep it fresh and interesting.

Another important follow-up to the curriculum is the "Hero Hour." This will begin after the unit is completed as a way to keep the students thinking about being a hero. Each session will begin with brainstorming to get ideas to do something for someone else so they feel special. Initially, the teacher may have to offer most of the suggestions. As the year progresses, however, the students should begin to suggest ideas on their own though they may be repetition of the teacher's ideas. If it is feasible, I would like to have the students do something for the birthday of each faculty and staff member. Since we are a small school (Wharton has a personnel of approximately 35 people), this could work. If it becomes too much of an undertaking, we will focus on the people my students come into contact with regularly: ancillary teachers, cafeteria workers, office workers, etc. The essence of the "Hero Hour" is to give the students ample opportunity to make contributions to the community (in this case the school community) and consequently increase their sense of self-worth (Habel et al. 1999).

CONCLUSION

Many strategies and activities will go into "The Hero within the Special Needs Child" in order to reach each student at his or her level. I will pull from the students' culture and background as well as familiar people and situations. Many different modes of learning will be implemented to ensure that each student has the opportunity to learn in a way they can understand. With this, I believe I can help my students learn about themselves and learn how to help others. Along the way, I expect to learn something too.

Being a hero, as defined all through the curriculum, is a life-long learning process. It does not end when the curriculum does, but will continue beyond that time period. Learning to communicate feelings effectively and how to treat others with kindness and respect are two principles that transcend time, span all areas of life and will benefit my students in all situations they may encounter.

The importance of teaching heroism during the entire school year is represented most clearly in the proposed follow-up activities to “The Hero within the Special Needs Child.” When the four weeks have finished, the students will continue to participate in activities that relate to heroism. The permanent “Hero Learning Center” and the “Hero Hour” sessions will keep the concept of heroism fresh and allow the students to continue to learn how to be a hero. These, with the inventories created to enhance teacher understanding and student participation, the Life Skills students at Wharton Elementary will gain the knowledge essential to being a productive citizen and a dynamic student.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan I – What is a Hero?

Objective

To define a hero in terms the students can understand

Procedure

Read a book to the students depicting a hero or a heroic deed. Following the story, discuss what happened in the story making special note to discuss the desirable behaviors and the undesirable ones. Draw a smiley face and a frowning face at the top of a piece of chart paper. Using one word or short phrases, list the positive qualities under the happy face and the negative ones under the sad face.

Pick a number of students that corresponds to the number of characters in the story. Have them recreate the story while the remaining students act as the audience. Only the main points need to be reenacted, not every detail. It is important to keep the ‘actors’ moving and the ‘audience’ interested.

When the scene has been performed once, discuss how the various characters may have felt following positive or negative behaviors. Perform the scene a second time with any students who did not participate. Do the scene as often as needed to allow each student to participate but preferably not more than three times. After each presentation, discuss feelings that result from behaviors.

The use of props and costumes is encouraged but need not be extravagant. For example, any hat could suffice as a crown and a stick could be a staff. For nonverbal students, give them two craft sticks, one with a large happy face and one with a large sad

face. These can be used to participate in the discussions. To respond to how the character he or she played may have felt, the student can hold up the corresponding face.

Conclude the lesson with a rewrite of the story where any negative behavior is replaced with positive ones. Allow the students to come up with their own ideas. However, the teacher can make suggestions such as giving a hug, helping with a difficult activity or inviting the other person to play a game.

Lesson Plan II - “Know-Want to Know-Learned (K-W-L)” Chart

Procedure

Present a book to the students, preferably one the students have not read before. Prior to reading it, ask the students what they already know about the story or what they think they know by looking at the cover and some pictures inside. List these answers on chart paper under “Know.”

Then ask what they want to know about the story. Perhaps they want to know why a particular picture is in the book or what the characters names are. List these answers next to “Know” under the title “Want to Know.”

Now read the book. It will be helpful to refer back to the list when something they wanted to know is revealed. When the book is finished, review the “Know” list checking for accuracy. Then go through the “Want to Know” list and write any answered questions under “Learned.”

This lesson relies heavily on the verbal students of the class. While they are the ones who will answer the teacher’s questions, the teacher can in turn reiterate the questions to the nonverbal students to encourage their participation. For example, if a verbal student say he wants to know if there is a wolf in the story, the teacher can ask a nonverbal student “John, do you want to know if there is a wolf in the story?” or “That’s a good question, who else wants to know if there is a wolf in the story?”

