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Abstract: This paper examines the role of self-reflection and self-evaluation in early childhood practicum students development of positive guidance skills with children. We examine how helpful students find self-reflection and self-evaluation exercises and how their thoroughness of reflection relates to their progress in acquiring positive guidance skills. Self-reflection also plays a role in students attitudes towards positive guidance and their confidence in using guidance skills. This paper explores the extent to which reflection and evaluation affect the attitudes and confidence of future early childhood educators, which could have an impact on the children and families they work with. Participants were 63 university students (60 female and 3 male) in their junior or senior years in a Human Development and Family Sciences undergraduate program at a university in the southern region of the United States. They were enrolled in an undergraduate class focused on learning -positive guidance- interaction skills and classroom management with young children. Students generally found the self-ratings and goal setting helpful in learning guidance skills. We did not find that thoroughness of self-reflection was related to guidance skills or amount of improvement. There were three groups of students in regards to self-evaluation and supervisor evaluation: those who initially overinflate their abilities, those who initially underinflate their abilities, and those who evaluate themselves consistently.

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Reflective Practice and Self-evaluation in Learning Positive Guidance: Experiences of Early Childhood Practicum Students

Working with children and families is a dynamic process. In order to work effectively as an early childhood educator, it is necessary to engage in ongoing self-evaluation and reflective practice in order to think critically about the ever changing practices and perspectives that influence teaching (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). Specifically, educators' reflections and evaluations of the development and implementation of their guidance skills with children are particularly important in order to effectively meet individual children's needs. The role of self-reflection and evaluation in the learning of guidance techniques has not been given much attention in the literature. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of self-reflection, self-evaluation and goal setting in the development of early childhood students' positive child guidance skills.

Reflection and evaluation

Reflection and evaluation are two separate processes that educators can use to critically analyze their practice with children and families. These processes allow educators to develop as practitioners and contribute to the changing early childhood field through a greater depth and understanding of why educators do what they do (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2005). "Reflective practice is a cycle that involves stopping to consider practices and the reasons for them, thinking critically about alternative perspectives and changing practices based on new understandings" (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002, p. 16). Self-reflection allows educators to distance themselves from their thoughts and actions, make sense of how and why particular practices

worked or didn't work, and use new understandings of these processes to adapt practices to be more effective in the future (Arthur et al., 2005). Self-reflection encourages informed decision making by being able to see things in a different light (Arthur et al, 2005; O'Connor & Diggins, 2002).

Evaluation is an ongoing process involving self-questioning through which educators review the value or effectiveness of a particular practice, as well as why it happened (Arthur et al, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Educators should be engaged in evaluation everyday regarding their teaching strategies in order to contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning (Johnson, 1989). Through evaluation, educators can self-reflect and engage in dialogue with other professionals about current and future practices, and in turn change their practices (Arthur et al., 2005). Information to be used in evaluations can be gathered any number of ways, reflective journals, discussions and written records to name a few.

Reflective practice and self-evaluation are tools by which educators can challenge their own assumptions and beliefs about early childhood education and practices and change their practice based on new insights (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). Educators often come into the field with strongly held beliefs about particular practices, which are largely based on their own experiences and cultural upbringing (Gonzalez-Mena & Shareef, 2005). The use of guidance or classroom management techniques with children is one area where many educators hold strong pre-conceived ideas (McFarland, Allen, Saunders, 2007). It is also essential that early childhood educators critically reflect on their practice in general, with particular attention to guidance, in order to be sensitive to the personal and cultural differences amongst the children in their care. Additionally, reflection on one's own practice may allow educators to think about the power and

gender relationships in the classroom and how their responses to various situations may impact these relationships, which is a key component of critical theory (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004).

