

Reflections of CosmoKidz in Kindergarten Through Second Grade Classes at Mountain Vista School in Oracle, Arizona

Kimberly Pearce
CMM Institute
June, 2014

Soar (verb): 1. To fly or glide high in the air. 2. To rise suddenly above the normal level --Webster's II Dictionary

"If you're teasing someone, you're not soaring" --Jazzy, a first grader

"Why walk or run when you can soar?" --Fred Bull, grandparent of a first grader

This is a case study about soaring...and more specifically, about children ages 5 to 7 years soaring. It's a study about how kindergarten through second grade teachers at Mountain Vista school are teaching children to "rise above the normal level" in their social worlds of, for example, teasing and bullying, and developing social and emotional skills that foster awareness and compassion. Among other things the children are learning to *live* the acronym SOAR:



Why is this important? Well for starters, children who learn these kinds of skills and abilities help make better social worlds. They are more pleasant to be around. They help the people around them feel respected and valued. They learn positive self expression and self regulation. And eventually, they grow up to be the kind of family members, employees, leaders, and citizens who help make positive communities and societies. In short, they become good citizens of the world; more specifically of the worlds *they* inhabit.

This case study will introduce how the teachers at Mountain Vista have used SOAR and, more broadly, CosmoKidz in their classes...in brief time increments (10 minutes), without bringing in outside experts, and without interfering with the time needed to teach the core curricula. I will do this by: 1. Providing an overview of CosmoKidz; 2. Describing the research project that three k-2 classes in Oracle, Arizona participated in; and, 3. Discussing our research findings.

AN OVERVIEW OF COSMOKIDZ

"It's important to be kind, so people will be kind to you." --Jesse, age 6

Six-year old Jesse is already learning something very important about his social world: Kindness begets kindness. Jesse's classmate, Brianna, has identified the corollary: "You have to think before you do something because if you're building something with blocks and someone knocks them down, you will be mad!" What these two children have identified about social worlds is that *actions matter*. What we *do* affects other people. And by extension, what other people do affects us.

This is the simple yet profound underpinning of CosmoKidz: All of us, including young children, are part of making the social worlds in which we live. This "making" process requires a level of awareness that most of us don't have because of a simplistic and persistent four hundred year-old tradition of communication. The same dictionary that describes soar as "the ability to rise above the normal level" defines communication as "the exchange of ideas, messages or information." This taken-for-granted view of communication has profoundly shaped *and* obscured our understanding of what is occurring every time we're with others. What CosmoKidz attempts to do is to help children "rise above the normal level" of things to actually *see* and *name* the "making process" that occurs in and through our communicating.

A Higher Level View of Communication

One of the skill sets that is an essential part of a "higher level view of communication" is an ability to recognize *patterns* of communication that develop when people talk together. For example, the current "default" patterns of public communication as they relate to public issues include

sound bites, name calling, finger pointing, absolute assertions, and the selective use of facts to support one's own perspective. These public patterns do not include deep listening, questions for exploration and clarification, finding common ground, openness to other perspectives, etc. And because of these default patterns of communication, most adults and children are much better at finger pointing and name calling than they are at deep listening and showing curiosity about viewpoints that are contrary to theirs. Imagine how different our social worlds would be if more of our communicating included patterns with the latter set of skills.

A second important "higher level" view of communication is the ability to recognize that the way a story is told or a perspective presented is just as important as the story/perspective itself. If a perspective is presented in a hostile or absolute fashion, it is much more difficult for others, especially those who disagree, to remain open. If we want people to listen deeply to the perspective of others, to thoughtfully weigh choices, to anticipate what may happen if certain choices are implemented, then we must teach people to pay attention to *how* they are talking to each other.

"Cosmopolitan communication" is a term coined by Barnett Pearce that includes the set of skills described above.¹ Among other things, this is a form of communication that suggests that everyday differences between people can be a starting place for deeper understanding, trust and respect. In our interdependent, globalized world we must learn how to get along with others, how to handle conflicts in productive ways, how to empathize with others who are "not like me", and how to recognize and then express thoughts and feelings productively. We believe that these skills and abilities need to be taught to children.

Communication patterns begin at birth, and we (children and adults) are shaped by these patterns throughout our lives as well as being the shapers of them. Young children, for example, have learned that acting in certain ways will get them attention—throwing temper tantrums gets one form of attention while saying please and thank you gets them another form of attention. They *live* these patterns and ways of being without understanding their part in the creation and/or maintenance of these patterns. Taking a "higher level view of communication" can help children see how their actions affect others.

Communication and Neural Patterns

The social patterns we experience and live into also affect neural patterns that develop in our brains. The relatively new field of Interpersonal Neural Biology (IPNB) is demonstrating that the development of insight, empathy,

¹ Pearce, B. (1989). *Communication and the human condition*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

and compassion moves us toward healthy integration with others. As we co-enact various emotional states (compassion, empathy, anger, fear...), these states don't just occur between two or more individuals but between our brains as well. There is now empirical evidence of the activation of "mirror neurons" whenever two or more people are communicating (Siegel, 2010).² It is one of the reasons a person's emotional state can so quickly match the emotional states of others s/he is conversing with. To the extent that we are able to foster relationships characterized by the more empathic and open forms of communication, neural connections in the right and left hemispheres become more integrated and the parts of the brain that correlate with compassion and empathy become stronger.

Children who develop self-regulation, flexibility, and choice making skills are better able to work well with others. If children are encouraged to develop and foster these communication skills and healthy patterns in their own social worlds of sharing, teasing, bullying, test taking, etc. they will be more likely and able to use them in other contexts. Patterns are like muscles; the more you use them, the stronger they become. The muscles of curiosity, respectful listening, empathy and question asking are essential communication and citizenship skills; they are the bedrock of healthy families and communities. And if children learn them at a young age they can practice these skills into adulthood.

CosmoKidz: A Communication Tool for "Higher Level" Conversations

With that in mind, the CMM Institute, in partnership with a Norwegian organization, Hele mennesker (directly translated as *Whole People*) have developed a communication tool called CosmoKidz. The term CosmoKidz grows out of the concept of "Cosmopolitan communication" introduced above. The CosmoKidz activities are meant to help children explore their social worlds in ways that will help them develop these specific communication skills: Identifying thoughts and feelings; Expressing and sharing these thoughts and feelings; Listening to the thoughts and feelings of other children; and, Selecting a course of action that helps create better outcomes for how children act together (agency and self regulation). The encouragement and use of these skills will help children develop better patterns of relating over time.

One of the building blocks of learning new skills and abilities involves meeting learners where they currently are in their development and then helping them increase their skills and abilities. If we want children to learn how to get along, empathize with others, productively work through conflict, and proactively manage their fears, we need to know something about the

² Siegel, D. (2010). *Mindsight: A new science of personal transformation*. NY: Bantam Books.

social worlds that they inhabit and the issues that matter to them.