Lesson Plan III – The Wrong Way and The Right Way

Objective

To act out the unpleasant way of handling circumstances; then resolve them by acting out the pleasant way to handle them.

Procedure

Draw a sad face and a happy face on the board. Point to the sad face and explain to the students they are going to act out a situation in a way that would make someone sad. Possible scenarios include asking for a toy, trying to get around someone blocking the way, asking another student to be quiet and being hit by a student. Two students then act out the wrong way to handle a situation: hitting, screaming, etc. It is important for the

students to act this out and not actually use aggression on one another. The teacher may have to show by example first.

Once the students have demonstrated the wrong way, point to the happy face and explain the situation will remain the same, but now they have to resolve the situation in a way that will make everyone happy. This is an opportunity to explain that even when we do things the right way, people may still be unhappy with us. However, there are always nice ways to handle situations. It is valuable for the students to learn not to be taken advantage of, but also learn appropriate social skills.

APPENDIX A

Abilities Inventory

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Sources: Teacher, Student, Parents, Student's Revised Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development

Important! List the abilities the student currently has. All answers should be in a positive format. All examples in parentheses do not represent all possibilities of a particular skill. However, if there is difficulty in thinking of a response, use the examples and consider the following:

1. Does the student have an interest from a distance?
2. Does the student attempt to explore in that area?

Motor Skills

Fine-motor skills (handwriting, puzzles, painting, cutting with scissors)

Gross-motor skills (walking, kicking, jumping, hopping, running, throwing)

Speech and Language Skills

Names objects, gives personal data, follows directions...

Social and Emotional Skills

Has a close friend, plays cooperatively with others, takes turns, gives affection, is proud of accomplishments...

Reading Skills

Has an interest in books, can recite the alphabet, recognizes letters, knows letter sounds...

Writing Skills

Scribbles, can copy lines, can copy letters and numbers, writes personal data...

Math Skills

Can count by rote, recognizes numerals, can tell time, recognizes coins, knows ordinal positions...

Additional Skills

*Based upon *Revised Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development (Birth to Seven Years)* (Brigance, Inc. 1991) and *An Experimental Curriculum for Young Mentally Retarded Children* (Connor and Talbot 1966).

APPENDIX B

Incentive Inventory

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Sources: Teacher, Student, Parents

List as many possibilities in each category. If possible, list in order of preference from most effective to least effective.

What foods does the student like? (Example: M & M's, popcorn, soft drinks)

Does the student have any food allergies?

What kinds of entertainment does the student like? (Example: video, radio, computer)

What types of independent work does the student like? (Example: free time)

What kind of adult or peer approval does the student prefer? (Example: teacher praise, stickers on work, selection for teamwork, classmates asking for help)

What privileges or responsibilities encourage the student to participate? (Example: class monitor, directing class play, classroom job)

Additional incentives that work for the student:

*Based upon *Educational Psychology: Windows on Classrooms, 3rd Ed.* (Eggen and Kauchak 1997).

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books for Students

- Alexander, Liza. *Ernie Gets Lost*. New York: Western Publishing Company, 1985.
A children's book that shows how easy it is to get lost in a department store as well as gives practical advice on what to do if it happens.
- Berenstain, Stan and Jan. *The Berenstain Bears Learn to Share*. Westport, CT: Reader's Digest Kids. 1992.
A children's book about things friends can do together but also presents how arguments get in the way. Also shows how one can have fun playing by oneself.
- Cohen, Miriam. *Will I have a Friend?* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967.
A children's book that follows a young boy's first day of school. All his attempts at making friends are unsuccessful until another student shows him a toy. After that, the other students start making friends with him too.
- Elliot, Dan. *Grover Goes to School*. New York: Western Publishing Company, 1983.
A children's story in which Grover tries so hard to please everyone and make them happy he ends up being miserable. It shows how there are nice ways to say "no".
- Hoban, Russell. *Best Friends for Frances*. New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1969.
A children's book about Frances who does not let her younger sister be her best friend because she already has one, Albert. But when Albert decides to have a no-girls baseball game, Frances discovers that sisters can be friends too.
- Hoff, Syd. *Who will be my Friends*. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.
This short story is about a boy who does not have any friends in school until the other children see his ability to catch and throw a ball.
- Lobel, Arnold. *Fables*. New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1980.
A winner of the Caldecott Medal that presents one page stories with each followed by a positive moral or adage.
- Oliver, Clare. *Animals Helping with Special Needs*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1999.
A beautifully formatted children's book that explains how animals such as dogs, horses, monkeys (to name a few) help people who are deaf, blind, have seizure disorders, etc. It includes "Animal Anecdotes" that mention specific animals and how they have helped people.
- Piper, Watty. *The Little Engine that Could*. New York: Platt and Munk Publishers, 1961.