Positive Guidance

Positive guidance is currently considered to be quality practice in working with young children. Positive guidance techniques, as opposed to overly permissive or overly punitive discipline techniques, are most beneficial for the social and emotional health of young children (Flicker & Hoffman, 2002; Gartrell, 2002; Porter, 2003). The philosophy behind positive guidance is to support and direct in children the growth of effective life skills. In practicing positive guidance with children, adults use various techniques to guide children through social situations and facilitate the development of emotion regulation. Some positive guidance strategies include offering choices, reasoning, problem-solving, negotiation, conflict resolution, and redirection (Gartrell, 2004; Porter, 2003; Russel, 2004).

The short term objective of positive guidance is to help children understand the appropriateness of their behaviors and how they affect others. The use of positive guidance helps children understand that they need to take into consideration the rights of others, keep themselves and others safe, and respect the environment. The long term goals of positive guidance are to help children internalize the difference between right and wrong, to help children develop successful peer relationship skills, to facilitate self-regulation of emotions, and to develop positive self-esteem (Gartrell, 1997).

Reflection, goal setting, and self-evaluation are important tools in learning to practice positive guidance skills. Some early childhood professionals may find reflection to be more helpful than others. Early childhood professionals who spend time reflecting on their positive

guidance skills may gain insight into how they can modify their practice with both individual children and whole groups. Thus, they may actualize their ideas through practice and therefore become better at implementing guidance. Further, some early childhood professionals may more thoroughly reflect on their skills than others. It is possible that by putting more effort into their reflection, these professionals may have more ideas about how they can improve their skills. By generating more ideas to draw from they may develop more effective guidance strategies.

Many factors influence how adults choose to view their own developing skills related to guidance. For example, social pressure or low self-esteem may lead individuals to underrate their skills. Likewise, abundant confidence may lead some adults to overrate their skills. This paper explores how early childhood practicum students' ratings of their own guidance skills are related to their attitudes towards positive guidance. Because positive guidance is accepted as quality early childhood practice (Gartrell, 2004; Porter, 2003), it is possible that students may view it as a favorable approach to working with children, regardless of their skill in practicing the techniques. However, it is also possible that students who believe their guidance skills are very good also feel favorably towards positive guidance, whereas those who view their skills as poor do not feel favorably towards the practice. Many times adults enjoy and view positively activities they do well.

Self ratings on guidance skills may also be related to confidence in using positive guidance. It is possible that all students will feel confident in using positive guidance because they have all had the opportunity to learn and practice the techniques. However, students who believe their guidance skills are very good may have more confidence in using those skills. Believing in one's ability to use positive guidance may be synonymous with an inner confidence in using those skills.

This paper examines the role of self-reflection and self-evaluation in early childhood practicum students' development of positive guidance skills with children. We examine how helpful students find self-reflection and self-evaluation exercises and how their thoroughness of reflection relates to their progress in acquiring positive guidance skills. Self-reflection also plays a role in students' attitudes towards positive guidance and their confidence in using guidance skills. This paper explores the extent to which reflection and evaluation affect the attitudes and confidence of future early childhood educators, which could have an impact on the children and families they work with.

Method

Participants

Participants were 63 university students (60 female and 3 male) in their junior or senior years in a Human Development and Family Sciences undergraduate program at a university in the southern region of the United States. They were enrolled in an undergraduate class focused on learning "positive guidance" interaction skills and classroom management with young children. Students from two semesters were contacted via email after completion of the class and finalisation of grades to ask for their consent to participate in the study. A second follow-up email was sent out two weeks after the first to students who had not yet responded. The first cohort consisted of 35 students; 9 of whom did not consent to participate, and 3 of whom for which there was no current email address on file. The second cohort consisted of 45 students; 5 of whom did not consent. The overall consent rate was 86.4%. Data from the two cohorts were combined and the total number of participants was 63; 60 were female and 3 were male. There would have been no pressure for students to consent as most of them had already graduated from the university and none of them had any further contact with the lecturer.

Participants averaged 21.2 years old and came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds including White (55.6%, n=35), Hispanic (25.4%), African American (7.9%), Asian (6.3%), Turkish (1.6%) and Indian (1.6%).