With that knowledge and wisdom in mind, the developers of CosmoKidz began with kids themselves. We asked a variety of children ages 5-7 to tell us what they face in their lives that they find difficult and challenging. The scenarios on each of the 31 cards in CosmoKidz represent the topics that these children expressed to us. As we were developing the questions and activities, we also tested them with a variety of children in different learning contexts. Doing this helped ensure that the cards are useful in helping children name a whole range of feelings, emotions, and thoughts, as well as ways that they can act with more awareness into difficult situations to help make a better outcome. The 31 topic areas include:

- TEASING^[L]_[SEP]
- MAKING A FIGHT OR SHARING^[L]_[SEP]
- SAYING "I'M SORRY"^[L]_[SEP]
- STAYING CALM AND BEING FOCUSED
- RESPECTING DIFFERENCES^[L]_[SEP]
- HELPING OTHERS
- THINKING BEFORE YOU ACT^[L]_[SEP]
- EXPLORING LOVING BEHAVIOR^[L]_[SEP]
- PLAYING TOGETHER AND MAKING CHOICES
- MAKING NEW FRIENDS^[L]_[SEP]
- BEING AWARE OF MY BODY
- ^[L]_[SEP]FEELING JEALOUS
- ^[L]_[SEP]BEING UNSURE ABOUT WHAT TO DO
- FEELING INCLUDED
- CLEANING BEFORE PLAYING
- ABOUT KINDNESS^[L]_[SEP]
- BULLYING^[L]_[SEP]
- MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER
- FEELING UNSURE
- FINDING MY OWN SPECIAL TALENT
- FEELING SCARED ABOUT GOING TO THE DENTIST OR DOCTOR
- CHEATING ON EACH OTHER
- MAKING A SPECIAL TIME WITH YOUR FRIENDS
- KEEPING THE EARTH CLEAN^[L]_[SEP]
- CALLING OTHER KIDS BAD NAMES^[L]_[SEP]
- GETTING ANGRY
- "COPY-CAT" TEASING
- MAKING QUIET TIME
- CONSCIOUS BREATHING
- YOUR FEELINGS ARE HURT
- BEING FAIR AND UNFAIR

Every card includes:

- a topic (in the purple bubble on the left side of the card)
- a scenario related to the topic, under the word “imagine”
- questions to help children meaningfully explore the topic
- activities to help children act more productively into a similar future situation (Act a and Act b)
- an illustration of the scenario on the reverse side of the card

An example of the card is included on the following page.



Act b

Think of 3 ways that you can make a situation better if you have done something hurtful.

ody destroys your work?

3. What happens next?
4. How does that make you feel?
5. How could you let your friend know how MAD you are and still continue playing as friends.



The assumption underlying the development of these activities is that children who learn how to talk together productively about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences will develop the skill set of cosmopolitan communication (empathizing with others, handling conflicts in productive ways, connecting with diverse children who are not like them, managing their strong emotions, and naming their own feelings and emotions). If these skills are reinforced over time, they become part of the repertoire for ways of acting and being in the world.

When teachers engage their students in each CosmoKidz card, they are helping students develop these more sophisticated communication skills of thinking, expressing, listening, and imagining alternative ways of acting (yes, we think even children as young as 5 can do this). If children are encouraged to use these communication skills across situations, there will come a time when these skills are easier to “call forth.” As previously stated, the more you develop a muscle, the bigger it grows! CosmoKidz is growing the child’s muscle of “better interpersonal communication skills”.

The Developmental Theory Underlying CosmoKidz

The developmental theory underlying the assumption that children as young as 5 years can meaningfully communicate is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978).³ Vygotsky believed infants from birth are made human through conversational/communication processes. These processes occur on two planes; internally (intrapsychological) and externally, between others (interpsychological). Although both planes are important, it is only after children have “practiced in conversation” that they can become conscious of and able to develop their human skills and abilities (Penman, 2000, p. 32).⁴ Vygotsky developed the notion of the “zone of proximal development” which posits that a child (even a pre-school age child), with the help of a more competent adult, can achieve a task that s/he would not be able to do alone. The task however cannot be so far out of the developmental reach of the child that, even with the help of a competent adult, the task cannot be accomplished. But if the task is not too developmentally sophisticated, the adult provides what Wood et al (1975)⁵ have termed “scaffolding,” or

³ Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

⁴ Penman, R. (2000). *Reconstructing communicating: Looking to a future*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁵ Wood, D. & Middleton, D. (1975). A study of assisted problem-solving. *British Journal of Psychology*, 66(2), 181-191.

supports that allow the child to concentrate on and complete the task in ways that can only occur with the help of the scaffold. Once the student masters the task, the scaffolding is no longer needed and the child can perform the task on his/her own. Wood et al (1976)⁶ describe the processes that provide effective scaffolding:

- Gaining and maintaining the learner's interest in the task
- Making the task simple
- Emphasizing certain aspects that will help with the solution
- Helping the child deal effectively with frustration
- Demonstrating the task.

These processes are all encouraged in the use of the CosmoKidz activities.

Goals of CosmoKidz

The goals of CosmoKidz involve three related aspects:

- Helping kids to notice and name their own thoughts and feelings;
- Increasing their awareness of their social worlds (i.e. their experience navigating situations like sharing, bullying, joyful times, and confusing times, etc.); and,
- Helping them more successfully navigate those social worlds with others in ways that increase their own and others social/emotional development.

One way of describing social/emotional development is becoming more aware of the stories we have that shape our perceptions and our actions. In other words, developing “mindfulness” and awareness, or self-reflection skills. The questions contained on each of the cards in CosmoKidz are designed to help children name some of their stories and feelings about situations that children their age encounter. Once these stories are named and explored, children, with the help of an adult, are better able to think about multiple ways of acting.

It is the “acting” piece that is an especially important skill for children to learn. How can kids respond effectively to bullying behavior? How can a child treat someone with respect who is ugly, or overweight, or extremely shy, or who wears funny clothes or has a funny accent? The ways that children act into these complex and difficult situations matter! Their response will elicit a

⁶ Wood, D., Bruner, J. & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem-solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry*, 17, 89-100.

response from others, which will elicit another response from them...and before you know it a new way of being together has emerged. If enough of these situations occur over time, a pattern of relating develops.

For example, if a child has become more aware of how hurtful it can be to tease someone with a funny name or accent, she can then begin to think about what she can do differently to help someone who “sounds funny” feel more accepted. With the help of an adult, children can develop awareness about how their actions affect other people, just as what others say and do affects them. The greater the child’s self-awareness, along with alternative ways to act, the more a child will develop his or her social/emotional skills.

The development of social/emotional skills also requires repetition and practice. Although there are 31 different situations in CosmoKidz, many of the questions throughout the cards are similar. For example, several cards ask questions like these:

- What does (the specific topic, in this case *sharing*) sharing look like?
- What does sharing sound like?
- How do you think your friends feel when you are sharing with them?
- When you aren’t sharing how does that feel inside?
- When someone else is not sharing with you, how does that feel inside?
- When you share, how does that feel inside? ^[1]_[SEP]

The first two bulleted questions are ones that are asking the children to think about the topic as something that can be positively observed. Sharing (and most of the scenarios that children identified for CosmoKidz) looks and sounds a certain way. In order to develop the children’s creativity as well as awareness of their senses, we pose “sense questions” that may be feel unfamiliar but that encourage them to touch, smell, and taste their worlds. To the extent that children can identify what people are doing when they are sharing, they can act with better awareness into a different situation involving sharing. We want kids to name and talk about the positive actions that lead to a more effective way of being with others.

