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A Study Examining Social Skills Ratings in  
a Special Education Classroom

by  
George J. Rafferty

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in the School Psychology  
Program of Rowan College  
May 7, 1996

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date approved 5/7/96

## ABSTRACT

George J. Rafferty

A Study Examining Social Skills Ratings in a Special Education Classroom

1996

Dr. Dihoff, School Psychology Program

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree of relationship between students' self-ratings scores and their teacher's and teacher assistant's scores. Ten students classified ED were chosen, along with a social comparison group of ten regular education students. A correlational matrix was computed to measure the degree of association between students' self-ratings and their teachers' ratings of them. The same was done for the regular education sample. Two t-tests for independent samples were used to (1) measure any differences between the ratings of the special education teacher and the regular education teacher, and (2) measure any differences between the self-ratings of the students with EBD and the regular education students. Results showed significant correlations between the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students with EBD in the areas of Classroom Survival Skills and Dealing with Feelings. A significant correlation was shown to exist between the regular education teacher's ratings and students' self-ratings in the area of Dealing with Stress only. A t-test for independent samples showed that students with EBD were rated lower than their regular education peers in all social skill areas. No significant differences were found between the self-rating scores of the student samples.

## **MINI-ABSTRACT**

**George J. Rafferty**

**A Study Examining Social Skills Ratings in a Special Education Classroom**

**1996**

**Dr. Dihoff, School Psychology Program**

Students' self-rating scores and their teachers' ratings were measured for correlations. A regular education sample provided a social comparison. Results showed significant correlations between the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings in the areas of Classroom Survival Skills and Dealing with Feelings. A significant correlation was found between the regular education teacher's and the students' self-ratings in the Dealing with Stress area only.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Social skills training should be an essential component in any curriculum for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). However, a study by Beare (1991) indicated that social skills training was not being used in most classrooms for students with EBD. For instance, Beare (1991) reported that the mean percentage of students receiving social skills training was 41%, the median was 25%, and 34% reported that none of their students received such training. Furthermore, respondents were polled by Beare on the following four interventions for students with EBD, (a) applied behavioral analysis, (b) counseling, (c) social skills training, and (d) consultation (1991). Beare's study demonstrated that only 44% of respondents were trained in using social skills training and only 53% ever used the method (1991, p. 213). However even though social skills training was not proven to be a widely used intervention, 84% of teachers using this method with students with EBD found the intervention highly effective (Beare, 1991). Clearly there is a need for more research investigating the effectiveness of using social skills training as a major intervention for students with EBD.

Steinburg and Knitzer (1992) identify another problem with programming for students with EBD, and that is the over reliance on behavior management techniques or what they refer to as "the curriculum of control". In their study, Steinburg and Knitzer (1992), correctly criticize curriculums or objectives that primarily focus on controlling behavior by stating, " While it keeps a classroom quiet and orderly, the curriculum of control is unresponsive to these children's seriously underdeveloped social skills" (p. 149). More disturbing is the fact that recent research (Shores, 1989; Smith & Simpson, 1989; cited in Steinburg & Knitzer, 1992) documents that few if any social and behavioral goals are ever written in IEPs. Although it is clear from the research cited that



students with EBD need social skills training, often this intervention is not included in curriculums or used in classrooms.

One study targets the teacher as an important element in any program for students with EBD. Grosenick et al., reported that teachers of students with EBD have more authority in developing and choosing their curriculum and methods than most other kinds of teachers (1987). For instance, Grosenick et al. (1987), stated, "Despite the presence of other program personnel (e.g., special education administrators, program administrators, program supervisors), teachers of the behaviorally disordered are ultimately responsible for nearly all aspects of program implementation (p. 165). This finding has both positive and negative implications. Negatively it reflects an apathetic position on behalf of public school districts to develop comprehensive programs for students with EBD. This is supported by Grosenick et al., (1987) finding that most districts surveyed had no formal program evaluation plan to help provide the type of formative assistance with goals, curriculum, and methods that is common for teachers of regular education (p. 167). Positively speaking, however, teachers of students with EBD are given more freedom when it comes to deciding what to include and leave out in their classroom curriculums.

### **NEED**

The need for this study is crucial for demonstrating the following three educationally important principles for servicing students with EBD: (a) the value of using social skills interventions in a self-contained classroom setting; (b) a model for teachers to use when assessing the social skills of students, and; (c) the necessity for incorporating social skills in the curriculum that have social validity for students and teachers alike.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to examine, using a social skills rating scale in a middle school self-contained classroom for students with EBD, the degree of relationship existing between students' self-rating scores and their teacher's and teacher assistant's scores. These findings will be compared to a regular education classroom for social comparison purposes.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

In this study the following hypotheses will be examined:

1. In regard to the special education classroom, a relationship will exist between the social skills rating scores of the teacher and teacher assistant, the teacher and the students, and the teacher assistant and the students.
2. Students without EBD will be rated higher in social skills areas than their peers with EBD by their respective teacher.
3. In regard to the five social skills areas viewed, there will be a difference between the self-rating scores of the students with EBD when compared to the self-rating scores of their regular education peers.
4. In the regular education classroom, a relationship will exist between the teacher's scores and the students' self-rating scores in the five skill areas.

## **A PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL APPROACH**

In this section, the basic model and assessment approach adopted for use in this study will be discussed, along with the types of students who can benefit from this approach, and the trainer skills needed for implementing it.

The social skills rating scale used in this study is based on Arnold Goldstein's Skillstreaming Curriculum and Structured Learning Approach (1980). Defined by

Cartledge and Milburn (1995), "Skillstreaming is a systematic, psychoeducational intervention demonstrated in many investigations to reliably teach a fifty-skill curriculum of prosocial behaviors" (p.314). The terms Skillstreaming and Structured Learning (SL) are used interchangeably in the literature, but both refer to the specific approach, developed by Goldstein, for teaching prosocial behaviors to students. The roots of the psychoeducational approach, as outlined by Goldstein, can be traced to learning theories and psychological research starting in the 1950's and early 1960's (1980). In addition, educational developments in moral education influenced the belief that didactic, instructional, and audio-visual techniques can be used to enhance individual's psychological well being (Goldstein,1980).

Psychoeducational approaches are becoming more popular in current psychotherapy. Psychoeducationalists view an individual's mental health problems as being caused mainly by skill deficiencies. As a result, alleviating mental health, social, and interpersonal difficulties becomes a training issue. Individuals who are having difficulty engaging in satisfying living require training in acquiring the specific skills necessary for accomplishing such goals.

Skillstreaming is a prescriptive psychoeducational approach. Prescriptive teaching is similar to precision teaching, data-based instruction, and direct instruction. These teaching methods have five basic techniques in common, they approach instruction by (a) assessing behaviors or skills, then (b) selecting or targeting skills to be taught, (c) task analyzing each skill into its component parts, (d) instructing students on each skill, and finally (e) measuring the degree and effectiveness of the instruction. The instructor repeats this prescriptive cycle until students achieve all their objectives.

Before discussing the basic components of Structured Learning, the kinds of students who can benefit from Skillstreaming will be presented. Goldstein relies on Quay's three general categories of classification for behaviorally disordered adolescents: (1) aggression, (2) withdrawal, and (3) immaturity (Quay, 1966; cited in

Goldstein,1980). Goldstein agrees that most behaviors exhibited by behaviorally disordered youth can be placed into one of Quay's categories. The first category, aggression, encompasses most antisocial acts directed toward others. For example, fighting, disruptiveness, profanity, destruction of school property, defiance of authority, quarrelsomeness, high levels of attention-seeking behavior, and low levels of guilt feelings are all characteristic of an aggressive type student (Quay,1966; cited in Goldstein,1980). However, Quay (1966) reports that withdrawn behaviorally disturbed students typically exhibit feelings of depression, feelings of inferiority, self-consciousness, shyness, and anxiety (cited in Goldstein,1980). These patterns of behavior typically involve pulling back or away from social interaction with others. Finally, the immature student is one that may be engaging in appropriate behavior for a particular developmental level, but just not their own. For instance, crying, pouting, stubbornness, foolishness, and silliness may be appropriate for younger children, but become largely inappropriate for an adolescent. All three types of students present challenges to school personnel and communities, but the most troublesome type tends to be the aggressive student. These students come to the attention of school personnel more often than most other types of students. Goldstein adds, "Children and adolescents whose behavior reflects this pattern in the extreme are likely to be . . . involved with the courts and social institutions for delinquents" (1980,p. 3). In addition, Goldstein adds that "normal" youngsters who need assistance overcoming common developmental hurdles may benefit from Skillstreaming as well (1980).

## DEFINITIONS

The term **Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD)** is used to refer to those students who are classified "Emotionally disturbed". According to N.J.A.C. 6:23-3.5 (d), Emotionally Disturbed means the exhibiting of seriously disordered behavior over an extended period of time which adversely affects educational performance and shall be

characterized by: (1) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships, or; (2) behaviors inappropriate to the circumstances, a general pervasive mood of depression or the development of physical symptoms or irrational fears. Of course, a full child study team evaluation, along with a psychiatric examination is required before a student can be labeled EBD.

