Research Spotlight

The Building Foundations for Friendship (BFF) Game

Several school psychology researchers from Dr. Kara McGoey’s directed research group at Duquesne University are investigating the effectiveness of a preschool anti-bullying curriculum they have designed. Each of the Preschool 4’s classes will participate in eight weekly sessions of the BFF curriculum during which they will learn about friendship skills, identifying different types of peer interactions, and responding appropriately to others’ aggression. Prior to the start of these sessions, each child for whom parents have submitted a consent form will be observed in the classroom, teachers will complete a brief questionnaire about the behavior of the child, and the child will participate in the BFF Game. This game is designed to assess the child’s knowledge of key aspects of friendship, as well as their processes of problem solving, before exposure to the curriculum. Each child will also be observed in the classroom during the weeks that BFF sessions are conducted. After the eight sessions are conducted, the child will again be observed in the classroom, teachers will complete the same brief behavior questionnaire, and the child will participate in the same BFF Game to assess how much knowledge he or she has gained from the curriculum.

The BFF Game utilizes dynamic assessment techniques with progressively more specific prompts offering increasingly more explicit hints to probe deeper into the child’s knowledge base. All learners will progress through the same sequence of prompts during the five to ten minute assessment. For the purposes of the current study, prompts will cover the full range of the targeted knowledge and skills included in the curriculum itself. By comparing children’s pre- and post-lesson responses to prompts such as, “Tell me about friends” and “What do you do when a friend is not nice to you?” the researchers can assess how the BFF anti-bullying curriculum increases knowledge about friendship.

Research for Undergraduate Courses

Carnegie Mellon’s Psychology Department offers multiple courses to provide undergraduates with a variety of theory, research, and practice experiences.

Non-Participant Observation: Students from Dr. Carver’s Principles of Child Development class will do two observation projects during the spring semester to provide firsthand experience with the dramatic developmental progress that occurs during the early childhood period (i.e., rather than just reading about it in a book). For each assignment, they observe specific differences between preschoolers and kindergartners in motor skills, social interactions, etc., using a checklist to record observations and then discussing the similarities and differences in an essay.

Research Methods Class Studies: Students in Dr. Erik Thiessen’s Research Methods course will start with a lab to learn basic strategies for conducting ethical research with young children. Then they will work in groups to conduct a study of their own design, which will be approved both by their teacher and by Dr. Carver. The course is designed to teach undergraduates both the theoretical and practical skills necessary to conduct effective early childhood research.