A classic tale of the Little Blue Engine who is asked to help a group of dolls and toys in need. While she is not the strongest of the engines and has never been to the other side of the mountain, her positive attitude and “I think I can” mantra set her up for success.

Rathman, Peggy. *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1995.

Winner of the Caldecott Medal, this book tells of Officer Buckle and his police dog Gloria. Together they form a partnership in which they are reminded it is important to always stick with your buddy.

Roberts, Sarah. *Don't Cry Big Bird*. New York: Western Publishing Company, 1983.

A children's book about needing to make adjustments so everyone can play.

Roberts, Sarah. *Ernie's Big Mess*. New York: Western Publishing Company, 1983.

This children's book shows how words can hurt and how friends stick together even when they upset each other.

Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1963.

This book, also a Caldecott Medal winner, is about Max, a mischievous boy whose antics land him banished to his room with no supper. It is there that his imagination sends him to an island where the Wild Things live. Though they make him their king, he becomes lonely and returns to his loved ones.

Filmography

“I Wonder.” “The Me I Like.” “When Things go Wrong.” “When I Feel Afraid.”
Developing Language Skills: My Feelings Count. Encyclopedia Britannica. 1976.
Film strips with corresponding audiotapes that focus on emotions and feelings

Hero Learning Center Books

These books, available in the Wharton Library and Life Skills classroom, will be used for a “Hero Learning Center.” They were selected for their availability and broad range of types of heroes. They do not represent all the possibilities for the Center: any books on heroes are acceptable. Some of the following are used in the curriculum as well.

Adler, David A. *A Picture Book of Helen Keller*. New York: Holiday House, 1990.

Adler, David A. *Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man*. San Diego: Gulliver Books, 1997.

Aliki. *A Weed is a Flower: The Life of George Washington Carver*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

- Bains, Rae. *Abraham Lincoln*. Mahwah, NJ: Troll Associates, 1985.
- Franchere, Ruth. *Cesar Chavez*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1970.
- Klein, Norma. *Girls can be anything*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1973.
- Logue, Mary. *Forgiveness: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi*. New York: The Child's World, 1998.
- Mosher, Kiki. *Learning about Compassion from the Life of Florence Nightingale*. New York: Power Kids Press, 1996.
- Mosher, Kiki. *Learning about Fairness from the Life of Susan B. Anthony*. New York: Power Kids Press, 1996.
- Murray, Peter. *Bravery: The Story of Sitting Bull*. New York: The Child's World, 1998.
- Murray, Peter. *Curiosity: The Story of Marie Curie*. New York: The Child's World, 1998.
- Murray, Peter. *Perseverance! The Story of Thomas Alva Edison*. New York: The Child's World, 1998.
- Oliver, Clare. *Animals Helping with Special Needs*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1999.
- Wheelock, Watten H. and J.O. Maynes. *Hispanic Heroes of the U.S.A.* St. Paul: EMC Corporation, 1976.
- Woodworth, Deborah. *Determination: The Story of Jackie Robinson*. York: The Child's World, 1998.

Books and Articles for Teachers:

- Begun, Ruth Weltmann. *Ready-to-Use Social Skills Lessons and Activities*. West Nyack, NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1995
A curriculum to help build self-esteem, self-control and responsibility.
- Brigance, Albert H. *Revised Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development (Birth to Seven Years)*. North Billerica, MA: Curriculum Associates, Inc., 1991.
The diagnostic test is the Locally Developed Alternative Assessment (LDAA) used in the Wharton Elementary Life Skills class. Through observation of and performance from the child, the test will reveal where the student's abilities levels are. Covers motor skills, speech and language, reading and writing, math, self-help skills and general knowledge.