**Generalization** refers to the effects of a social skills intervention that go beyond the immediate training setting. Generalization does not occur automatically and should be programmed into the intervention, if trainers want to ensure its success.

**Mainstream classes** are those subject areas in which handicapped students are included and receive instruction along with their non-handicapped peers.

**Maintenance** is a term used in social skills training programs that refers to any effects of the social skills intervention that continue after training has stopped. Like generalization, in order for maintenance to occur it must be planned for and programmed into the intervention program.

**Psychoeducational model** is a generic term used to refer to those approaches that apply research proven psychological principles to educational settings.

**Skillstreaming** refers to the curriculum of social skills developed by Arnold Goldstein.

**Social comparison** is commonly referred to the practice of comparing special education students to their regular education peers in order to measure the degree of difference between the two groups. The regular education group usually represents a standard for which special education students aim to achieve.

**Social skills** will be defined narrowly here as those skills identified within the skillstreaming curriculum and used in the training sessions of this study.

**Social validation** occurs when teachers, other school personnel, parents, and students view the social skill areas in the training program as socially useful, important, and necessary for success in school.

**Structured learning** is the approach developed by Goldstein (1980) that incorporates the following learning techniques: modeling, role playing, performance feedback, and transfer of learning.

### **ASSUMPTIONS**

This researcher recognizes the following factors as possible sources of confounding variables: the evaluators' skill level, sample selection and size, the rating scale, and setting. As a result, these factors are discussed here to alleviate any cause for concern that they will impact the results of this study.

The instructors in this study have had no formal training in the teaching of social skills. However, each instructor has a thorough knowledge of the Skillstreaming Curriculum, as well as the components of the Structured Learning approach. The special education teacher has been teaching students labeled ED for six years, both at the elementary and junior high levels. The teacher assistant, participating in this study, has been assigned to self-contained special education classrooms for seven years. In addition, both trainers have worked closely for two years in the self-contained ED classroom used in this study. This researcher is confident that both evaluators possess the necessary skills to rate students accurately, however a Pearson product-moment correlation will be computed to measure degree of interrater reliability.

A second source of concern is in the areas of sample size and selection. Ideally, subjects should be selected in a random manner and in great enough numbers to ensure reliability. However, due to the special focus of this study on a select sample of students with EBD receiving instruction in a public middle school self-contained classroom, the ten male students chosen were selected based on placement criteria and availability. In addition, the ten male regular education students were selected based on their similarities to the special education group, utilizing social comparison criteria, by the regular

education and special education teachers. In regard to the sample group, one must be aware of these sources of confounding variables.

Third, the rating scale may present a source for confounding variables in regard to each raters' interpretation of the meanings of the social skills being rated, the honesty of the students' self-ratings, and in the manner in which it was administered in the two settings. Since the social skills are defined in concrete operational terms, little confusion is anticipated from the raters. Also, the special and regular education teachers made efforts to explain fully and uniformly the directions for completing the social skills scale to their students.

Lastly, the settings used in this study were not under the control of this researcher. As a result, students will undergo social skills assessment in the same small, self-contained classroom in which all their other academic subjects are taught. The size of the classroom also limited this researcher's ability to arrange furniture in a manner most conducive to the assessment of social skills. However, except for size, the classroom does resemble most others in the school where students will need to transfer and perform social skills. Regular education students will undergo assessment in their regular classroom.

### LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations in this study that impact on the generalizability of the results. First, one must be careful not to generalize the results of this study to students outside of this sample group, especially because of the small sample size selected and the specialized group targetted. For example, the results do not apply to students in different grades or with different classifications. In addition, subjects are preadolescent, ten to thirteen year old, male students classified ED, receiving instruction in a self-contained classroom. Therefore, these findings do not generalize to students receiving services in

other settings like, resource center, mainstreamed classrooms, or those fully included in regular classes.

Classification criteria for labeling students ED also impact on the generalizability of the results in this study. Although there are federal definitions for special education classification categories, most states outline their own criteria. The result is classification criteria that varies from state to state. However, this researcher will argue that variation can be found even between school districts, since community standards and norms ultimately influence what behaviors constitute emotional disturbance.

Finally, this is a correlational study providing information regarding a select sample group. One can not take the results of this study and generalize them to all students, since they speak only to the uniqueness of this sample.

## OVERVIEW

In this section an overview of what will occur in the ensuing chapters is presented. In chapter 2, a detailed review of the literature is provided. Research studies outlining and explaining the importance of social skills assessment and training will be reviewed. In addition, the results of the literature will show the effects of various social skill interventions on student populations labeled Emotionally Disturbed (ED). In Chapter 3, the research design chosen for this study will be outlined in detail. Finally, in Chapter 4 an analysis of the results will be presented.



## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION

The necessity and importance for including social skills training in programs serving students with EBD is being emphasized more in both educational settings and the research literature. In addition, states are recognizing the need to mandate school districts to include social skills training in their programs for students with EBD. For instance, in the state of New Jersey, programs for students with moderate behavioral handicaps are required to focus on helping them with: (1) improving ability to build or maintain satisfactory relationships with others; (2) decreasing behaviors which interfere with other pupils' social/emotional or academic growth; (3) increasing self-control, and; (4) increasing social skills for successful group participation (New Jersey Administrative Code, 1994, 6:28-11.12). However, even though state departments of education, educational professionals, and researchers are aware of the positive impact social skills programs can have on students with EBD, there is little consensus on which model or approach to implement, the best way to measure program effectiveness, and a proper definition for social skills.

Before presenting the literature review there is a need for a brief word in regard to appropriately defining social skills. Social skills can be defined broadly or specifically. Even though no real consensus for one definition of social skills is reached in the literature, a widely accepted version is provided by Gresham and Elliot (1984) as:

those behaviors which, within a given situation, predict important social outcomes such as (a) peer acceptance or popularity, (b) significant others' judgments of behavior, or (c) other social behaviors known to correlate consistently with peer acceptance or significant others' judgments (cited in Cartledge & Milburn, 1994, p.4).

Although the above broad definition provides a basis for validating the importance of social skills, researchers Schloss, Schloss, Wood, and Kiehl (1986) recommend that social skills be defined as specific behaviors described in ways that allow reliable observation and take the subjects' age and specific social context into consideration (cited in Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). As a result of defining social skills specifically and operationally, reliable research studies can be conducted on program effectiveness and generalization effects.

In this chapter an in depth review of the social skills research literature will be conducted. First, a discussion on the importance and need for social skills training with handicapped students will be given. In addition, the concepts of social validation and social comparison will be discussed as it is related to social skills selection and training. Second, studies that measure the effects of social skills training with various types of individuals will be reviewed. Third, social skills research will be reviewed and presented as it relates to the following areas: (1) peers; (2) social problem-solving; (3) interpersonal communication; (4) mainstreaming, and; (5) generalization and maintenance. Finally, a summary highlighting the major findings of the studies reviewed will be given, along with the ways upon which this present study adds to the past research base.

### **THE CASE FOR SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING**

The case for including social skills training in the school curriculum, especially for students with EBD, is being repeated more often than ever before in the research literature. Gresham (1981) reports that handicapped students who are deficient in social skills are often poorly accepted by their handicapped peers. In addition, Gresham (1989) writes that handicapped students that are deficient in social skills and/or negatively accepted by their peers have a high incidence for school maladjustment, childhood psychopathology and adult mental health difficulties (cited in Dupaul & Eckert, 1994).

This seems to be confirmed by a 5-year longitudinal research study being conducted by Walker, Shinn, O'Neil, and Ransetz (1987), in which they found significant differences in their subject pool which consisted of an antisocial group and a non antisocial comparison group. For instance, in the evaluation of their antisocial group, after one year, Walker et al. (1987) found they were significantly less academically engaged in instructional settings, initiated negative peer-interactions ten times more than their peers, had more discipline contacts with the principal, and experienced greater social failure and exposure to special education sources than non antisocial peers. The importance of these findings suggest that if students at-risk for antisocial behavior can be identified early and receive social skills training in deficient areas, then greater maladjustment problems may be avoided later.

A survey study by Baumgart, Filler, and Askvig (1991) revealed that special education teachers and educational experts consistently rated social skills a curriculum priority, while parents viewed academic subject areas as most important. Interestingly, Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, and Klein (1983), when presenting their structured learning approach to teaching social competence, remarked that special education teachers showed a greater interest in their social skills curriculum and training program than regular education teachers. Maybe this is because many times regular educators do not have either the room in their curriculum or time in their schedules for teaching social skills. On the other hand, Goldstein et al. (1983), attributes the success and acceptance of their program to its compatibility with the federal mandate Public Law 94-142, which requires that students be included in the least restrictive educational environments. However, Gresham (1981, p. 140) states that the, "placement of handicapped children into regular classrooms without providing them with the social skills which are critical to peer acceptance may result in increased social isolation and a more restrictive social environment."

The importance of social skills and the training of such skills has been demonstrated through social validity, as well. Social validation refers to the process by which parents, teachers and students conclude that a set of social skills is both necessary and important. For instance, Williams, Walker, Holmes, Tolis, and Fabre (1989, p.19) write that " Social skills curricula should, whenever possible, include skills that have been positively validated by teachers, peers, and the targets of such training". Furthermore, William et al. (1989) in their study investigating the social validity of adolescent social skills found that both regular education teachers (n=183) and students (n=437) viewed social skill in areas like relating to others, relating to teachers , and relating to yourself as very important.