The third bulleted question asks children to imagine how their actions affect others. We think it’s important for children to recognize that what they do matters and actions like sharing positively affects their relationships and other people.

The last three bulleted questions are asking children to reflect on their own

thoughts and emotions. What is happening inside their bodies as they are experiencing the actions of sharing or not sharing with someone else? The emotional states and bodily responses are different and these questions are helping children to become more aware of those differences. Once the differences begin to be named, the adult is able to help children think of ways to respond to situations involving sharing so other children are not left out. The social/emotional skill of empathy requires that a child think about how something affects him or her and then make the leap to how others might feel. The CosmoKidz cards are meant to do both things: to encourage children to reflect on how a situation affects them and how the situation may be affecting others as well. The cards are designed to support the child in acting with awareness rather than purely reacting to the external environment. The questions become the prompts that enable adults to help kids think about effective and compassionate ways to act in difficult situations.

We believe this repetition and practice will help children begin to see the importance of asking similar questions across situations. Our hope is that if children are exposed to questions like these, they will be more likely to ask these types of questions on their own as new situations arise for them. The questions we have included are not meant to be exhaustive, however. We encourage adults to ask additional questions that you believe will help the children in your life to think and act mindfully and compassionately.

COSMOKIDZ RESEARCH PROJECT AT MOUNTAIN VISTA SCHOOL IN ORACLE, ARIZONA

Oracle, Arizona is a small community approximately 50 miles north of Tucson and 100 miles south of Phoenix. The median worker income is just shy of \$34,000 and the poverty rate is just over 17% of the national average.⁷ Consequently, one would not consider Oracle a wealthy community. Mountain Vista School is a k-8 public school servicing the town of Oracle. Due to budget cuts the school has eliminated or cut programs such as art, music, and physical education. And like most public schools, there are no programs designed to increase students' social skills and emotional intelligence. And yet laudably the Mountain Vista Student Pledge is based on social/emotional skills. The pledge is based on 3 Rs: "To Respect myself and others, take Responsibility for my actions and develop positive Relationships with adults and peers based on integrity." These three Rs are just as imperative as the more traditional phonetically talked about Rs of reading [w]riting, and [a]rithmetic because they serve as the bedrock of "citizenship skills." Healthy and robust families, communities and democracies begin with young people learning the 3 Rs contained in Mountain Vista's School Pledge.

⁷ Oracle, Arizona 2010 census data. www.usacityfacts.com/az/pinal/oracle/

This is one reason why the School Board President, Linda Thomas, the Superintendent, Dennis Blausner, and Mountain Vista's Principal, Nannette Soule, were excited about their school being the site for a research project to test the usefulness of CosmoKidz in kindergarten through second grade classes. The research began in January, 2014 and ended in June of that year. Three classes participated: A kindergarten class taught by Katrina Cassarino; a first grade class taught by Janice Vigil; and, a second grade class taught by Corrie Guerrero. All three of these teachers have been teaching for at least 9 years.

The teachers were asked to use the cards daily but in small increments. We wanted to see if CosmoKidz could be used without adding to the teacher's workload or interfering with the core subjects that must be taught.

We asked the teachers to begin each week by choosing one of the topic areas in CosmoKidz; for example, teasing. After selecting the topic, we asked the teachers to spend about 10 minutes each day doing the following:

Monday: The teacher announces the topic of the week and shows the children the illustration that is on the card. She spends the first day asking the children to look at the illustration. She reads the scenario and invites the children to talk about what they see.

Tuesday: The teacher reminds the children of the topic. She uses one or two of the "ask" questions as a way of helping the children name and explore their own experience with the topic.

Wednesday: The teacher reminds the children of the topic. She uses one or two of the "ask" questions as a way of helping the children explore how the topic may be affecting other people.

At the end of the school day on Wednesday the teacher sends home the supplemental activity sheet on the topic of the week for children to work on. Each activity sheet includes a "right brain" creative component and a "left brain" linguistic component. On the topic of teasing, for example, the activity sheet asks the child to make a drawing using colors that tell about hurtful feelings. And then to make a drawing using colors that make you feel good. Finally, to write one sentence that describes how these colors are different. We include these activity sheets to reinforce repetition and learning for the child, and to provide an opportunity for parents to talk with their child about what the child is learning that week.

Thursday: The teacher reminds the children of the topic. She chooses one of the activities in the "act" section and helps the children visualize positive ways of acting in a similar situation in the future.

Friday: The teacher reminds the children of the topic. She continues with the activity from Thursday or chooses the second "act."

We also supplied each teacher with a male and female puppet. Each puppet has a happy face on one side and a sad face with tears on the other.



We invited the teachers to use the puppets to engage the children in naming emotions and emotional states as they talk about topics such as bullying or teasing or sharing. Additionally we provided a SOAR bulletin Board for the teacher to display in the classroom and refer to throughout the school week. As a reminder, SOAR stands for: **S**ense what's around you; **O**pen your hands to help others; **A**ct with kindness; **R**espect other people.

Our study was qualitative, using interviews and observations as the primary means of data collection.

We formulated three research questions and four hypotheses that we wanted to test.

Research Question 1: To what extent are children ages 5-7 able to meaningfully discuss the topics in CosmoKidz?

Research Question 2: How does the use of CosmoKidz over the course of a school year affect children's interpersonal communication skill sets and actions?

Research Question 3: How does the use of CosmoKidz over the course of a school year affect interpersonal communication skill sets and actions across contexts?

Hypothesis #1 (based on research question 1): Children between the ages of 5-7 are able, with the help of adults, to use the activities in CosmoKidz to discuss with their peers the issues that they confront (i.e., sharing, teasing, bullying...). The communication tools of this skill set that we are observing include:

- Identifying thoughts and feelings
- Expressing and sharing these thoughts and feelings
- Listening to the thoughts and feelings of other children
- Selecting a course of action that helps create better outcomes for how children act together (agency and self regulation)

This hypothesis was tested using data gathered from:

Teacher Observation Each teacher chose 5 diverse children in her class and kept a weekly journal documenting whether the child was able to:

1. Express and share thoughts and feelings in a productive way;
2. Develop greater communication skills in managing their thoughts, feelings and actions with others;
3. Develop more awareness and mindfulness of their own behavior and how their behavior affects other people; and,
4. Listen to the thoughts and feelings of their peers.

We also asked the teacher to document whether CosmoKidz provided adequate scaffolding for children to stay focused and explore the topic of the week. Did the activities maintain the students' interest? Were the questions and tasks simple enough for children? Were children able to imagine positive solutions and alternatives?

In addition to observing the behavior of the 5 selected children, each teacher documented stories and experiences that she observed of the entire class as they engaged with the activities of CosmoKidz.

Hypothesis #2 (based on research question 2): The skill set of effective communication will improve as children consistently engage in these discussions over the course of a school year.