Procedure

The undergraduate class on positive guidance included a two hour weekly lecture and a four hour weekly practicum in a University Lab School. During lectures, practicum students were presented with a range of topics and engaged in discussion groups focused on issues related to positive guidance including general child development, positive guidance techniques (eg. conflict negotiation, redirection, positive language), cultural issues, gender issues, effects of corporal punishment, and child aggression. For the practical component of this class, students were placed in one of the nine classrooms at a University Lab School, including four toddler classes, two three-year-old classes, two four-year-old classes, and one five-year-old class and were under the supervision of an experienced Supervising Teacher who modelled positive guidance strategies, gave daily feedback, and completed a mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluation (Professional Skills Inventory) on the students' developing skills. Students were encouraged on a weekly basis to verbally self-reflect on how their skills were developing. Students completed self evaluations (Professional Skills Inventory) on how they believed their positive guidance skills were developing both mid-semester and end-of semester. Students also completed self-reflection activities, including a mid-semester "goals sheet" at the mid-point of their lab placement and end-of semester "status of goals sheet" after lab placements ended. Students met either with the class lecturer or teaching assistant mid-way through the semester to discuss their self evaluations and reflect on their goals.

Measures

Self evaluation: Professional Skills Inventory (PSI)

This measure consists of 40 items related to professionalism and guidance skills including the categories and sub-categories of “Professionalism and relationship with adults” (appearance, participation in daily planning and evaluation, dependability, and cooperation with other adults), “Relationships with children” (positive communication and situation specific knowledge), and “Guidance practices” (avoiding problems, responding to problems, and promoting problem-solving strategies). Each sub-category contains more specific items which were rated both mid- and end-of- semester by both the Supervising Teacher and the student. For example, some items related to avoiding problems included “presents choices or alternatives” and “communicated expectations clearly.” Some items related to positive communication included “uses positive body language” and “demonstrates positive verbal communication”. Each of the 40 items was rated on a 5-point scale; 5 = Strength/excellent skill usage, 4 = Good performance/good skill usage, 3 = Needs improvement/average skills usage, 2 = Minimal performance/less than average skill usage, and 1 = Failing performance/disinterest in skill usage. The total PSI score was obtained by totalling points from each item; the maximum score possible was 200 points. When meeting with the class lecturer mid-semester, students were able to view the Supervising Teacher ratings of their skills and compare this to their own self ratings in order to discover areas of agreement and disagreement. By evaluating their own skills, this measure also encouraged students to think carefully about their skills in many areas of guidance.

This measure was initially used an assessment for undergraduate students. It has been used in one other study to assess parental use of positive guidance (Saunders, 2009). As a new

instrument, reliability and validity have not yet been established. This should be a focus of future studies in which the measure is used.

Self-reflection and goal setting: Mid-semester goals sheet and status of goals sheet

The mid-semester goals sheet contained three open-ended questions focused on self-assessing students' strengths, weaknesses, and goals in learning and implementing guidance skills. Questions included "What are your strengths as far as guidance skills with the children?", "What are some personal goals you have related to guidance skills, that you hope to accomplish by the end of your lab experience (what are some areas/skills you would like to see improvement)?", and "What steps will you take to accomplish these goals?" Students were instructed to take time to reflect on the questions carefully and to be as specific as possible. Otherwise, students were free to answer the questions any way they saw fit.

The status of goals sheet, which was filled out at the end of the semester, allowed students to self-reflect on their progress reaching their guidance goals. There were three open-ended questions including, "List your mid-semester goals and describe your progress in reaching each goal" (e.g., Have you accomplished the goal or do you feel like you could use more work in that area?), "What were your greatest challenges in reaching your guidance goals?", and "What area/skill do you feel like you learned the most or made the most improvement over the semester?" Students were asked to be specific and elaborate on their responses. Students were encouraged to openly discuss these goals with their lecturer and weekly with their supervisor.