As indicated by the above discussion, the determination of what social skills are important can best be determined by students, teachers, and parents deciding together. However, another method known as social comparison has helped many researchers determine what overall skills to target for training with handicapped students. Social comparison refers to using non handicapped peer groups as a normative model for measuring appropriate social behavior. For instance, Macklin and Matson (1985) showed in their study, which matched 30 hearing impaired children on age (8-14) and sex with equal members of nonhandicapped children, that differences in social skills deficits and excesses can be seen. A study by Walker and Hops (1976) used non handicapped subjects as a baseline in which to measure the treatment effects of a social skills intervention on subjects that "exhibited relatively low rates of appropriate classroom behavior " (p.160). The important finding of the Walker and Hops (1976) study, in which nonhandicapped students were used as a normative standard, was that even though the handicapped treatment groups managed to surpass their nonhandicapped peers in their use of appropriate classroom behaviors during treatment phase, follow-up measures indicated that their behaviors were not maintained and returned to levels below that of their peers. One study by Gunter, Fox, Brady, Shores, and Cavanaugh (1988), using non

handicapped peers as standards for measuring the generalization effects of social skills training with autistic children, found no increase levels of social interaction with non handicapped peers and non trained handicapped peers. Another study by Cartledge, Stupay, and Kaczala (1986), showed no significant differences between learning disabled students and non handicapped students' abilities to demonstrate empathy in various social situations.

As shown in a survey study by Pray, Hall, and Markley (1992), in which social skills goals were selected for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), is that many times the goals teachers select for training reflect the areas that they deem most important. For instance, although Pray et. al (1992) successfully demonstrated that social skills were listed in the student IEPs, they found that most focused on academic related behaviors rather than on interpersonal social skills. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the selection of social skills should be based on social validity and social comparison principles in order for them to be viewed as important and necessary.

Finally, in an effort to assist and guide teachers through the ocean of social skills programs that have proliferated just over the last decade, articles have been published on the promising practices in teaching social skills to handicapped students (Carter & Sugai, 1988), on how to choose effective social skills curricula for behaviorally disordered students (Epstein & Cullinan, 1987), and on a decision model for teachers to use when selecting and analyzing a social skills curriculum (Carter & Sugai, 1989). Nevertheless, the most important reason for including social skills training within the school curriculum, is best summarized by Epstein & Cullinan (p.21, 1987) statement revealing that "historically overlooked in explanations of normal and abnormal development, social competence is now recognized by leading child psychologists as critical to successful life adjustment".

## **SOCIAL SKILLS INTERVENTIONS**

In this section, research studies measuring the effects of social skills interventions will be discussed in regard to their focus on the types of social deficits and excesses targeted, population of subjects used in the study, their findings, and the treatment settings emphasized in the study. The following subsections have been developed to provide focus for the reader on the varying focuses of social skills intervention on age/developmental levels and school levels selected for treatment settings: (1) Preschool/Lower Elementary Grades; (2) Upper Elementary/Junior High School; (3) Outpatient/Inpatient Clinical Settings and with (4) Court Adjudicated Youth.

### **Preschool/Lower Elementary School**

Social skills training has been applied to all age levels, but the preschool/lower elementary school grade interventions demonstrate that they can be effective at this level, too. In addition, social skills training holds a special importance with younger children as some research has indicated that remediation of social skills deficits and excesses can lead to better adjustment later. The Head Start program movement was based on the premise that if intervention is implemented early, bigger problems can be avoided later. An ABAB reversal design study conducted by Parrish, Cataldo, Kolko, Neef, and Egel (1986), in which preschool children aged 3 to 5 underwent social skills training based on operant behaviorism, demonstrated a positive increase in appropriate behaviors with an inverse decrease in non targeted inappropriate behaviors. This study is extremely important because it shows that social skills interventions not only can have a positive effect on targeted behaviors, but on untargeted ones, as well. In addition, Parish et al (1986) help demonstrate behavioral covariation between appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors, indicating that when one behavior is changed a direct inverse change can occur in another.

Operant behavioral principles have been successfully implemented in social skills interventions with positive results. For instance, Sullivan & O'Leary (1990) were able to demonstrate the effects of cost token programs on the maintenance of social skills targeted in treatment following reward. Their study results indicated that both cost token and reward practices are equally effective in increasing the percentage of on-task behavior in young children. In addition, Sullivan & O'Leary (1990) show that the efforts of applying behavioral principles to changing behavior are lasting even after treatment is faded. Other researchers have met with similar success for instance, McMahon, Wacker, Sasso, & Melloy (1994) not only effectively demonstrate the reliability of the findings in the previous studies, but show that a single social skills intervention can have multiple positive effects on young children's behavior across a variety of settings, in regard to response covariation, increases in positive social interaction with peers, collateral behavior changes, and on-task behavior. The research results of social skills training with young children are both positive and encouraging.

### **Upper Elementary/Junior High**

Social interventions with elementary and junior high students with EBD have met with the same success of studies focusing on younger children. Studies exploring the uses of operant behaviorism and social learning approaches will be presented. In terms of a group approach to training elementary students, La Greca & Santogrossi (1990) have revealed results that support the efficacy of such an approach for improving a child's social behavior with peers. These researchers importantly point out that preschoolers and elementary students differ in the complexity of their conversational skills, therefore their sample focused on the latter group. Although, generalization and maintenance of social skills were lacking in their study, La Greca & Santogrossi (1980, p. 25) successfully demonstrated that "Children who experience some difficulty in peer social interactions in a normal classroom setting can be taught to improve their social behaviors through

instruction and practice". In their study focusing on training assertive interpersonal behaviors to elementary school children ages 8 to 11, Bornstein, Bellack, and Hersen (1977) employed a multiple-baseline across individuals design to measure the effects of their social skills intervention.

Bornstein et al. (1977) used direct instruction, feed back, behavioral rehearsal, and modeling, all social learning principles, and demonstrated a positive increase in assertive behavior of children across settings and maintained across a two and four week time period. However, a study by Sasso, Melloy, and Kavale (1990), using the social learning principles found in Goldstein et al.'s (1983) Structured Learning approach with behaviorally disordered children ages 7 to 14 demonstrated an increase in most skill areas having to do with positive ways of dealing with aggression, stress, and feelings. In addition, Sasso et al. (1990) showed that these behaviors could be generalized to other settings maintained over an entire school year, and inversely affect non-targeted negative behaviors (response covariation).

Finally, Bulkeley and Cramer (1990) successfully implemented a social skills intervention as part of the curriculum in a secondary school, with young adolescents ages 12 to 13 that demonstrated social skills difficulties. In this study, Bulkeley & Cramer (1990), employed group social skills training methods and compared the training group with a comparison of untrained peers, the result indicated that while significant improvement was shown in the treatment group there was no improvement in the untrained group. These studies indicate that social skills intervention can be successfully implemented with upper elementary and junior high students, especially those with EBD.

### **Outpatient/Inpatient Clinical Settings**

In this section, studies examining the effects of social skills training on youngsters receiving services in either outpatient or inpatient settings will be presented. It is important to note that these youngster represent a category of subjects who exhibit social



skills difficulties that are more severe than most students, including handicapped students and those with EBD, currently being served in regular public school settings.

An empirical case study conducted by Franco, Christoff, Crimmins, and Kelly (1983) with an extremely shy young adolescent 14 year old boy receiving mental health services in an outpatient clinic, revealed that a behavioral intervention significantly improved his conversational skills with both significant others and individuals he had never met before. A multiple baseline design across behaviors was used to assess treatment effects by using frequency recording and subjective reports by significant others. As a result, a significant increase in the frequency in the use of appropriate conversational behaviors, generalization and maintenance across settings and time, and an increase in favorable ratings by both peers and significant others who knew him (Franco et al., 1983). Researchers conducting a study, using a 10 year old male receiving treatment in a residential group home, were able to teach basic social skills in the following three areas; greeting others, departing skills, and telephone conversation skills (Ford, Evans, & Divorkin, 1982). The teaching components of this intervention are similar to those used in a Structural Learning approach. Ford et al. (1982), were not only able to increase the use of appropriate social behaviors, but were able to maintain them over time.

An important study by Matson, Esvelt, Dawson, Andrasik, Ollendick, Petti, and Hersen (1980), using four children with EBD between the ages of 9 and 11 in a hospital setting showed that observational learning or modeling alone was not as effective in maintaining and generalizing social skills to other setting as the combined effects of direct instruction, performance feedback, modeling, role playing, and social reinforcement. Finally, a cautionary message about relying solely on role playing as a primary assessment tool in social skills interventions. A study by Bellack, Hersen, and Turner (1979) examined the validity of using role playing and structural interviews to assess the social skills behaviors of 28 psychiatric patients for determining their behavior

in vivo situations. The findings reported by Bellack et al. (1979), indicated that there was no valid reliable correspondence between behaviors demonstrated in the role playing sessions and those exhibited in vivo situations.