This hypothesis will be tested using data gathered from:

Pre/Post Interviews with each teacher: The purpose of the interviews is to engage the teacher in naming her observations of the children's social behaviors and social worlds before she began using CosmoKidz (pre-CosmoKidz interview). After using CosmoKidz for more than four months, each teacher will be interviewed again to explore the differences using the

cards made in the development of better communication skills. See Appendix A for the pre- and post-interview questions.

Hypothesis #3 (based on research question 3): The ratio of adult guidance/intervention in the child's ability to engage in effective communication will decline over time if children are exposed to these skills consistently.

This hypothesis will be tested using data gathered from:

Teacher observation. We asked each teacher to consistently refer to the theme/acronym SOAR (Sense what's around you; Open your hands to help others; Act with kindness; Respect other people). Our hypothesis is that encouraging SOARing behavior becomes a scaffold for enacting those behaviors. We wanted to know if simply referring to SOARing behavior was enough to help children enact these more productive communication skills.

Hypothesis #4 (based on research question 3): With enough duration and consistency, the communication skill set will carry-over into other aspects of the child's life (in non-classroom contexts and at home).

This hypothesis will be tested using data gathered from:

A change in playground behavior: We interviewed each teacher to assess if playground behavior shifted over time and if the behavior is consistent with SOAR.

A parent survey to assess whether there have been changes in their child's communication and behavior at home: At the end of the school year we asked a parent or guardian to answer questions on a survey. Each family received a letter and survey in the child's weekly packet that the teachers send home. See Appendix B for the letter and survey.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data we have collected over five months is exciting and encouraging. The "headline" is that all of our hypotheses were confirmed. We found that children as young as 5 years can meaningfully engage in CosmoKidz; that interpersonal communication skills and actions improved over time; and, that these skills and actions carried over into other contexts. To do justice to the data in terms of providing specific observations and stories, I have decided to let the teachers, parents, and students speak in their voices as much as possible and with specific examples.

Pre-CosmoKidz Teacher Interviews

I would like to begin with the three teachers, Katrina (kindergarten), Janice (first grade) and, Corrie (second grade) and their experience of the children in their classes before they began using CosmoKidz. When I interviewed each teacher, they were four months into the academic school year.

Katrina described her students as sensitive to the children with disabilities but nasty and critical to the other students in the class. She told me they have trouble with turn-taking and there is not a lot of back and forth communication. If a child says something emotionally mean, the response will be to cry or tell the teacher. They lack the ability to problem solve and to talk through things. The communication style for most of the kids is "it's my way or I will throw a fit." Katrina talked about handling behavioral challenges all day long. These challenges ranged from following directions and constantly interrupting each other to lacking basic manners with each other. The most challenging behavior that she observed was emotional bullying.

The first grade teacher, Janice, described her class as not interacting well together overall. She said many students in her class are competitive and they all want to be first. If some of the kids aren't first in line they become devastated; they withdraw and pout. She also described many of her students as quick to tell her the faults of the other students. There is a lot of "tattle telling" going on. For example she said,

"today we were lined up for PE and they were fighting over who will stand where in line. One child yells at another. Then they began to tattle on each other. Some are pushing. When kids start yelling and pushing it sets off more difficult interactions. There seems to be a chain reaction when this happens. I like to say 'monkey see monkey do'."

The communication skills that she wishes the children displayed more of are listening and being more respectful of the other kids. She says that the children aren't aware that their actions are affecting others. On a positive note however, the students want to help take care of an autistic student in their class. Janice says, "they are very compassionate towards this student. Everyone wants to take his hand and make sure he does well."

Corrie, the second grade teacher, says that she has one of the best classes she has ever had. "My kids seem to do really well together. I have a large group of girls; 11 with only 4 boys. They like each other and they share and they are eager to help me and help each other. When someone in the class isn't doing well, the other kids want to help."

However Corrie says that some girls have very strong personalities and want to boss the others around. This causes conflict. They will snap at each other and say "you're not the boss of me and you're not in charge." But Corrie says that the girls who say these things are just as bossy as the others. The communication skills that are underdeveloped are the ability to express their feelings productively, the ability to understand that what they are doing may be annoying other people (lack of self awareness), and impulse control.

Using CosmoKidz: Stories From Katrina

The Kindergarten teacher, Katrina, was the first person I talked with after the teachers began using CosmoKidz. Recall that the most challenging behavior she was observing in her 5 year olds was emotional bullying. Katrina said:

“We started Cosmo this week. The students are mostly modeling the skills at this time. We worked on the "teasing" card this week. I had a mother come in on Monday upset that a few of my boys had teased her son about the way he speaks. Spanish is his primary language. I had briefly worked on this card before but this week we worked on it all week. Kids were very enthusiastic about talking about when they have been teased. These two boys (the teasers) were very quiet during the lesson but seemed to be taking it all in.”

During our first conversation after she began using CosmoKidz, Katrina also told me about a student in her class who was diagnosed with impulse control issues. She created a chart with 6 possible ways that he could help control himself and she asked him to choose another 2 ways that he thought would be helpful. One of his choices was to sit next to the “SOAR” bulletin board to remind him of the behaviors that he wants to have. Katrina told me that he used the SOAR poster twice during the first week to calm himself down. When I have visited his class, he has been quick to tell me how he is becoming more aware of how his actions affect others and he wants to help his friends and classmates more.

The second and third weeks of using CosmoKidz, Katrina told me the following:

“After completing the week about the child with an accent or different sounding voice activities (card, Teasing) we went into the quiet activities (card, Making Quiet Time) . My class has been having a hard time all year eating quietly in the cafeteria, walking quietly in line and working quietly in class. Right before lining up and going to the cafeteria which are both hard places for us to be quiet we reviewed the Cosmo Kids card. I saw a slight improvement after 5 days and decided to continue with the same topic for a 2nd week. I have noticed tremendous change in the overall noise level in the classroom, cafeteria and when lining up.”

At the end of the first month of using CosmoKidz, Katrina said:

“We still have a few kids that have a hard time lining up quietly so this week we are working on the activity card that

talks about one kid making bad choices and others paying for it. This week's activities are really impacting one of my top five kiddos that I am monitoring. We talked about how the Cosmo kid that was making good choices feels sad when he gets into trouble because of the other kid's bad choices. The main child that I was focusing on this week looked up at me and said I'm not going to do this anymore it makes my friends sad.

What I'm liking is the ability to use a spiral approach with the Cosmo activities. I am moving forward but still reminding the kids regularly of the past activities.

We are reading the cards, acting out with the puppets and demonstrating these skills within our normal environment.

Two months into the use of CosmoKidz, Katrina told me about the "my special talent" card and how she used the topic throughout the week:

"This week we worked on the special talents card. The kids LOVED this one. Our reading series included the *The Little Engine That Could*. A whole week about encouraging kids to try their special talents. We also talked about not judging a book by its cover. Sometimes you may not realize how awesome some one is if you don't give them a chance. I showed a YouTube video. This video gave the kids courage along with the SOAR card and lesson. To my surprise I had kids singing in front of class, break dancing and sharing their special talents with us!

