

How can I improve children's social skills by developing trust with other children and adults?

Robyn Berardi

Biography



Robyn graduated from Mohawk College in 1988 with an Early Childhood Education Diploma. She is the mother of 3 children, ages 11, 15 and 16 and has worked in the child care community for 17 years. Shortly after graduating, she worked part-time at Rainbow Room Lab School (at Mohawk College) while her daughter, then 6 weeks old attended the infant program. She worked full time at Pauline Johnson Child Care Centre for 11 years as an Early Childhood Educator so has had experience working in the infant, toddler and preschool programs. More recently, she has been employed with Children Aid Society of Brant since July, 2003 and has been involved in a variety of community programs, the latest being the Branlyn/Notre Dame Launch Pad which opened in September, 2004.

Abstract

Social skills are a very important part of children's growth and development. The more programs and exposure they have to social situations at a young age the easier it will be for them to adjust to their school setting. This project involves tracking the social skills of several children from September 2004 to the present.

Question

My question for this research project is:

“How can I improve children's social skills by developing trust with other children and adults?”

Through their social skills I would like to instill sharing, co-operation and participation in group activities.

Case Studies

Leah

Leah started coming to the Launch Pad with her mom, Lana, in September, 2004. Leah is three years old and will be four in October. Leah's parents were undecided whether they would send Leah to Junior Kindergarten in September 2005 because she will still only be three years old in September. They are not sure if she would be ready socially.

When she first came to the Launch Pad Program, she stuck very close to her mother and would

wait for her mother to initiate activities. Leah had a new brother arrive in October and had to adjust to the change at home. Leah's father brought her to the program so they could maintain the same routine for Leah.

At first Leah would come to circle time and stood on her circle mat and only observe circle. Lana said they had Leah in a children's music group and Leah did not participate initially. As she continued to attend the Launch Pad, she became more involved in her music program.



By the beginning of November Leah would anticipate circle time and set out the mats for herself and other children. By the end of November Leah would answer questions at circle and fully participate in all activities. If I had forgotten a favourite song, Leah would ask if we could sing it. If I introduced a new song Leah would observe until she felt comfortable participating. Lana told me that Leah had a guitar at home and pretended to strum it like an autoharp which I used at circle time. She sings to all her dolls. (Journal entry November 29, 2004)

Leah walked through the Launch Pad door very cautiously and liked to observe the room and participants before deciding which activity she would like to do first. She was very sensitive to change and noticed if there were new people in the room or if there were new activities to play with. Leah loved to make her own creations at the creative art table and would stay there for a long



period of time. Leah's father tucked her into bed one night, they have the same bedtime routine. When Leah woke up in the morning she saw that her doll did not have the right blanket covering her. Leah told Lana that her baby did not have a good night sleep because Daddy put the wrong blanket on her. (Journal entry: March 10, 2005)

This duck was created with materials from the open art shelf. Leah said she put feathers on both side so the duck could swim.

As the room quiets at the end of the morning, Leah becomes more comfortable in the room and is more willing to talk and share information. (Journal entry: March 9, 2005)

According to her parents, Leah asks to come to the Launch Pad everyday.

We needed to close the Launch Pad one day. Leah,

Lana and Liam walked to the Launch Pad not realizing we were closed. Mom said Leah cried all the way home and couldn't understand why we weren't open. (Journal entry:February 1, 2005)

Lana also finds the program beneficial to her own social needs as she is a stay at home parent. She moved to Brantford from British Columbia and knew very few people. She has made connections with other parents in her neighbourhood as well as throughout Brantford. This connection is important for both Leah and Lana because some of these children Leah will be going to school with in September. It gives Lana a chance to share information, help solve parenting issues or concerns and enjoy the company of other adults.

I spent some time working on having Leah come through the door without her mother. Lana would take her time getting Liam out of the car seat. I asked Leah if she would like to come into the room with me. Thursday March 10,2005(journal entry) was the first time Leah would let me take her into the room. She hesitated a little but came with me.

Leah has a few friends that she played with while she was at the Launch Pad. Her friends were quiet like Leah. She appeared quite comfortable in her setting and with her friends. She began to assert herself and ask her friends if they would like to play.

Hooray, it is now May 9th (journal entry) and Leah came walking through the door on her own and was ready to play without any hesitation.