### **Court Appointed Settings**

Two studies focusing on using social skills interventions with court adjudicated youth, one with subjects on probation and the other using incarcerated female subjects, will be presented. This population of youth represent the final outcome of children that have received no social skills training or remediation during their life. Eventually, as some studies indicate these youths are more likely to be arrested by the police and come under the supervision of the courts.

Fortunately, even at this stage, success has been achieved with social skills interventions used with this population. Hazel, Schumaker, Sherman, and Sheldon-Wildgen (1982), applied a group training program for teaching social skills to 13 court adjudicated youths on probation with a juvenile court, and instructed them in eight skills: giving positive feedback, giving negative feedback, accepting negative feedback, resisting peer pressure, problem solving, negotiation, following instructions, and conversation. Hazel et. al (1982), used the same procedures and components found in Structured Learning with results showing substantial skill increases in all skill levels. An 8 month follow-up revealed that the youth were still maintaining good retention of the skills, as well as rating themselves more competent than before. Another study by Mathur and Rutherford (1994) utilized 9 female incarcerated juveniles ages 13 to 17 years as subjects. The subjects were shown to have various social skills deficits and excesses in inappropriate behaviors, as well as educational handicaps. Researchers used a Positive Talk social skills curriculum and applied Structural Learning principles in training, resulting in the successful promotion of targeted social skills in generalizing to a natural social context (Mathur & Rutherford, 1994). It is important, as it is indicated in Mathur

& Rutherford's (1994) study to systematically program for the generalization of targeted social skills to successfully ensure that area.

### STUDIES EMPHASIZING SPECIAL FACTORS

In this section, studies that relate to the following unique areas relevant to social skills training will be presented: (1) peers; (2) social problem solving; (3) interpersonal communication; (4) mainstreaming, and; (5) generalization and maintenance.

#### Peers

Social skills training approaches that consider the nonhandicapped peer group of handicapped children, focus on the necessity of interpersonal social skills for enhancing the acceptability of handicapped children by their nonhandicapped peers, and incorporate peers into the actual training process have demonstrated extremely positive results. For instance, Bierman, Miller, and Stabb (1987), in their study with 32 boys who were rejected by their peers, showed in grades 1-3, that a combination of both direct instruction and a response cost token system led to improved sociometric ratings from nontargeted treatment partners. Sociometric measures are commonly used in social skills studies that utilize peers, mainly because they are effective in measuring peer preferences for social interaction. Although, most sociometric measures are used to observe if handicapped students with poor social skills are rejected by peers, Singleton and Asher (1977) applied a sociometric measure to assess if race and age were factors influencing peer preferences for social interaction in third graders. Their findings indicated that sex was the most potent determiner of social interaction between young children than sex and age (Singleton & Asher, 1977). Wheeler and Ladd (1981) administered the Children's Self-Efficacy for Peer Interaction Scale (CSPI), to determine construct validity and reliability and to develop an instrument for measuring elementary school children's self-efficacy for social situations. This CSPI Scale, hopefully, can be helpful to future researchers when

measuring whether children's self-perception of social competence influences their interpersonal behavior is important (Wheeler & Ladd, 1981).

Training young children in interpersonal skills can aid in increasing their positive interactions with peers. Kohler and Fowler (1985) demonstrated that children trained in prosocial behaviors received more play invitations from their peers than untrained children. Results of another study conducted by researchers Bryant and Budd (1984) indicated that if children with EBD can be taught sharing behaviors their social initiative will be more likely to be accepted by their nonhandicapped peers, hence increasing their social interactions in a more normalized setting. Also, Bryant and Ladd's (1984) results indicated that teacher praise and prompting was helpful in maintaining sharing behaviors, in children with EBD, over time. On the other hand, Odom, Chandler, and Ostrosky (1992) examined the effects of fading teacher prompts after a peer-initiation intervention with nonhandicapped children. Overall, Odom et al. (1992) found that when nonhandicapped peers were trained to initiate social interactions with handicapped children they continued to engage in this behavior even after teacher prompting was faded.

Although peers can be powerful agents of change in social skills interventions by exerting positive influences on the behaviors of their peers, research has not proven that peers can be relied on solely as agents of change in such interventions. For instance, Carden-Smith and Fowler (1984) indicated by the results in their study that if peers were made monitors of a token point system, they frequently gave points whenever their peers earned them, but when they were not monitored or received corrective feedback they consistently awarded points that were not earned. As a result, Carden-Smith and Fowler (1992) recommend a combination of both teacher and peer-monitored interventions for a more successful approach. Consequently, in a review of peer-mediated interventions promoting the social skills of children with EBD, Mathur and Rutherford (1991) found overall that these programs produced positive immediate treatment effects, identified

numerous types of peer-mediated approaches, and that for the most part generalization effects have been ignored by researchers in such studies.

### **Social Problem-Solving**

Some studies focus on increasing socially appropriate behaviors in children with EBD by incorporating a social problem-solving (SPS) component into their social skills intervention. However, the results of such studies are mixed in regard to the overall effectiveness of SPS with students with EBD. For example, Amish, Gesten, Smith, Clark, and Stark (1988) indicate that although students with behavioral disorders did not differ from their nonhandicapped peers in their ability to generate alternative solutions to social problems, the results of this study showed that these students more often provided solutions that were inadequate, aggressive in nature, and socially incompetent. A study by Brochin and Wasik (1992) supports these results, as well. In addition, Neel, Jenkins, and Meadows (1990) found students with EBD, who received SPS training offered solutions to social problems and conflicts that were intrusive and aggressive. In closing, the results of SPS training with students with EBD is inconclusive. More research needs to be done in the area of cognitive social problem-solving and the effect this training has on students' with EBD abilities to generate socially competent and appropriate solutions.

### **Interpersonal Training**

Several studies will be presented here that emphasize either interpersonal social skills training or functional communication skills training in their intervention. First, a multiple baseline analysis of an interpersonal training program with depressed youth conducted by Schloss, Schiess, and Harris (1983), reported positive results using a social skills training package that included modeling, behavioral rehearsal, feedback, and contingent reinforcement. Consequently, the depressed youth showed positive increase in the use of targeted skills across settings. A study by Bates (1980) reports similar success

using 16 moderately and mildly retarded adults. The results of Bates's (1980) study show that although subjects acquired new social skills, unfortunately these new social skills gains were not generalized to natural settings.

Functional communication training with students with EBD has demonstrated great success. For example, Durand and Carr (1991) were able to use functional communication training successfully by demonstrating that their intervention not only reduced challenging behaviors, but resulted in the new behaviors being generalized to other settings and maintained over time by at least 18 to 24 months. This study replicates the results of their earlier study (Carr & Durand, 1985), in which misbehavior was more often seen in children when teacher attention was low and task difficulty was high. Therefore, as a function of training children were taught how to appropriately seek attention and ask for help, this training effectively suppressed misbehavior in 4 developmentally disabled children.

### **Mainstreaming**

Mainstreaming is another area of focus in the social skills research literature, especially in regard to measuring the effects that such training has on enabling handicapped students to be both included and maintained in mainstreamed settings over time. Researchers like Gresham (1982) have pointed out that many times mainstreaming is based on the following three faulty assumptions: (1) that placing handicapped children in classrooms with nonhandicapped children will increase social interaction between the two groups; (2) that placing handicapped children in mainstreamed setting will increase their social acceptance by others, and; (3) mainstreamed handicapped children will model and imitate the socially appropriate behaviors of the their nonhandicapped peers. All these assumptions are false and research studies reviewed by Gresham (1982, p. 423) reveal that in order for handicapped children to be successfully mainstreamed they need

to be “trained in the social skills necessary for effective social interaction and peer acceptance”.

In reviewing social skills research literature pertaining to mainstreaming behaviorally disordered children, Hollinger (1987) states that although the focus should remain on training behaviorally disordered children in social skills, efforts need to be made to improve peers’ negatively biased perceptions of such students. Cartledge, Frew, and Zaharias (1985) found that when they examined both teacher and peer perceptions of the social skills needs of mainstreamed students, results showed that regular education classroom teachers viewed task-related academic skills as most important and that nonhandicapped children preferred interacting socially with other nonhandicapped peers. Cartledge et al. (1985) suggested that the results of their study indicated that communication and sports skills seemed to be a great determiner of a child’s social acceptance in upper grades. Nevertheless, Ballard, Gottlieb, Cornan, and Kaufman (1977) demonstrated that mainstreamed educable mentally retarded children in grades 3,4, and 5 were favorably rated by nonhandicapped peers after working together in small cooperative groups for 8 weeks. In addition, a study by Sainato, Maheady, and Shook (1986) showed that by increasing the social status of withdrawn kindergarten students, social interaction pattern between the withdrawn children and their peers could be positively enhanced. For instance, Sainato et al. (1986) found that after withdrawn children fulfilled their role as classroom manager they were favorably rated by their peers on sociometric measures.