Great week to open up my students and help them express their favorite talents."

I observed Katrina's class on two occasions while she was engaging her class with CosmoKidz activities. One topic was helping others feel included and Katrina had asked her students to use recess as an opportunity to seek out others to play with who were playing alone. It was inspiring for me to hear these 5 year olds talk about the ways that they invited children to play with them and how happy that seemed to make the child who was invited into the game.

My second opportunity to observe Katrina's class was when she used the card "conscious breathing." These were my comments to Katrina after observing her class:

“Katrina, the topic of "conscious breathing" can be a challenge...especially connecting it to our relationships with others. I was so inspired by the way you used the puppets to act out one child scaring another and using this as the entree into the kinds of breathing we experience when we're scared and helping the kids pair the emotion (in this case fear) with what's happening with the way they are breathing. I also loved the way that you used one of your students to coach the puppet that scared his friend on ways to make the situation better and to restore the friendship. The kids were so engaged and really seemed to understand how our breathing changes based on the activities we're engaged in, the emotions we're experiencing, and what's happening in our relationships with others. Your ending with how to help make relationships better if something has happened to hurt someone, helps keep even something as private as our breathing more relational. It was a beautiful lesson!!”

Katrina was very creative in the ways she used the puppets. Each time she used a puppet she would give it a different name and personality. She used the puppets to demonstrate actions that she wanted the kids to talk about—for example, with the topic of sharing, she would have one of the puppets wanting to play with a toy the other puppet had and the puppet with the toy not wanting to share. She would ask her students to help the puppet who doesn't want to share learn why it's helpful to play with others.

Katrina also used the SOAR poster quite a bit to supplement the desired communication skills and behaviors of increased awareness, helping others, respecting others and acting with kindness. Over time, the children began to engage in SOARing behaviors and tell Katrina about it. For example, on a cold day one of the students gave his jacket to another student who was cold. He ran up to his teacher and said, “Ms. Katrina, I opened my hands to help (he named the student) by sharing my coat with her. Another student took a classmate by the hand to help the girl do something that she couldn't do by herself. The helper told Katrina that she “opened her hands to help.” When I visited the classroom, I had an entire group of students line up to tell me about their SOARing behavior. These are 5 year olds!!

End of the Year Interview with Katrina

At the end of the school year, I interviewed Katrina about her overall observations about the effect using CosmoKidz has had in the communication skills and behaviors of her students. The transcript of our interview is as follows:

You now have used CosmoKidz in your class for about 4 months. If you think of your class overall, what changes have you observed in:

The overall ability of children to identify their thoughts and feelings

Huge improvement!

The children are definitely identifying their feelings better. They are expressing themselves with full sentences. Rather than saying, "don't do that" or "stop that." They say things like, "don't push me because it makes me sad". They are always saying things like, "that makes me feel sad or that makes me happy." If they are misbehaving I can ask them how do you think that makes your friends feel? They always respond by saying things like, "that makes my friends sad when I am bad."

The overall ability of children to share their thoughts and feelings

They are tattle-telling less and actually saying things like she's not soaring or you're not soaring. They try to correct one another's behaviors. They tell each other that makes me sad or this and that happened and it made me happy. They also give examples of how they "soar" at home. They give each other their jackets on cold days and tell me, Ms. Katrina I am soaring I opened my hands to help --- and I gave her my jacket. They get no prizes from me for soaring but they are so proud of themselves so they continue to do it. It is great to watch.

The overall ability of children to listen to the thoughts and feelings of other children

Listening to me and expressing their thoughts is easier than listening to each other, but overall they have improved their ability to listen to others. The girls are doing better than the boys. They always come to me and say--- is sad or --- is upset or-- is happy because...

The overall ability of children to select a course of action that helps create better outcomes for them and others

Huge Improvement! Overall, they are much more aware of how their behavior impacts the other kids. They used to be worried about personal consequences and now they realize that other kids are affected by their choices. They seem to be thinking things through now.

The willingness of children to play and interact with children that they never used to play with.

We have talked about including other people and playing together. They seemed to do this the week we talked about it but after that they really went back to the same old routine of playing with the same kiddos. "clicks"

When you think of the children in your class who have had the most difficulty interacting positively with others, what changes have you observed in: Their overall ability to identify their thoughts and feelings?; Their overall ability to share their thoughts and feelings?; Their overall ability to listen to the thoughts and feelings of other children?; Their overall ability to select a course of action that helps create better outcomes for them and others?; and, Their willingness to play and interact with children that they never used to play with?

These comments are based on the five kids I've been monitoring since we began using CosmoKidz:

1. Child #1 (opening her hands to help others, act with kindness)
She was one of the biggest bullies in the class and this month she was student of the month. What a turn around. She is much nicer to the kids in class and does little things like saying good morning and bye at the end of the day. Her overall manners are much more polite. She is definitely SOARing! It is difficult to explain but her entire attitude has improved and she is constantly opening her hands to help others. She also recognizes when she is soaring and tells me I soared because I....
2. Child #2 (respecting other people, act with kindness)
She is less aggressive towards the kids but has a very difficult time respecting personal space, she has a difficult time interacting and playing with her peers and is constantly upset if she doesn't feel included. She is expressing her thoughts and feeling in greater detail. She tells me if the behavior of other kids makes her feel sad.
3. Child #3 (sense what's around me)
At the beginning of the school year she was receiving pink slips 4 or 5 times a week 80-100% of the time she was exhibiting bad/disruptive behavior, fighting with kids, being disrespectful, etc. She currently receives pink slips 10% of the time. Huge improvement, 70-90% overall behavior improvement.
4. Child #4 (respecting other people)
He was stealing a lot in class, from me and other students. I have not caught him stealing in 2 months! He is aware of how his stealing makes other people feel.

5. Child #5 (respecting others, sense what's around me)
He started the year off with Pink Slips almost every day. He is very engaged during our cosmo lessons. He still has a difficult time with respecting his peers and his teachers but he is aware of how his peers feel when he misbehaves. He has gone from 100% pink slips to 20%. Huge improvements!

Have you noticed a positive difference overall in the way children relate to each other because of the use of CosmoKidz? If so, what differences have you noticed?

Mostly the “opening their hands to help others”. They are very intuitive.

Have you noticed a difference in how much of your day is spent redirecting problematic behavior between the children? If so, describe the differences.

Rather than directing the bad behavior I am able to say, “Are you soaring?” They process what they are doing wrong and correct their own behaviors.

What have you liked most about the use of CosmoKidz in your classroom?

I love that I have a creative way to teach positive behavior. I am able to find a card that matches certain behaviors that I am dealing with in class. I like that the picture card has questions on the back and I love the puppets and the paper activity. It doesn't take too much time.

What surprised you the most as you engaged the kids in the activities?

Their willingness to participate, their excitement over the puppets and their quick attempts to soar, opening their hands to help others!
☺

Using CosmoKidz: Stories from the First Grade Teacher Janice

As you recall, when I interviewed Janice before beginning CosmoKidz she said that the kids didn't interact very well together and there was a lot of “tattling” and competitiveness going on. She also observed bullying and teasing behavior.

