

## **POKI – Positive Kids in Kindergarten: Development and Evaluation of a Program**

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Karina Weichold, PhD, Department of Developmental Psychology, Center for Applied Developmental Science, Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena

Study Project SS 2006

Thursdays

10.15-11.45

CZ, SR 212

**Topic:** The context kindergarten is an important educational institution where children can profit for their development. This is in particular true if staff is well trained and programs of high quality are implemented. Most of the programs developed for kindergarten children focus on the reduction of risk factors for problem behaviours. Today it seems to be more adequate to promote positive characteristics like initiative, responsibility, and participation (Pittmann et al., 2001). This strategy is based on the assumption that every child has the potential to develop positively and successfully (Lerner et al., 2002).

Actively participating in decisions, creating the own developmental context, and taking over responsibilities belong to the core competencies that promote positive developmental outcomes in children. Children who engage in participation and take over responsibilities are more likely to learn to communicate effectively, are intrinsic motivated, pro-social, emphatic, and receive positive rewards from adults. These characteristics resemble developmental assets (Lerner et al., 2002) or general life skills (WHO, 1997) which promote positive outcomes (e.g., regarding identity development, Sherrod, 2004), and reduce the likelihood for developing severe long-term developmental problems (e.g., antisocial behaviours; Leffert et al., 1998). In particular for children that show already behavioural problems at kindergarten age such a program might be particularly important because often they are not accepted by peers and adults (Moffitt, 1993). A higher involvement in activities within the kindergarten setting should give these children the chance to integrate, and to have new opportunities for learning positive behaviours and positive rewards from others.

Although programs aiming at the promotion of positive development in children and adolescents are strongly recommended, and guidelines were established to do so, only few programs actually focus on that issue. Thus, the aim of this one-year study project is to develop and implement a program (POKI=Positive Kids) in particular aiming at the promotion of taking over responsibilities, participation in decision making processes, and involvement in group activities.

**Method:** Students that participate in the study project will be involved in all aspects of an empirical study. During the winter semester, the German study group already developed the program POKI, and prepared the implementation and evaluation of the program (e.g., facilitator training, preparation of questionnaires). During the summer semester, the focus lies on the evaluation of the program POKI. All students will be able to visit the kindergartens either during the implementation phase, or during data gatherings at post-test. Then, data will be analyzed in order to check acceptance, and effects of the program. Finally, students will write a final report on the evaluation study. At the end of the semester, the findings will be reported to the kindergartens, parents, and the staff of the CADS. Thus, all skills, that are necessary in order to conduct an own

empirical study will be acquired within the study project. Students will work in small break-up groups intensively on different tasks. The teacher is offering regularly in-depth counselling and support to the groups. The students present results of their small group in front of the whole study group (once per week).

**Target Group:** The study project is offered for advanced BA students and students in a doctoral program. The course will include both students from PSU and FSU, with course language being English. Participants should be interested in applied developmental psychology, particularly in intervention programs and the promotion of positive development.

**References:**

- Leffert, N., Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Sharma, A. R., Drake, D. R., & Blyth, D. A. (1998). Developmental Assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviours among adolescents. Applied Developmental Science, 4, 209-230.
- Lerner, R. M., Brentano, C., Dowling, E. M., & Anderson, P. M. (2002). Positive youth development: Thriving as the basis of personhood and civil society. New Directions for Youth Development, 95(2), 11-33.
- Moffitt T. E. (1993). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. Psychological Review; 100(4), 674-701.
- Pittman, K. J., Irby, M., & Ferber, T. (2001). Unfinished Business: Further reflections on a decade of promoting youth development. In P. L. Benson & K. J. Pittmann (Eds.), Trends in youth development. Norwell: Kluwer.
- Sherrod, L. (2004). Civic engagement as an expression of positive youth development. Paper presented at the conference "Positive Development: Linking Individuals, Communities, and Social Policies", Weimar, Germany, October 9-12, 2004.
- WHO – World Health Organization (1997). Life Skills Education in schools. WHO.
- Youniss, J., McLellan, J. A., & Mazer, B. (2001). Voluntary service, peer group orientation, and civic engagement. Journal of Adolescent Research, 16(5), 456-468.

**Grading:** Students that participate in the study project are expected to work intensively in min. two small groups, to participate in data analysis, and writing the final report. Moreover, they have to attend regularly group meetings. In the middle of the semester there will be a short mid-term exam, and at the end of the study project there will be a written test which contains open-format multiple-choice questions.

## Semester Schedule:

April 20	Contact Meeting German Students Preparation data collection post-test Process evaluation
April 27	Process evaluation of program implementation: final results
May 4	Writing up results of process evaluation (no meeting)
May 11	Hook up-meeting German and American students I Introduction into theoretical basis of the program
May, 18	Hook-up meeting German and American students II POKI as it stands now: Program and Evaluation Outcome evaluation: Planning data analyses
May, 23	no meeting (official holiday)
June, 1	Outcome evaluation: Data analyses
June, 8	Mid-term exam
June, 15	Outcome evaluation: final results
June, 22	Wrapping up and distribution of results Writing information letters to parents, and facilitators Visit of kindergartens in order to convey findings
June, 29	Writing the final report
July, 6	Writing the final report (no meeting)
July, 13	Preparation of presentation at the colloquium of the Department of Developmental Psychology, and Center for Applied Developmental Science
July, 19	Presentation of findings (4.30-6.00 p.m.)
July, 20	Final test