### **Generalization and Maintenance**

A national survey study conducted by Epstein and Cullinan (1984, p. 57) examining research issues in behavioral disorders, revealed that respondents viewed “generalization and maintenance as the most pressing research topics”. In other words, the value of any intervention with students with EBD lies in its ability to generalize

behaviors across settings and demonstrate their endurance over time. Numerous studies have been conducted in an attempt to develop and measure the most effective strategies for enhancing the generalization and maintenance of behaviors taught in social skills interventions. Clark and McKenzie (1989) implemented a social skills intervention demonstrating generalization and maintenance of behaviors across settings and teachers by training 3 students with EBD in self-evaluation procedures. Ninness, Fuerst, and Rutherford (1991) successfully proved that 3 emotionally disturbed adolescents could improve their on-task behavior and socially appropriate behaviors in class, while the teacher was out of the room, by using strategies taught in a self-management training program.

Generalization and maintenance of social skills across 3 settings was successfully achieved, with an adolescent with EBD, by using a Structured Learning approach, with results showing an increase in greetings and thanking behavior and an incidental increase in the skill initiating conversation (Kiburz, Miller, & Morrow, 1984). In another study, researchers Rhode, Morgan, and Young (1983) showed that treatment gains were successfully generalized and maintained with behaviorally handicapped students from resource room settings to regular classrooms, by using a combination of procedures emphasizing self-evaluation.

Kelly, Salzberg, Levy, Warrenteltz, Adams, Crouse, and Beegle (1983) used role playing and self-monitoring to promote the generalization of vocational social skills of behaviorally disordered adolescents. Hopefully, such procedures focusing on vocational and career training will decrease the high incidence of adult unemployment many behaviorally disordered children eventually face.

Social skills instruction and self-monitoring were successfully employed to improve game related social skills in adolescents with EBD, by using a Structured Learning approach (Moore, Cartledge, & Heckaman, 1995). The effects of this social



skills intervention using self-monitoring generated greater overall improvements in the classroom, as well.

Generalization and maintenance procedures involving self-control and self-monitoring have also been shown to be effective when applied to academic task areas. Stevenson and Fantuzzo (1984) successfully increased math performance in two underachieving students by incorporating a number of self-management skills into their overall self-control intervention, which ultimately led to increased performance across a variety of settings. At last, Harris (1986) shows that teaching 4 learning disabled children to self-monitor their attentional behavior greatly increased their productivity on on-task behavior and academic response rate.

### SUMMARY

In reviewing the previously examined research studies one can see that social skills interventions can be successfully implemented with a variety of types of individuals and settings. Individuals demonstrating significant deficits and excesses in social skills have been successfully remediated. The most effective approaches to teaching social skills with behaviorally disordered students, as indicated by the research findings, seems to be those that incorporate a combination of the following components: (1) direct instruction; (2) modeling; (3) role playing; (4) performance feedback, and; (5) reinforcement procedures. In addition, generalizations and maintenance of social skills across settings, individuals, and behaviors have been successfully achieved through planning and programming generalization enhancement strategies into the intervention. Strategies that research has shown to be most effective in enhancing generalization effects include self-management procedures, self-monitoring, and transfer of learning activities that use behavioral rehearsal and reinforcement of correct behavior.

This present study adds to the current knowledge base of the social skills research by: (1) selecting social skills based on social validation and social comparison principles

through student and teacher rating scales; (2) comparing the degree of relationship existing between the following raters' scores: the special education teacher and the teacher assistant, the special education teacher and the teacher assistant, and the teacher assistant and the students; (3) comparing the self-rating scores of students with EBD to those of their regular education peers to examine any differences that may exist; (4) comparing the rating scores of the special education teacher with a regular education counterpart to analyze any differences in the way they rated their students; (5) measuring any significant relationship existing between the rating scores of the regular education teacher and his students, and; (6) using an applied setting in a public school. Although some studies exist that examine some of the above mentioned elements, few can be identified that examine all of them. A final point in regard to the importance of this present study is best described by the results of a study conducted by Zaragoza, Vaughn, and McIntosh (1991), in which after reviewing 27 social skills intervention studies they were surprised to find that relatively few focused on the outcome of social interventions with school age children, who are presently being served in school based programs for the behaviorally disordered. Since the focus of this study is on students with EBD receiving services in a public school setting, at the very least it will fill this research void.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DESIGN**

#### **Social Comparison**

A social comparison will be conducted between the handicapped subjects in this study and non-handicapped peers in the mainstream settings. Each non-handicapped peer will be selected based on the degree to which they are similar to the subject in demographics, learner characteristics, and gender. A between-subjects approach will enable the researcher to measure any differences between handicapped and non-handicapped students in regard to social skill functioning. A correlational design will be used to measure any relationship between each sample group's ratings on the Social Skill Checklist.

Subjects' rating scores will be placed in sample groupings according to whether they are students classified EBD, regular education students, a special education teacher, a special education teacher assistant, or a regular education teacher. The special education teacher and teacher assistant will be rating the social skills of the students with EBD on the Checklist, while the regular education teacher will be rating the regular education students. However, both student groups will be rating themselves on the Checklist.

#### **Inter-rater Reliability**

The ratings of the students with EBD were conducted by the special education teacher and the teacher assistant. These scores were converted to mean scores for each of the following five social skill areas: Classroom Survival Skills (CRS), Friendship-Making Skills (FMS), Dealing with Feelings (DWF), Alternatives to Aggression (ATA), and Dealing with Stress (DWS). Mean rating scores were matched for each of the component skill areas between the special education teacher and the teacher assistant, and

evaluated for interrater reliability using Pearson product-moment correlations. The results show significant interrater reliability between the special education teacher and the teacher assistant in the areas of CRS ( $r = .77, p = .009$ ) and DWF ( $r = -.82, p = .003$ ). No significant correlations were found between the two raters in the areas of FMS, ATA, and DWS.

## SUBJECTS

### Special Education Sample

Ten male middle school students, between the ages of 12 and 14 with the educational classification of Emotionally Disturbed (ED), and receiving instruction in a self-contained special education classroom were selected for this study.

In addition students were selected because they met the following criteria, also outlined in a study by McMahon, Wacker, Sasso, and Melloy (1994):

- Their daily schedules included a 40 minute period for small group social skills instruction.
- Social skills were specified on their Individualized Education Program (IEP) as instructional goals.
- Their daily schedules included integration into both academic and nonacademic general education classrooms.
- Social skills were identified as deficit areas for all students by the special education teacher and other school personnel.

A general description of the characteristics of the subjects participating in this study will be given here. First, it is important to report that five of the ten subjects receive medication daily during the school day, in order to control Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder related behaviors. Second, within the subject pool a range of inappropriate behaviors from withdrawn to aggressive can be seen. Finally, the

subjects consisted of two African-American students, seven Caucasian students, and one Hispanic student.

### **Regular Education Sample**

The ten male middle school students selected from the regular education classroom were chosen based on their similarities to the special education sample in regard to race, gender, and learner characteristics. The regular education teacher chosen is also similar in respect to age, gender, and race to his special education counterpart. It is important to note that the regular education students resemble the special education sample in regard to possessing characteristics of ADHD behaviors, inappropriate and rule breaking behaviors, and aggressive and withdrawn tendencies, all in milder forms, of course.

## **SETTING AND MATERIALS**

### **School Description**

The setting in this study is a self-contained special education classroom for students classified ED located in an urban middle school in southern New Jersey. There are approximately 1,300 students enrolled at the middle school which contains grades 6 through 8. In addition, each grade level is administered by an assistant principal, while a separate principal oversees the entire school. According to recent school reports the student population consists of approximately 58% Caucasian, 29% African-American, and 9% Hispanic. The percentage of low-income enrollment could not be determined.

### **Setting**

Social skill assessment will be conducted in the special education classroom by the special education teacher. The classroom is a medium sized room containing two teacher desks, eleven student desks, three computers, and instructional supplies for all subject areas. Although the classroom is not large it will be adequate for assessment purposes, especially since the students are comfortable and familiar with the setting.

The regular education classroom is larger than the special education setting and consists of approximately thirty student desks, a teacher desk, and bookcases along the windows filled with various academic subject materials. The teacher's desk is located at the front of the class, off to the right. The students' desks are arranged in traditional rows of six. The area is both well lighted and ventilated, which make it suitable for assessment purposes.

### **Materials**

The curriculum material and assessment measures are supplied by Goldstein's (1984), "Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child: A Guide for Teaching Prosocial Skills". In his guide for teaching prosocial behaviors, Goldstein outlines the Skillstreaming curriculum, which contains 60 specific social skills categorized into six areas: Group I, Classroom Survival Skills; Group II, Friendship-Making Skills; Group III, Skills for Dealing with Feelings; Group IV, Skill Alternatives to Aggression; Group V, Skills for Dealing with Stress (1984, p. 108-109). The assessment process will be based on the above social skills groups mentioned. The social skills in the Skillstreaming curriculum are operationally defined and broken down into their behavior component, so they can be measured and replicated by others. The assessment tools used are taken from Goldstein's curriculum and include the Student Skill Checklist and the Teacher Skill Checklist, both of which will be described in detail in the Dependent Variable section.

### **INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

The independent variables in this study are the groupings for each raters' scores for the purpose of comparison and categorized as follows: the Special Education Teacher; the Teacher Assistant; the Special Education Student; the Regular Education Teacher, and; the Regular Education Students.

## DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The following materials provided by Goldstein (1980) will be used to assess social skills deficits: (1) **The Student Skill Checklist**, a rating scale to be filled out by the student meant to assess the student's perceptions of their social skill strengths and weaknesses; (2) **The Teacher Skill Checklist**, a rating scale to be completed by the teacher most familiar with the student's social skill abilities in a variety of settings.

The Student Skill Checklist is a 60 question 5 point likert rating scale. Each question relates to a particular social skill being assessed. In Table 3.1 a sampling of the items students are required to rate themselves on are given, along with the specific social skill targetted.

**Table 3.1**  
**Sampling of Items from The Student Skill Checklist.**

Item No.	Question	Social Skill
1	Is it easy for me to listen to someone who is talking to me?	Listening
14	Is it easy fo me to take the first step to meet somebody I don't know?	Introducing Yourself
26	Do I know how I fell about different things that happen?	Knowing Your Feelings
36	Do I keep my temper when I am upset?	Using Self-Control
45	When I feel bored, do I think of good things to do and then do them?	Dealing with Boredom

Students responded, rating their performance in each of the 60 social skills, as instructed by the directions provided by McGinnis et. al (1984, p.32):

*Directions:* Each of the questions will ask you about how well you do something. Next to each question is a number.

Circle number 1 if you *almost never* do what the question asks.

Circle number 2 if you *seldom* do it.

Circle number 3 if you *sometimes* do it.

Circle number 4 if you do it *often*.

Circle number 5 if you *almost always* do it.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Answer the way you really feel about each question.

The readability of this checklist makes it suitable for upper elementary and middle school students with reading levels starting at least at the 3.0 grade level.

The Teacher Skill Checklist, also a 60 item 5 point likert rating scale, is designed to be completed by a teacher most familiar with the student. Each item number lists the skill being assessed with a brief question following it. One sample item from each skill group is provided in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2**  
**Sample Items from The Teacher Skill Checklist.**

Item No.	Skill: Question
1	<b>Listening:</b> Does the student appear to listen when someone is speaking to and make an effort to understand what is said?
14	<b>Introducing Yourself:</b> Does the student introduce himself/herself to people he/she doesn't know in an appropriate way?
26	<b>Knowing Your Feelings:</b> Does the student identify feelings he/she is experiencing?
36	<b>Using Self-Control:</b> Does the student know and practice strategies to control his/her temper or excitement?
45	<b>Dealing with Boredom:</b> Does the student select acceptable activities when he/she is bored?



The following directions provided at the top of the Teacher Skill Checklist, by McGinnis et. al (1984, p. 35), were adhered to by all the teachers completing the scale:

*Directions:* Listed below you will find a number of skills that children are more or less proficient in using. This checklist will help you record how well each child uses the various skills. For each child, rate his/her use of each skill, based on your observations of his/her behavior in various situations.

- Circle 1 if the child is *almost never* good at using the skill.
- Circle 2 if the child is *seldom* good at using the skill.
- Circle 3 if the child is *sometimes* good at using the skill.
- Circle 4 if the child is *often* good at using the skill.
- Circle 5 if the child is *almost always* good at using the skill.

### **Validity**

The Student and Teacher Skill Checklists are based directly on the social skills that compose the Skillstreaming Curriculum giving both devices a high degree of face and content validity. Since the rationale for social skills assessment is to identify and select skills for instructional and training purposes, these instruments are suitable measures for such planning. In addition both checklists evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of students' social skills abilities based on the students' self-ratings and their teachers' ratings of them. As a result, social validity is obtained by using these rating scales, since the social skill deficits selected for training are deemed important to all parties.

### **PROCEDURES**

The basic components of Structured Learning include: (a) modeling, (b) role playing, (c) performance feedback, (d) transfer of learning, and (e) reinforcement (Goldstein, 1980). These techniques are chosen by Goldstein primarily because research has shown them to be the most effective way to teach social skills. Most of the research demonstrating their effectiveness is rooted in Bandura's social learning theory and

Skinner's operant behaviorism. The first component, modeling, involves demonstrating to students the correct way of performing a targeted social skill either by modeling the behavior oneself or providing students with other models, like peers or audio-visual tapes. After students view the skill being performed correctly, the trainer will guide students through role playing scenarios that provide students with opportunities to perform the skill themselves. Both during and after role playing the trainer needs to be providing students with corrective performance feedback and social reinforcement, until student behaviors are shaped to match those of the model. Finally, homework is assigned to ensure that students transfer their learning to other settings. Homework is designed to enable students to practice targeted social skills outside the classroom.

The steps necessary for using the structured learning approach involve three major areas. (a) identifying social skill deficiencies, (b) selecting skills for instruction, and (c) preparing for the group sessions.

Identifying individual and group deficiencies involves assessing students' social skills. Social skills can be assessed in a number of different ways. One way is to interview parents, school personnel, and the student about a variety of social skills, then record the results. Secondly, a behavioral rating scale or social skill checklist can be used by individuals who know how the student performs in various settings. Consequently, the student can use the rating scale as a self-report and conduct a self-assessment of social functioning. Furthermore, naturalistic observation can be useful in assessing a students social skill levels. Observing the student's behavior in different settings and under varying conditions provides qualitative information in regard to possible social skill deficiencies. Goldstein provides a Structured Learning Social Skill Checklist, for rating specific social skills on a 5 point Likert scale.

Next the manner in which the assessment process was conducted will be described.

First, ten Teacher Skill Checklists were provided to all the teachers. The special education teacher and the teacher assistant independently rated the ten students with EBD on each of the 60 social skills that compose the five major skill groups. No collaboration or discussion occurred between the two raters in reference to their ratings. Therefore, the special education teacher and the teacher assistant rated the students without knowledge of how the other would rate each student. The raters circled a number from 1 to 5 as directed by the instructions previously stated. Second, rating scores were totalled within each of the five skill areas ( CRS, FMS, DWF, ATA, and DWS) for each student. After, mean rating scores were obtained from the special education teacher's ratings of the students for each skill group. The teacher assistant's ratings scores were treated the same. Thus, five mean rating scores were obtained based on the special education teacher's ratings, and five mean rating scores were obtained based on the teacher assistant's ratings. Finally, the regular education teacher rated the ten regular education students in the same manner. These ratings were treated the same as described above for the special education data.

#### **Administration of The Student Skill Checklist**

Students in the special education classroom received a 40 minute lesson on social skills the day prior to administering the Student Skill Checklist. The lesson was delivered by the special education teacher with students required to meet the following objectives: (1) to be able to define social skills, (2) provide examples of both appropriate and inappropriate uses of the specific social skills, and (3) to be able to give a rationale for using prosocial behavior for achieving one's goals. Students were given a list of the 60 social skills evaluated on the checklist. A discussion ensued to solicit student responses in regard to the above objectives. Once the special education teacher was reasonably certain that all students met the required objectives, the Student Skill Checklist was scheduled to be administered the next day.

On the day of assessment, the students received the Student Skill Checklist. Students were directed to listen quietly, as the special education teacher read the directions at the top of the checklist. Students were then instructed to: (1) read each item carefully, (2) rate themselves honestly, and (3) if at any time they did not understand an item to raise their hand quietly and assistance would be provided. Students appeared to both take the task seriously and rate their skills truthfully during the assessment. During the administration of the checklist students did request help on certain items, but all were able to complete the checklist with no difficulty.

The regular education teacher delivered the same lesson provided by the special education teacher to the ten regular education students. Again, once the teacher was reasonably certain that students met the lesson objectives, the checklist was then scheduled to be administered the following day in the same manner as previously stated. The regular education teacher reported that the students completed the task with no difficulty and appeared to take the task seriously and rate honestly.

Students' rating scores for both the students with EBD and the regular education students were treated in the same way as the teachers' ratings scores.

Finally, once the assessment process is over, specific social skills can be selected based on the areas of need reflected in the assessment results. Selected skills can then be task-analyzed. Task-analysis involves breaking social skills down into specific behavioral steps, so students can easily identify what is needed to perform such skills. In addition, one can begin to prepare for the group training sessions now that skill deficiencies are identified and social skills selected. The following key elements need to be considered before training sessions can begin: the setting, length of sessions, number of sessions per week or per skill, when sessions will be held, group size, and the manner in which the first training session will begin. However, these issues are carefully described by McGinnis et al. (1984) in "Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child: A Guide for Teaching Prosocial Skills".

## CHAPTER 4

The results are presented in regard to the four major hypotheses addressed by this study.

**Hypothesis 1.** In regard to the special education classroom data, does a relationship exist between the mean social skills rating scores of (a) the teacher and the teacher assistant, (b) the teacher and the students' self-ratings, and (c) the teacher assistant and students' self-ratings?

Using the data gathered from the special education classroom only, a correlation coefficient matrix was computed to measure the degree of correlation between the mean rating scores of the teacher and the teacher assistant and between the teachers and the mean rating scores of the students in the following five skill areas: (1) Classroom Survival Skills (CRS); (2) Friendship-Making Skills (FMS); (3) Alternatives to Aggression (ATA); (4) Dealing with Feelings (DWF), and; (5) Dealing with Stress (DWS). The results are presented in Table 4.1.