Unfortunately, Janice's class was the only one I was not able to observe because she chose not to have a set time to engage her students in the CosmoKidz activities. She and I were able to meet after school twice to talk about her observations; once about 2 months into the project and a second time at the end of the school year.

In looking over the data she provided, I was curious to know if the competitive, tattling, and teasing behaviors that Janice observed during the first half of the year changed as a result of CosmoKidz. I'll say more about this shortly.

Mid-way through the semester, Janice told me that her students really enjoyed SOAR:

“They always ask if it is SOAR time. I tell them they should soar all the time. They like to talk about the different pictures. I have had a couple of incidents when children were teasing and not sharing. I asked them if they were soaring and they replied no. And they apologized to the other students. I am seeing that they are starting to think about their decisions.”

Janice asked the students at the end of the school year what they learned from CosmoKidz. Here is what her first graders said:

- I learned to share and be polite --Ethan
- To be a better person and to be nice to people when they're hurt and help them up and take them to the nurse --Kalyn
- If someone doesn't want to share and they should take turns, so it doesn't become a big fight --Emma
- It's bad to pick on people and not to say bad words to people --Eddie
- Not to call people bad words and don't bully them --Dominic
- To be nice to people and be a better person --Gisella
- Not to be mean to people and not be a bully --Gianna
- Not to be a bully and not to be bossy --Brianna
- I learned to not be mean and be nice to people. And if they fall down help them out --Jazzy
- Do not hit no one --Darryan
- Don't kick someone and to be nice --Nathaniel
- Not to call people names. If you call people names you could hurt their feelings --Magdalena
- Not to be mean and not to be selfish and not to steal toy from other people and don't call people names. And don't make people sad -- Danny
- To be nice --Jesse
- To be nice to other people and don't push people --Isabella
- Open your hands and respect other people --Lakota
- Respect other people and not be mean --Brooklyn
- Be nice and be a better person --Adriana
- Don't call people names, share stuff with other people and be nice -- Kaylee

Child developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky reminds us that only after children have “practiced in conversation” can they become conscious of and able to develop their human skills and abilities. These children, with the help of Janice, are naming and practicing communicative skills and abilities. They are talking about behaviors to avoid like hitting, kicking, bullying, and calling others bad names. They are also naming desirable behaviors like sharing, being nice, and respecting other people.

Note that the children are describing some of the behaviors that Janice wanted the children to develop (or avoid). However, what none of these children have described is the ability to express their internal thoughts and feelings or the importance of being a good listener (more on that below).

End of the Year Interview with Janice

In my interview with Janice at the end of the school year, she said that her students have had the most difficulty identifying their own thoughts and feelings and listening to others. Says Janice, “I feel that this class had a hard time listening to others...when one person had a chance to talk someone was already adding their own story.” She also noticed that if someone had called a child a bad name the child had a difficult time expressing her/himself and would instead “hold that against the child who had done something wrong to her or him.” She observed that the kids would say things like “you hit me” instead of “I don’t like it when...” and that these communication patterns didn’t really change.

The differences that Janice has noticed are in “playing” behaviors: “I have seen a big difference at recess where everyone is playing with everyone. Before we had certain groups that only played with certain kids but now that has changed.” She has also noticed that the children “have changed how they handle a situation. Now they are ready to help out instead of just standing and watching what is happening...If someone falls down they are there to help out.” Janice says that what has surprised her the most is “they really changed how they handle a situation.”

Using CosmoKidz: Stories from the Second Grade Teacher Corrie

As you may recall, Corrie told me in her pre-CosmoKidz interview that her second grade class is the best she has had since her teaching career began. Corrie’s observations of what her students needed going into CosmoKidz were skills that enabled the students to work better together and to be less “bossy.”

Within the first month of using CosmoKidz, Corrie and I had a conversation about a challenge Corrie was experiencing as she was using the cards. Since many of the questions on the cards are similar across topic areas, she was

finding that her students were providing similar answers despite the topic and this was making the conversations less interesting. My suggestion was to take more advantage of the “acts” or role-playing situations to help the kids move from “talk” to actually acting out different ways of behaving in similar future situations. I also suggested that she give the puppets to the kids to use as role-playing props.

A few weeks later I observed Corrie’s class. The topic of the week was “Getting Angry” and two of the students had gotten into a “fight of words” earlier in the day when one student stepped on another student’s foot while they were in line. Corrie used this “real life experience” as a teaching moment for the entire class and not just the two students involved in the altercation. After observing her class, my response to Corrie was the following:

“Corrie, the way that you worked with your topic of “expressing anger” was very inspiring for me to observe. I loved the way that you used a specific situation that had happened earlier in the day with two of the students by having those students act out the situation using the puppets (one puppet stepped on the other puppet's foot while they were lining up), the emotions that were expressed (both ended up angry at each other) and how they could have handled the situation differently so that they work through their anger productively together. I thought you coached them well in how to express something that they didn't like (having a foot stepped on) and what happens when someone says something as simple as “I’m sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.” The kids also seemed to enjoy being in a role-play situation using the puppets.

I think it's these kinds of simple yet creative and engaging activities that, used over time, really do help children name experiences (the S in Soar) and provide them with better ways of acting into challenging situations (opening hands to help others; acting with kindness; respecting other people-- the OAR in SOAR).”

Corrie seemed to work a lot with her students on SOARing behavior. Two months into the use of CosmoKidz, Corrie told me that she was “...noticing kids redirecting each other by asking the other students if they are soaring when they see something happening that’s not appropriate. I’ve also used the question ‘are you SOARing?’ to redirect undesirable behaviors. It seems to be a great way to quickly redirect.” What struck me about Corrie’s observations is the kids seemed to be moving from acting “bossy” (telling others what to do) to asking

questions (asking others if their behavior is SOARing).

I observed Corrie's class for a second time and was delighted to see the students just as engaged as they were during my first visit two months before. Corrie had the students using the puppets to role-play ways of acting into situations; the students would try out different options and she would ask the class what they thought of each option. It was an energizing and engaging way of helping the kids think through future behaviors, all in the span of less than 15 minutes.

During the last week of school I received this email from Corrie:

"I'd like to share a few things with you that happened today.

We were playing a game and a team of girls won. A— (student's name) said that the girls won because girls are smarter than boys. Before I could even address it she apologized to the boys. After she said she was sorry, she looked at me and said that she apologized for saying that because that was not SOARing.

We are watching Bernstein Bears videos in class. On their own the children were commenting on the behaviors of the characters and they pointed out behaviors that were not SOARing behaviors. When the video was over they were commenting on the lesson that was being taught. They were able to catch on to the lesson being taught in the videos, which were helping others try new things and not bragging. I feel that the cards have helped the kids become more aware of "nonsoaring" behaviors as well as SOARing behaviors all on their own."

End of the Year Interview with Corrie

Corrie has noticed positive differences since her students began using CosmoKidz. She has observed that there are less cliques than there used to be (allowing everyone to play) and the children are more accepting of differences and more aware of helping others. In terms of changes in her students's ability to identify thoughts and feelings, Corrie said that they seem to be doing this better and more consistently. Says Corrie, "I overheard one girl say the other day 'it hurt me when you didn't share the chalk with me.' I overheard a boy apologizing for something that he had done and the other boy accepting the apology. Children are redirecting behavior by saying things like 'are you SOARing?'"