- Connor, Frances and Talbot, Mabel. *An Experimental Curriculum for Young Mentally Retarded Children*. New York: Teachers College Press. 1966.
This book, while not current, gives excellent categories for rating a child's abilities level.
- Dreikurs, Rudolf, M.D. *Psychology in the Classroom: A Manual for Teachers*. 2nd Ed. New York: Harper & Row. 1968.
A useful book that explains how to handle different situations in the classroom. Gives many examples. Needs to be viewed with caution due to the age of the research.
- Eggen, Paul and Don Kauchak. *Educational Psychology: Windows on Classrooms*. 3rd Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 1997.
An educational psychology textbook that covers learning, motivation, instruction and assessment in the classroom.
- Grandin, Temple. *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from my Life with Autism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
This book provides extraordinary, first-hand insight into the autistic mind. Temple Grandin holds a Ph.D. in animal sciences, despite her autistic label. She has been able to communicate in simple terms the reasoning behind autistic behavior.
- Greenspan, Stanley and Serena Wieder. *The Child with Special Needs*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 1998.
A practical book that promotes discovering the strengths of special needs children and gives ideas for encouraging emotional and intellectual growth.
- Habel, John, Lisa Bloom, Marissa Ray, and Ellen Bacon. "Consumer Reports: What Students with Behavior Disorders Say About School." *Remedial and Special Education* 20 (1999): 93-105.
A study on how students with behavior disorders experienced school in four different categories: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.
- Johnson, David R. *Motivation Counts: Teaching Techniques that Work*. Parsippany, NJ: Dale Seymour Publications.
Though this book is geared to the math classroom, it gives relevant motivations techniques that can be applied to every discipline.
- Lyons, Beth. *Me and My World*. Waterbury, CT: Graphic Learning, 1993.
An integrated social studies curriculum that includes many activities and materials.

- Moore, Jo Ellen. *People Who Help Us*. Monterey, CA: Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, 1995.
A social studies guide with simple stories and activities.
- Nelsen, Jane, Ed. *Positive Discipline*. Fair Oaks, CA: Sunrise Press, 1987.
A resource book for parents and teachers. Includes review questions at the end of each chapter.
- Page, Parker, Ph.D. *Getting Along: A Fun-Filled Set of Stories, Songs and Activities to Help Kids Work and Play Together*. New York: Children's Television Resource and Education Center, 1988.
A fully illustrated book with activities and songs for getting along. Includes a song and story cassette.
- Patrick, Helen. "Social Self-Regulation: Exploring the Relations between Children's Social Relationships, Academic Self-Regulation, and School Performance." *Educational Psychologist* 32 (1997): 209-220.
A journal article that explains the association between school performance outcomes and children's peer relations. Has an extensive list of references.
- Payne, Ruby K, Ph.D. *Learning Structures Inside the Head*. Baytown, Texas: RFT Publishing, 1997.
A workshop publication based on Payne's book *A Framework: Understanding Students and Adults from Poverty* that gives many practical strategies for developing positive relationships with students.
- Quill, Kathleen Ann. *Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 2000.
This book is geared to children with autism and includes many activities. It also gives an in-depth look at what autism is.
- Sprick, Randy, Ph.D., Mickey Garrison, Ph.D., and Lisa Howard. *CHAMPs: A Proactive and Positive Approach to Classroom Management*. Longmont, CO: 1998.
This book has practical applications to classroom management. It begins with the start of school and continues throughout the year.
- Wargo, Kyle. *The Functional Academic Curriculum for Exceptional Students (F.A.C.E.S): Social Studies Module*. Lubbock, Texas: Region 17. Education Service Center, 1998.
Required curriculum for Life Skills on which the Individual Education Plan objectives are based. Includes TEKS objectives and lessons plans as well as worksheets.

Williams, Rozanne Lanczak. *Around the Community*. New York: Frank Schaffer Publications, 1998.

A teacher guide for grades K-2, with activities and reproducible booklets, that focuses on where people live.

Williams, Rozanne Lanczak. *My Friends, My Family and Me*. New York: Frank Schaffer Publications, 1998.

A teacher guide for grades K-2 with activities and reproducible booklets that focuses on being part of a family.

Software for Teachers

Boardmaker. CD-ROM. Solana Beach, CA: Mayer-Johnson, Inc., 2001.

This CD-ROM is just one of several picture symbol makers that can be used with PECS, the Picture Exchange Communication System. It includes many feelings and emotions and the categories are easy to narrow down.