Ainsley

Ainsley started coming to the Launch Pad with her Mom Angie in October, 2004. Ainsley turned 2 in September 2004. She is very shy and quiet. Ainsley and her younger sister Laurel started coming to the program with their nanny Sharon on a regular basis. It took Ainsley a long time to trust other people and feel comfortable in the room. Ainsley still has another year before she goes to school.



By visiting the Launch Pad, Ainsley made friends and built trusting relationships with other children. She became an eager participant at circle time. Although she would not say her name at circle when it was her turn, she actively participated in all our songs and activities. Best of all she remembered all of the songs and practiced them at home.

Evan, Aidan and Quinlyn

Evan, Aidan and Quinlyn also attended the Launch Pad with their mother, Fatima. Evan attended Junior Kindergarten at Notre Dame School. Aidan will be going to Junior Kindergarten this September. Fatima was also uncertain if she would send Aidan to school in September because she wasn't sure if he was ready. Aidan will be four in October. Fatima and her husband Rob have

reconsidered because of the change they have seen in Aidan since he has been attending the Launch Pad.

Circle Time

Circle time is a very important part of our day. It is at the same time everyday to create a routine. It is a time to:

- learn
- share information
- increase attention span
- learn new songs and activities
- socialize
- listen and follow directions
- encourage turn taking
- have fun

I know it is circle time when the children have their mats out and are waiting for me to start circle. They seem to know without anyone telling them that it is 10:30. It is like an internal clock.

The parents requested a list of all the words for our songs. They like to sing the songs at home with their children and sometimes the words are forgotten by the time they get home.



Christian

Christian often performs for his family at home. One time he gathered the whole family and did a complete circle time from beginning to end. His family even had to call him "Robyn".(journal entry: January 20, 2005)

Christian started attending the Launch Pad in September 2004 with his Grandma Helen. Christian had a difficult time at circle time. He would get his circle mat and sit down but as soon as we started circle he seemed to have his own agenda. We recently made progress which is very exciting.

Christian recently decided that it was OK to participate in circle and sing the songs and activities. (Journal entry: May 10, 2005) It was wonderful to see the change. He laughed at circle and had fun. He told his mother while he



was in the bathtub that he had something exciting to tell her. He said “He couldn’t believe that Robyn picked him first at circle time.” (Journal entry: May 12, 2005)

Christian’s mother said the Launch Pad became the topic of conversation at their dinner table. She said Christian was very excited about having his turn at circle time. (Journal entry: May 18, 2005)

Emily

Emily started attending the Launch Pad in October 2004 with her Grandma Rita. They came on a regular basis every Thursday. Emily was 18 months old when she started to attend. Emily’s mom Teri called Grandma on the phone one day. She could not figure out why Emily kept taking the dog’s mat that is at the patio door. She would then sit down and look at Terry and wait. Rita told Teri that we use mats at circle time and sing songs. Teri needed to buy Emily her own mat so they could have circle time at home. (Journal entry: November 25, 2004)

Circle time is also a time for the children to practice standing up in front of a group of people and dance, or jump without feeling embarrassed. It builds their confidence and boosts their self-esteem. I use one of two songs every circle time that gives each child this opportunity. If the child does not want a turn and is not comfortable, that is alright too, we just move on to the next child. The whole idea is to build their self-esteem not embarrass them.



The school library is next door to the Launch Pad. Sometimes we can go into the library for story time which promotes literacy and respect for books. We also have someone from the Brantford Public Library to have a special circle time with the children once a month.



Conclusion

This action research project has been a real eye-opener for me. I have been involved in other community programs but never right from the beginning. It has been a wonderful experience watching the children and families grow and make connections as a community. We have moms, dads, grandmas and caregivers come to the Launch Pad on a regular basis. The Launch Pad was a deciding factor for a mother that needed to pick a Wee Watch Provider. She had a hard time choosing between two caregivers. When she found out that Tammy brought her children to the Launch Pad, she decided that was where she wanted her child to be. (Journal entry: April 14, 2005)

We had grandmothers who met outside the program to take their children to the park together.

We had mothers teaching other mothers how to knit.

I have seen children who are excited to see each other everyday and hug each other when it is time to go home, who enjoy spending time with each other and cannot wait to draw a picture together or just sit and have snack at the same time.

I have seen children who were not ready to attend Junior Kindergarten in September blossom into confident, trusting, social young children who are eager to come to the Launch Pad everyday. They consider the Launch Pad “their school”.