In terms of "selecting a course of action that helps create positive outcomes"

Corrie has also seen positive movement. She told me about a girl who was accidentally bumped into on the playground. The student told Corrie that she was going to hit him back but then “I thought about SOARing behavior and changed my mind.” Corrie is seeing this kind of behavior more often.

What surprised Corrie the most about how her students responded to CosmoKidz was “their willingness to share their personal experiences. Some of them shared some very personal feelings and experiences. I was also surprised at how quickly the kids picked up on the SOAR reference.”

The one area that Corrie didn’t see much improvement in is listening. She says that listening to each other is still a big problem because everyone wants to talk.

Using CosmoKidz: What Parents Say about Observed Differences in Their Child

Our fourth hypothesis was that “with enough duration and consistency, the communication skill-set will carry-over into other aspects of the child’s life (in non-classroom contexts and at home)”.

All three teachers and the Principal Nannette Soule said that they noticed positive and consistent changes in playground behavior. Some of the stories that you have just read speak to these changes.

But what about changes at home? The teachers sent home a questionnaire at the end of the school year. We received 11 responses from parents of kindergartners and 17 responses from parents of the first graders. The tabulated responses are below:

Parents of the Kindergarten students

1. My child has talked with me about the topics in CosmoKidz?
8 Yes **3** No
2. My child has talked with me about SOAR and SOARing behavior?
10 Yes **1** No
3. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at expressing thoughts?
9 Yes **2** No
4. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at expressing feelings?
10 Yes **1** No

5 In the last 5 months, my child seems better at listening to others?

7 Yes 1 No 3 Sometimes

6 In the last 5 months, my child is doing a better job of taking into account the thoughts and feelings of others in our family?

7 Yes 2 No 1 Sometimes

In terms of SOAR behavior, have you noticed:

7. Your child being more aware of what is happening around him/her? (Sense what's around you) 11 Yes 0 No

8. Your child doing more to help others? (Opening your hands to help others)

11 Yes 0 No

9. Your child doing more to act with kindness? (Act with kindness)

9 Yes 0 No 1 Sometimes

10. Your child showing more respect towards other people? (Respect other people) 10 Yes 1 No

11. If there is an experience or story that you would like to share about positive differences you have noticed in your child's communication and social skills, please include this in the space below or the back of this questionnaire.

Six parents responded:

He does a lot more to help mom, dad and sister. He talks to his sister about being a bully.

She is able to express her feelings more and truly grasps bullying which is a stepping-stone as we move through the higher grades.

My daughter definitely discusses the topics on the SOAR homework with us. She is more aware of certain behaviors and how they affect others. I'd like to see this program continue—even expand.

When one of her sisters was acting up, I heard her tell them that they were not SOARing!

She got two of the same doll. She said, "let's give this to someone."

O. has been playing nurse at home. Her grandpa had surgery recently. She brings him things and reads/draws for him.

Parents of the First Grade Students

1. My child has talked with me about the topics in CosmoKidz?
 9 Yes **8** No
2. My child has talked with me about SOAR and SOARing behavior?
 11 Yes **6** No
3. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at expressing thoughts?
 15 Yes **2** No
4. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at expressing feelings?
 15 Yes **2** No
5. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at listening to others?
 13 Yes **3** No
6. In the last 5 months, my child is doing a better job of taking into account the thoughts and feelings of others in our family?
 12 Yes **2** No **3** Sometimes

In terms of SOAR behavior, have you noticed:

7. Your child being more aware of what is happening around him/her? (Sense what's around you) **15** Yes **2** No
8. Your child doing more to help others? (Opening your hands to help others)
 15 Yes **2** No
9. Your child doing more to act with kindness? (Act with kindness)
 15 Yes **2** No
10. Your child showing more respect towards other people? (Respect other people) **13** Yes **3** No **1** Sometimes

Reflections About the Data

Most all of us (the teachers, principal, parents and me) saw an improvement in the communicative skills and abilities of the children after only two months of using CosmoKidz. Throughout the 5 months of using CosmoKidz, the children's skills never plateaued but, rather, continued to positively change. This is an exciting finding as we move into the second year of research. The kindergarten and first

grade students will have a full year of CosmoKidz in their new class and it will be interesting to observe how they continue to grow and change.

I'll spend the rest of this paper providing my own observations for why the children improved, the specific ways that they improved, and in what ways they didn't.

My overall assessment for why the children improved without plateauing was that the "scaffolding" that the teachers provided was effective. In every class I observed, the kids were enjoying the conversation and the role-playing activities. They seemed enthusiastic to talk about and play-act issues like getting angry, sharing, conscious breathing, and test taking. These topics kept the children's interest because they speak to the experiences that kids deal with on a regular basis. Additionally, the teachers were animated and skillful in the ways they applied the topics to the children's daily experiences. The puppets were also creatively used to help the children explore a variety of thoughts, feelings and actions that the kids could then comment on.

Our first research question "to what extent are children ages 5-7 able to meaningfully discuss the topics in CosmoKidz?" was answered affirmatively. All three grade-levels stayed engaged week after week and, in some cases, applied their learning about a particular topic days and weeks after the actual conversation occurred. It was also very helpful (and another significant scaffold for learning) that the teachers continued to "cycle back" to previous CosmoKidz lessons to remind the kids of something that they had previously talked about when needed.

The SOAR bulletin Board and the continual reminder about SOARing behavior were very effective in reinforcing desirable behaviors like opening your hands to help others and undesirable ones (i.e., bullying someone is *not* acting with kindness or respecting other people).

Our third research question looked at how the use of CosmoKidz affected interpersonal communication skills and actions *across contexts*. Based on how frequently the children in all three grades began using SOAR to comment on their own and others' behaviors, it appears that it became the "scaffolding" for identifying and reinforcing or changing behaviors in the classroom, on the playground, and even at home. All three teachers said that the children took initiative to use SOAR as a lens to name behaviors in their social worlds (theirs and others). Many of the children seemed most comfortable with "opening their hands to help others" and made a point of telling their teachers when they did so. Even one of the kindergarten parents overheard her child telling her siblings who were fighting that they were not SOARing. Of the many tools in CosmoKidz (the cards, puppets, activity sheets, etc.) SOAR seems to be the most effective in helping the kids to think about and name *behaviors* across contexts.

The teachers and parents also observed positive changes in most children's interpersonal communication skills of:

- Identifying thoughts and feelings
- Expressing and sharing those thoughts and feelings
- Listening to the thoughts and feelings of other children
- Selecting a course of action that helps create better outcomes for how to act together

I was amazed at the number of parents who said they noticed a difference in the four areas since their child had begun using CosmoKidz:

- Expressing thoughts: **24 yes, 4 no**
- Expressing feelings: **24 yes, 3 no**
- Listening better to others: **20 yes, 4 no, 3 sometimes**
- Taking into account the thoughts and feelings of others in the family: **19 yes, 4 no, 4 sometimes**

Having said that, this is the area that showed the most mixed results. Our second research question (how does the use of CosmoKidz over the course of a school year affect children's interpersonal skill sets and actions?) led to the hypothesis that communication skills and actions would improve over time. If you look at the parents' responses above, most of the children did improve. The teachers also told many stories of changing attitudes and behaviors. For example, children recognizing that when they do certain things, it hurts others' feelings; children apologizing for their actions; and, children delighting in helping others in very concrete and specific ways (i.e., helping someone who has fallen on the playground get up and get help).