Results

Self-Reflection Tasks

Helpfulness of Self-Reflection Tasks

Students were asked to rate how helpful they found the self-reflection tasks in learning positive guidance on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the least helpful and 10 is the most helpful. Responses ranged from 3 to 10, but on average, students seemed to find the reflection tasks helpful. The mean was 7.5 with a standard deviation of 1.63. Although there were a wide range of responses, students generally found the self ratings and goal setting helpful in learning guidance skills. The degree to which students found the self-reflection tasks helpful was not related to their actual skills ratings nor amount of improvement in skills.

Thoroughness of Self-Reflection Tasks

We read through student goals and rated how thorough students were in their thinking about their goals in learning positive guidance. Two of the authors rated both mid-semester goal statements and end-of-semester status of goal statements as either “not thorough”, “thorough” or “very thorough”. Ratings were judged by the amount of detail and apparent thought put into critical reflection. It is possible that students who were more reflective regarding their guidance skills would have higher quality guidance skills and improve more over the semester. Perhaps students who spend more time thinking about improving will likely be the students who improve the most. However, we did not find that thoroughness of self-reflection was related to guidance skills or amount of improvement.

The Impact of PSI Ratings

The PSI is an evaluation tool used to assess students’ skills in using positive guidance. At both mid semester and end of semester, students filled out the PSI as a self-evaluation tool to reflect on their progress in learning positive guidance. Students’ supervising teachers also filled out the PSI at mid and end-of-semester to evaluate the students on their progress in attaining guidance skills.

PSI Ratings' Impact on Students' Favorability Towards Positive Guidance

At the end of the semester, students indicated on a scale from 1 to 10 how favorable they felt towards positive guidance, where 1 was not favorable and 10 was favorable. At mid-semester, students who rated themselves higher ($r = .40^{**}$, $p < .01$, $N=60$) and who overrated themselves as compared to Supervising Teachers ($r = .31^*$, $p < .05$, $N=59$) had more favorable attitudes towards positive guidance at the end of the semester. Likewise, at the end of the semester, students who rated themselves higher had more favorable attitudes towards positive guidance ($r = .36^{**}$, $p < .01$, $N=61$), but the difference between student and Supervising Teacher scores at the end of the semester only marginally correlates with favorability ($r = .23$, $p = .08$, $N=59$). Thus, students with more favorable attitudes towards positive guidance at the end of the semester rated themselves higher in their skills both mid- and end-of-semester, but by the end of the semester the Supervising Teachers raised their ratings to match more with the student ratings.

PSI Ratings' Impact on Students' Confidence in Using Positive Guidance

At the end of the semester, students indicated on a scale from 1 to 10 how confident they felt in using positive guidance skills, where 1 was not confident and 10 was confident. Students who rated themselves higher at mid semester had more confidence in using positive guidance with children at the end of the semester ($r = .26^*$, $p < .05$, $N=60$). There were no differences at the end of the semester in how confident students felt in using positive guidance.

Degree of Match Between Students' Self-Ratings and Supervising Teachers' Ratings of Students

At both mid-semester and at the end-of-semester, we looked at the degree to which student self-evaluations matched their supervising teachers' evaluations of their skills. Specifically, we looked at how many students underestimated, overestimated, or matched the score given to them by their supervising teacher at mid- and end-of-semester. At mid-semester,

most students were rating themselves higher than the supervising teachers were rating them. That is, students perceived themselves to be practicing positive guidance at a higher level than observed by the supervising teacher. At the end of the semester, more students were rating themselves lower than the supervising teachers rated them, but the percentage who matched with the supervising teacher ratings did not change from mid- to end-of-semester.