In respect to the area of Classroom Survival Skills, the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the handicapped students correlated highly ( $r=.77$ ), with a p-value of .009 indicating this coefficient to be significant and unlikely to occur by chance. The results showed nonsignificant correlations between the teacher and the student ( $r = .33$ ,  $p = .41$ ) and between the teacher assistant and the students ( $r = .29$ ,  $p = .35$ ).

**Table 4.1****Correlations Between the Teacher's, Teacher Assistant's, and Student's Social Skill Ratings.**

<b>Special Education Classroom</b>			
	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Teacher Assistant</b>	<b>Students</b>
<b>Classroom Survival Skills</b>			
<b>T</b>	1.00	.77**	.29
<b>TA</b>		1.00	.33
<b>S</b>			1.00
<b>Friendship-Making Skills</b>			
<b>T</b>	1.00	-.44	.56*
<b>TA</b>		1.00	-.39
<b>S</b>			1.00
<b>Alternatives to Aggression</b>			
<b>T</b>	1.00	-.04	.35
<b>TA</b>		1.00	.12
<b>S</b>			1.00
<b>Dealing with Feelings</b>			
<b>T</b>	1.00	-.83***	.03
<b>TA</b>		1.00	-.13
<b>S</b>			1.00
<b>Dealing with Stress</b>			
<b>T</b>	1.00	.22	.29
<b>TA</b>		1.00	-.10
<b>S</b>			1.00

Note: T=Teacher, TA=Teacher Assistant, S=Students.

\*  $p = .09$ , \*\*  $p = .009$ , \*\*\*  $p = .003$

In the area of Friendship-Making Skills a correlation coefficient of  $r = .56$  was obtained between the teacher's and teacher assistant's ratings of the students. However, with a  $p$ -value of .09 it is not a statistically significant finding unless at a significance level of  $p \leq .10$ . No significant correlations were found between teacher and students and between teacher assistant and students in this skill area.

There were no statistically significant correlations coefficients obtained in the social skills areas of Alternatives to Aggression and Dealing with Stress, due to the unacceptably high p-values associated with the coefficients. However, the most striking result was found between the teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students in the area of Dealing with Feelings ( $r = -.83$ ,  $p = .003$ ). This finding is especially relevant given that the population of students being rated have been classified because of emotional and behavioral difficulties.

**Hypothesis 2.** The question of whether handicapped students were rated differently from nonhandicapped students by their respective teachers was examined.

A t-test for independent samples was computed to test the difference between the matched pairs of the special education teacher's and the regular education teacher's mean score ratings of their students. The special education and regular education teachers' mean score ratings for their students were found to differ significantly in each of the five skill areas reported in Table 4.2.

The results indicate a significant negative correlation between the special education teacher's and the regular education teacher's ratings of their students at a  $p \leq .001$  significance level for the areas of Friendship-Making Skills,  $t(18) = -4.97$  and Dealing with Feelings,  $t(18) = -5.72$ . Significant negative correlations were also found to exist between the two sample groups in the areas of Classroom Survival Skills,  $t(18) = -3.72$ ; Alternatives to Aggression,  $t(18) = -3.44$ , and; Dealing with Stress,  $t(18) = -3.84$ . These correlations were significant at the  $p \leq .01$  level.

**Table 4.2****Means, Standard Deviations, and Mean Differences for Special Education and Regular Education Teachers' Ratings of Their Students**

	Special Education Teacher		Regular Education Teacher		M.Diff.	df	t
	M	SD	M	SD			
Classroom Skills	41.2	8.19	55.6	9.12	-14.4	18	-3.72 <sup>1</sup>
Friendship Skills	33.3	5.39	47.9	7.56	-14.6	18	-4.97 <sup>2</sup>
Alternatives to Aggression	25.9	3.99	35.8	8.19	-9.90	18	-3.44 <sup>1</sup>
Dealing with Feelings	24.9	3.99	38.1	6.12	-13.2	18	-5.72 <sup>2</sup>
Dealing with Stress	48.9	6.35	64.3	10.99	-15.4	18	-3.84 <sup>1</sup>

Note: The higher the social skill rating, the higher the skill level.

<sup>1</sup>p ≤ .01

<sup>2</sup>p ≤ .001

These findings indicate that the special education teacher consistently rated his students consistently lower in all five social skill areas than his regular education counterpart's ratings of his students.

**Hypothesis 3.** Is there a significant difference between the self-rating scores of the students with EBD and the nonhandicapped students in the five social skill areas examined?

A t-test for independent samples was computed to measure if such differences exists between the two groups. The results are presented in Table 4.3.



mean rating scores of the regular education teacher and the mean self-rating scores of the students in regard to the five social skill areas reported in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4**  
**Correlations Between the Teacher's and the Student's Social Skill Ratings.**

	Regular Education Classroom	
	Teacher	Students
<b>Classroom Survival Skills</b>		
T	1.00	.38
S		1.00
<b>Friendship-Making Skills</b>		
T	1.00	.39
S		1.00
<b>Alternatives to Aggression</b>		
T	1.00	.50*
S		1.00
<b>Dealing with Feelings</b>		
T	1.00	.10
S		1.00
<b>Dealing with Stress</b>		
T	1.00	.69**
S		1.00

Note: T=Teacher, S=Students.

\* p = .14

\*\* p = .03

As indicated above in reference to the areas of Classroom Survival Skills, Friendship-Making Skills, and Dealing with Feelings there were no significant findings to support any relationship existing between the two groups of scores, due to high p-values associated with the coefficients obtained. Although, a positive correlation coefficient of  $r = .50$  was obtained between the teacher's and students' scores in the area of Alternatives

to Aggression, with a p-value of .14 this is not significant. Finally, a significant correlation ( $r = .69$ ,  $p = .03$ ) between the teacher's and the students' scores in the area of Dealing with Stress was found.

## SUMMARY

In this section, the results obtained and reported above will be presented in regard to the conclusions they support about the hypotheses examined in this study.

In terms of hypothesis 1, the following conclusions can be made: (1) there was a failure to find a significant relationship between the teacher's, the teacher assistant's, and the students' social skill ratings in the areas of FMS, ATA, and DWS; (2) a significant positive correlation was found to exist between the teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students in the area of CRS, and; (3) a significant negative correlation was found to exist between the teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students in the DWF area. Therefore, in the areas of FMS, ATA, and DWS the position to fail to reject the null hypothesis, a relationship will not exist between the social skill rating scores of the teacher and teacher assistant, was taken. However, in regard to the areas of CRS and DWF the alternative hypothesis, stating that a relationship will exist between the two raters, can be accepted.

The results obtained in reference to hypothesis 2 support the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, since the findings of significant negative correlations demonstrated that regular education students were consistently rated higher than their peers with EBD by their teacher.

**Table 4.3****Means, Standard Deviations, and Mean Differences for Handicapped and Nonhandicapped Students' Social Skills Rating Scores.**

	Handicapped Students		Nonhandicapped Students		M.Diff.	df	t
	M	SD	M	SD			
Classroom Skills	51.5	7.62	52.7	6.14	-1.20	18	-.39
Friendship Skills	44.9	6.82	49.0	5.03	-4.10	18	-1.53
Alternatives to Aggression	31.6	6.33	34.9	6.71	-3.30	18	-1.13
Dealing with Feelings	34.8	5.53	37.8	4.80	-3.00	18	-1.29
Dealing with Stress	56.0	10.39	63.5	8.52	-7.50	18	-1.77

Note: The higher the social skill rating, the higher the skill level.

These results show that even though the handicapped students' mean scores were consistently lower than their nonhandicapped peers in all five skill areas, there were no significant differences between their mean scores at the  $p \leq .05$  level.

**Hypothesis 4.** Does a relationship exist in the social skill ratings between the regular education teacher's ratings and the students' self-ratings.

Using the data obtained from the regular education sample only, a correlation coefficient matrix was computed to examine whether a relationship existed between the

A failure to reject the null hypothesis was reached for hypothesis 3, since the results showed no significant difference between the mean rating scores of the students with EBD and their regular education peers in all five social skill areas.

Hypothesis 4 pertains to the regular education classroom, stating that a relationship will exist between the teacher's scores and the students' self-rating scores in the five skill areas. However, the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis was reached for the area of DWS only. A failure to reject the null was supported by the results which showed no significant correlation existing in the areas of CRS, FMS, DWF, and ATA.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY

In this section a summary will be presented based on the problem, purpose, need, and hypotheses examined. The important findings of the literature review and the design of the study will be highlighted. Also, a cursory presentation of what the analysis of data revealed in regard to the hypotheses will be summarized. Finally, the conclusions reached based on the results will be presented.

The focus of this study enabled the researcher to present a model that can be used by teachers for assessing and selecting social skills for training that have social validity. A secondary focus was to argue the importance of including social skills in the curriculum for students with EBD. The purpose of this study was to examine the degree of relationship existing between students' self-ratings and their teachers' ratings of their social skills, using a social skills rating scale in a classroom for students with EBD. The hypotheses examined were whether: (1) a relationship existed between the rating scores of the teacher and teacher assistant, the teacher and students, and the teacher assistant and students; (2) students without EBD would be rated differently than their handicapped peers by their teachers; (3) a difference will exist between the self-rating scores of the two student sample groups, and; (4) a relationship exists between the regular teacher's and the students' scores.