Yet, according to the teachers and based on a final conversation I invited each class to have with me on the topic of teasing, the children didn't improve very much in the simple, yet crucial, skills of turn-taking, listening to the thoughts and feelings of others, and building on what others have just said. All three grades continued to engage in communication patterns of wanting to talk and tell others about them, interrupting when other children were speaking, and not listening well even when they *weren't* interrupting.

This aspect of the data surprised me; I thought the turn-taking and listening *communicative skills* would develop more easily than the *SOARing behaviors* of helping others, showing kindness and respecting others. Upon reflection, I realize that the topics of CosmoKidz focused on helping children name, for example, what sharing looks like and how it feels if their friends are or are not sharing. This helps children name, identify and positively act into a situation of sharing. What these questions don't do is help children to reflect on the communicative skills of listening and turn-taking as the children are talking about the topic of sharing. In other words, inviting the children to take a "meta" approach to communication. Additional prompts, for example, might include the teacher asking children to pay

attention and listen to what their peers are saying about sharing. How does it feel when your friend listens to you? What does it look like when we are listening to each other? Questions like these begin to focus on communication itself as part of the social worlds that children are making.

In the first section of this paper I described a persistent four hundred year tradition of communication as “exchanging ideas, messages, and information”. This view of communication has come to be known as the “transmission model”. In one sense omitting specific questions about communication itself in the CosmoKidz’ topics is an example of the reach of this view of communication. I think we assumed that the communication patterns of listening and turn-taking would develop as the children discussed the topics with their teachers. And yet, as I also described in the first section, we live in a culture in which deep listening, turn-taking and building on the ideas of others are skills in short supply. Furthermore, we are not taught to be observant about how we and others are communicating with each other and what our patterns of communication are “making.” Reflecting on the data from the past five months has reinforced the importance of also helping the kids “look at and name” forms of communication as *behaviors* that affect what is being made.

For example, next year’s research can more closely align *communication skills* with the scaffolding of “*SAORing behavior*”. For instance, helping children to see that being a good listener and not interrupting is a concrete way to respect other people; that building on a comment that a classmate has just made is a form of acknowledgment that shows kindness and respect; that seeing the hand of your friend enthusiastically going up to answer a question and not interrupting him is an example of sensing what’s around you; and, that telling your story while your classmates are listening to you is their way of acting with kindness and respecting you. These very basic but crucial skills are the building blocks for “higher level conversations” and healthy interpersonal relationships that will serve these children, and those who know them, well.

APPENDIX A
TEACHER PRE-COSMOKIDZ INTERVIEW AND
POST-COSMOKIDZ INTERVIEW

Teacher Pre-CosmoKidz Interview given by Kim Pearce just before each teacher began using CosmoKidz in her class. The academic school year had begun 4 months prior to this interview.

If you were to describe overall how the children in your class interact with each other, what words would you use? (ask follow-up questions based on their response)

Think of a situation when they are interacting well together. Tell me about it... What are they doing? What are they not doing? What's happening that helps them interact well together? What communicating skills are you observing that are helping them interact well?

Think of a situation when the children aren't interacting well together. Tell me about it...What are they doing? What are they not doing? What's different about this situation that is making it more difficult for the kids to interact well together? What communicating skills are under-developed or missing?

When you think of a given school day, how much of the day is spent on behavioral challenges? Describe the behaviors that are challenging? Of the behaviors you've described, which is the most challenging? How are you attempting to redirect behavior? What seems to work the best? What seems to work the least?

Post-CosmoKidz interview given by Kim Pearce at the end of the school year.

You now have used CosmoKidz in your class for about 5 months.

If you think of your class overall, what changes have you observed in:

The overall ability of children to identify their thoughts and feelings

The overall ability of children to share their thoughts and feelings

The overall ability of children to listen to the thoughts and feelings of other children

The overall ability of children to select a course of action that helps create better outcomes for them and others

The willingness of children to play and interact with children that they never used to play with

When you think of the children in your class who have had the most difficulty interacting positively with others, what changes have you observed in:

Their overall ability to identify their thoughts and feelings

Their overall ability to share their thoughts and feelings

Their overall ability to listen to the thoughts and feelings of other children

Their overall ability to select a course of action that helps create better outcomes for them and others

Their willingness to play and interact with children that they never used to play with

Have you noticed a positive difference overall in the way children relate to each other because of the use of CosmoKidz? If so, what differences have you noticed? Have you noticed a difference in how much of your day is spent redirecting problematic behavior between the children? If so, describe the differences.

What have you liked most about the use of CosmoKidz in your classroom? What have you liked least? What surprised you the most as you engaged the kids in the activities? Are there changes that you would recommend to CosmoKidz that you think would help foster better interpersonal communication and deliberative skills among the children?

Anything else you'd like to share about using CosmoKidz in your class?

APPENDIX B:

END OF YEAR LETTER AND SURVEY FOR PARENTS

Dear Parents,

Beginning in January, 2014 your child's class participated in a pilot project called "CosmoKidz" to help develop and foster better social/emotional and communication skills. The activities in CosmoKidz are meant to be brief (only about 10 minutes a day) so as not to interfere with the curriculum, but used daily (to help instill better communication skills over time). CosmoKidz uses an acronym called SOAR. SOAR stands for **S**ense what's around you; **O**pen your hands to help others; **A**ct with kindness; **R**espect other people.

As the lead researcher of this pilot project, I want to know if you have noticed any differences in your child's social skills and communication. Would you please take about 5 minutes to fill out this brief questionnaire and send it back to your child's teacher before the end of the school year? Thank you so much for your help and support!

Kim Pearce (kimpearce@aol.com)

1. My child has talked with me about the topics in CosmoKidz?
 Yes No
2. My child has talked with me about SOAR and SOARing behavior?
 Yes No
3. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at expressing thoughts?
 Yes No
4. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at expressing feelings?
 Yes No
5. In the last 5 months, my child seems better at listening to others?
 Yes No
6. In the last 5 months, my child is doing a better job of taking into account the thoughts and feelings of others in our family? Yes No

In terms of SOAR behavior, have you noticed:

7. Your child being more aware of what is happening around him/her? (Sense what's around you) Yes No
8. Your child doing more to help others? (Opening your hands to help others)
 Yes No

9. Your child doing more to act with kindness? (Act with kindness)

Yes No

10. Your child showing more respect towards other people? (Respect other people) Yes No

11. If there is an experience or story that you would like to share about positive differences you have noticed in your child's communication and social skills, please include this in the space below or the back of this questionnaire. Thank you!!