Degree of match between self-ratings and Supervising Teacher ratings mid-semester

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Students who underestimated	19	30.2	31.1	31.1
Students who matched	14	22.2	23.0	54.1
Students who overestimated	28	44.4	45.9	100.0
Missing	2	3.2	0.0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Degree of match between self-ratings and Supervising Teacher ratings end-of-semester

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Students who underestimated	34	54.0	55.7	55.7
Students who matched	13	20.6	21.3	77.0
Students who overestimated	14	22.2	23.0	100.0
Missing	2	3.2	0.0	
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Discussion

While we did not find that depth or thoroughness of self-reflection was related to the development of positive guidance skills, self-reflection can be beneficial in helping students learn to tailor guidance to meet children's individual needs when students record information regarding their positive guidance skill development. The early childhood practicum students in this study clearly found the reflection and evaluation exercises to be useful in the development of their guidance techniques. For example, students learning positive guidance skills can use goal setting at mid-semester to reflect on their practices and strategize plans to adapt positive guidance practices for the second half of the semester. Mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluations provide students opportunities to examine their practices with children regarding itemized skills used during interactions with children. Supervising Teachers and pre-service teachers can use these evaluations to identify specific examples of guidance skill success and to target areas for improvement.

Additionally, review of supervisors' evaluations may encourage students to reflect on their own practices more accurately. Pre-service teachers benefit from having accurate knowledge about their implementation of positive guidance with young children. They are provided with information that enables them to make realistic adjustments to their current practices.

Given our results, there appear to be three groups of students in regards to self-evaluation and supervisor evaluation: those who initially overinflate their abilities, those who initially underinflate their abilities, and those who evaluate themselves consistently at mid-semester and end-of -semester time points. It was interesting to note that initially, students more often rated themselves higher than their supervisor ratings, however, at the end of the semester, students

more often rated themselves lower than their supervisor ratings. There are some possible explanation for this finding. Perhaps initially, supervisors were more reluctant to give high ratings of student skills because they wanted students to see that there was room for improvement. Thus, if supervisors rated students too high, it is possible for students to think that their skills did not need improvement. Another possible explanation is that students were initially overconfident in their abilities, resulting in overinflation of their skill level. However, after the feedback from their supervisors, they were able to get a more realistic picture of their skills.

Supervisors should be encouraged to review students self-evaluations more frequently since supervisors' formal assessments of students positive guidance skill development are sometimes incongruent with students' self-reflections of positive guidance skill development. Supervisors may be able to adjust modeling or teaching strategies in the classroom if students are unable to determine how to make adjustment in their positive guidance practices based on supervisor evaluations. Seasoned educators can reflect on their own growth over time and use the examples to encourage pre-service teachers and new educators to begin reflecting on their knowledge of positive guidance and development of positive guidance skills early in their careers. Regular review of growth in learning positive guidance should be encouraged so that individuals have accurate information about how their skills are developing over time.

Self-evaluation is an important tool in the education of pre-service teachers. Having multiple opportunities to process the use of guidance skills may help focus students in their interactions with children. As guidance situations arise, pre-service teachers who have spent time reflecting will have pre-planned solutions to guidance situations based on their goal setting and thorough review of their self-evaluations and supervising teacher's evaluations. Pre-service teachers benefit from personalized learning experiences, which help them focus on application of

practices they first learn about in the lecture environment (McFarland et al, 2007). Self-reflection provides pre-service teachers opportunities to set goals for particular positive guidance practices and strategies, to review their progress, and to make adjustments to their practices as needed. Critical reflection of practices is an essential step in becoming aware of one's own beliefs and biases about children, as well as in effectively adjusting guidance in response to individual children keeping in mind personal and cultural diversity (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004).

Currently, there is limited literature referencing the utility of self-reflection and evaluation during the process of learning to implement positive guidance in early childhood learning environments. The findings from this study indicate that clearly identified goals and opportunities to reflect and evaluate one's self encourages students to focus on learning particular positive guidance strategies. Young children likely benefit from the targeted focus and reflection of pre-service teachers who are sensitive to the nuances of individualized guidance. The use of positive guidance in the early childhood learning environment is considered a proximal indicator of child care quality, and more sensitive measures of process level variables in adult-child interaction are necessary to better understand the impact on children's development (Dunn, 1993).

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