
Kindness by Design: Embedded SEL Intervention in the Class



When education honors gender differences, collaboration calms boys and empathy nurtures girls.

Key Takeaways

- The Montessori method, which prioritizes emotional regulation and structured learning, showed stronger effects in reducing verbal aggression, especially among girls.
- The inclusive environments fostered by Montessori and PjBL methods—where respect, empathy, and peer mentoring are emphasized—appear to offer protective benefits for non-binary children.
- As frontline observers, teachers are often the first to witness bullying and are in a unique position to guide both victims and aggressors toward more constructive behavior.

This article explores how Montessori and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) interventions influence bullying behaviors among preschool and kindergarten-aged children, with a particular focus on gender differences. Drawing on data from classroom-based interventions, the study examines verbal bullying patterns before and after the implementation of Montessori and PjBL methods. Special attention is given to how these educational approaches can be adapted to address the diverse ways in which boys and girls express and experience bullying. The article noted that information about non-binary children may manifest differently and is still being explored, making it an area for growth.

The study employed random selection to conduct a before-and-after analysis of each model's application and assess the impact of the model's implementation on children's behaviors. The study's findings reveal a general reduction in verbal bullying across both intervention models. Among children in Montessori environments, verbal bullying decreased from 28.4% to 24.9%. The reduction was more pronounced among girls, dropping from 30.1% to 16.6% following the Montessori intervention. Similarly, children who participated in PjBL activities also showed a decline in bullying behaviors, with this approach demonstrating a more significant reduction across both genders. The structured and emotionally supportive nature of Montessori education appeared especially effective in helping girls manage verbal conflicts.

Gender differences in bullying behavior emerged as a key theme. While boys were more likely to exhibit physical forms of aggression, girls displayed higher instances of verbal and social bullying. The interventions seemed to align well with these behavioral patterns. PjBL, with its emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, was particularly effective in channeling boys' energy into cooperative projects. In contrast, the Montessori method, which prioritizes emotional regulation and structured learning, showed more potent effects in reducing verbal aggression, especially among girls.

Importantly, the study also considers the experiences of non-binary children, a group that is often underrepresented in bullying research. These children frequently face unique challenges, such as exclusion and misgendering, which may not align with traditional gendered understandings of bullying. The inclusive environments fostered by Montessori and PjBL methods, where respect, empathy, and peer mentoring are emphasized, appear to offer protective benefits for non-binary children. This finding reinforces the need for educational practices that are not only developmentally appropriate but also sensitive to gender diversity.

The role of teachers is highlighted as a critical component of intervention success. The Montessori approach encourages mixed-age classrooms and peer mentorship, fostering a sense of social responsibility and mutual care (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006).

Overall, the findings from this study align with broader research supporting the integration of emotional and social learning into early education. The findings highlight the potential for hybrid approaches that draw on the strengths of both Montessori and PjBL methods. As Miller et al. (2021) suggest, combining structured emotional learning with collaborative, hands-on projects may offer a comprehensive framework for reducing bullying and promoting inclusivity in early education. While gender continues to influence how children express and respond to bullying, the educational method itself emerges as a more powerful determinant of positive behavioral outcomes.

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