The results of the literature review revealed the importance of using the most effective social skills training approaches with students with EBD. This present study adds to the current knowledge base of the social skills research by: (1) selecting social skills based on social validation and social comparison principles through student and teacher rating scales; (2) comparing the degree of relationship existing between the following raters' scores: the special education teacher and the teacher assistant, the

special education teacher and the teacher assistant, and the teacher assistant and the students; (3) comparing the self-rating scores of students with EBD to those of their regular education peers to examine any differences that may exist; (4) comparing the rating scores of the special education teacher with a regular education counterpart to analyze any differences in the way they rated their students; (5) measuring any significant relationship existing between the rating scores of the regular education teacher and his students, and; (6) using an applied setting in a public school.

A between-subjects approach was chosen with a correlational design to examine existing relationships and differences between the rating scores obtained on the dependent measure for each of the following independent variables: : the Special Education Teacher; the Teacher Assistant; the Special Education Student; the Regular Education Teacher, and; the Regular Education Students. The students with EBD were selected based on placement criteria and availability, while the regular education students were selected based on social comparison criteria.

The analysis of results showed that for Hypothesis 1, that there was a positive association between the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students in the area of Classroom Survival Skills (CRS). In addition, the special education teacher's and teacher assistant's ratings in the area of Dealing with Feelings (DWF) were shown to be inversely related. Hence when the teacher rated students low in the area of DWF, the teacher assistant rated them high. For Hypothesis 2, the results showed that students with EBD were consistently rated lower than the regular education students in all skill areas by their teacher. This is interesting in light of Hypothesis 3, which revealed no significant differences in how each of the student groups self-rated on the Checklist. Therefore, even though a difference existed between how teachers rated their students, no difference was found to exist between the ratings each of the student groups gave themselves. Finally, analysis of Hypothesis 4 revealed that the only skill

area in which a relationship existed between the regular education teacher's scores and his students' self-rating scores was in Dealing with Stress (DWS).

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions reached based on the analysis of data are presented here in regard to the four major hypotheses examined.

**Hypothesis 1.** A positive relationship existed between the teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students in the CRS area. In the DWF skill area, a significant negative association was discovered between the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings.

**Hypothesis 2.** Students with EBD were rated lower in all social skill areas by their teacher when compared to the ratings given to their peers in the regular education classroom.

**Hypothesis 3.** No significant differences exists between the self-rating scores of the students with EBD when compared to the self-rating scores of their regular education peers.

**Hypothesis 4.** A positive relationship exists between the regular education teacher's and the students' scores in the DWS area only.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this study provided fertile ground for discussing some interesting interpretations. First, the finding that both the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings of the students with EBD were significantly associated in the area of CRS allows for certain interpretations. For one, CRS are targeting skills

related to academic success like: asking questions, following directions, and listening. Pray, Hall, and Markley (1992) point out in their study that many times the goals teachers select for training reflect areas they deem most important, and for the most part these tend to be academic related behaviors rather than interpersonal social skills. Perhaps the fact that these skills are most concrete, understandable, and familiar to school personnel, in part explains the high significant correlation found between the teachers' ratings in this area. Furthermore, the fact that students' self-ratings of their CRS were not found to be significantly correlated to their teachers' may be due to students basing their evaluation of their classroom skill on inaccurate perception, and/or having lower expectation in regard to what constitutes excellence in academic related behaviors.

A finding that the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's ratings were significantly correlated in the area of DWF points to some striking interpretations. Since the special education sample consists of students classified because of emotional and behavioral difficulties, it is ironic that the teachers' assessments were inversely related in the DWF area. For instance, when the teacher consistently rated the students poorly in the DWF skills, the teacher assistant rated them higher. One explanation may be due to the teacher's professional experience and background knowledge in psychology, mental health problems, and special education as compared to the teacher assistant's. This may have led the teacher to more accurately identify and interpret what difficulties, in regard to DWF, contribute to greater mental health and behavioral difficulties. For instance, in one particular case when evaluating a student in the specific skill of Expressing Your Feelings the teacher assistant rated the student as "*often* good at using the skill", while the teacher rated the student as "*seldom* good at using the skill". These differences in ratings may be attributed to the teacher evaluating these skills in more depth and considering the appropriateness of how the student expresses his feelings, rather than whether he solely expresses them or not. In addition, the teacher assistant may have been comparing her assessment of this student to the rest of the class, which may



have led her to believe he was doing well compared to the others. Finally, since no significant correlations were found to exist between the teacher's and teacher assistant's ratings of the students in the areas of FMS, ATA, and DWS, the reliability of this measure must be called into question.

It was demonstrated in this study when examining Hypothesis 2, that students with EBD were rated significantly lower in all skill areas by their teacher than their regular education peers. This finding supports using social comparison for demonstrating social skills deficits in special populations of students by comparing them to nonhandicapped peer groups. Macklin and Matson (1985) showed in their study, that when 30 handicapped students were matched to an equal number of nonhandicapped peers, that differences in social skills deficits and excesses could be seen. Also, it is important to include social skills in the curricula that have been positively validated by teachers, peers, and the targets of training (Williams et al., 1989). Finally, since the ultimate goal for many handicapped students is to be integrated in the regular setting, through mainstreaming or inclusion, the skills necessary for success can be identified by using nonhandicapped peers as a comparison, as done in previous studies cited in Chapter 2 (Cartledge et al., 1986; Gunter et al., 1988; Walker & Hops, 1976).

In light of the premises presented for Hypothesis 2, the results achieved by examining Hypothesis 3 showed no significant differences between the self-ratings scores of the students with EBD and the regular education students in all five areas of social skills. Despite the lack of significance found in Hypothesis 3, it appears that both student sample groups did not view themselves, as demonstrated by their self-rating scores, that differently. Nevertheless, for Hypothesis 3 one can only fail to reject the null hypothesis which states that no differences will exist. This does not mean, however, that if a larger sample size and/or a dependent measure with a proven reliability record were used that differences may be found. This hypothesis need to be studied further by controlling the confounding variable mentioned.

Hypothesis 4 was designed to investigate the relationship between the regular education teacher's scores and those of his students. The findings demonstrated a significant correlation between the two in the area of Dealing with Stress (DWS) only. The component skills that make up the skill area DWS seem to provide a basis for the teacher's and the students' scores to correlate significantly. However, there were no significant correlations found between the two in the areas of CRS, FMS, DWF, and ATA. Interestingly the areas of CRS and DWF did significantly correlate between the special education teacher's and the teacher assistant's rating scores. Perhaps if the regular education teacher's ratings were paired with another regular education colleague's, significance could have been found in other areas or at least inter-rater reliability established. Nevertheless, the reliability of the measurement device along with the sample size of the students present sources for confounding variables that are effecting the results.

The limitations of this study will be presented and discussed here. First, due to the focus of this study on a special population of students with EBD, the special education sample was smaller than desired and not randomly selected. As a result, both the sample size and selection criteria have contributed to diminishing the power of the statistical tests that were applied to the data and the outcomes. Also, since the regular education sample was selected to match the special education sample, the same limitations apply to them as well. Further, it would have been interesting and prudent to match the regular education teacher's ratings with those of a colleague's to test for inter-rater reliability, as well as for correlations.

External validity issues must be considered due to the sample size and the nature of the population examined. Since a special education sample classified ED were used, the generalizability of the results are limited to the population at hand. A large stratified random sample selected from the population would have maximized the generalizability of this study.

In regard to measurement issues, choosing the Social Skill Checklist rating scale is justified for purposes of assessing and selecting social skills for training, however the reliability of the measure is brought into question by some the inconsistencies obtained in the findings of this study. Since the dependent measure used is a rating scale it provides grounds for variations in the scores that may be due to rater misinterpretations and/or a subject's overly high or low expectations being reflected in the ratings. However, the items on the measure were clearly operationally defined and clearly explained. Hopefully, the clarity of the measure diminished the possibility of the variations mentioned.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The assessment of social skills for selection and training purposes, based on teacher and student input, provides fertile ground for further research investigations. The demand for including social skills training in the curriculum for special populations of students is ever growing, and in some cases mandated. A research investigation in which a large random sample of students selected from an entire special education pool, and matched with a large randomly selected regular education sample for comparison of social skills ratings would provide an opportunity for further explore questions examined in this study.

Further research questions could address if social skills ratings by students and teachers serve as indicators for predicting special education students' success in mainstream settings or the need for a more restricted placement. For instance, were students with high self-ratings and high teacher ratings more likely to be placed in mainstreamed settings? Were students with low self-ratings and low teacher ratings more likely to remain in restrictive placement settings?

In addition, further research could explore comparing students' ratings of each other, along with their self-ratings to examine whether students view themselves as their peers do.

It is suggested that any future research investigate the reliability of the Social Skill Checklist for uses in correlational comparisons, as well as establishing greater inter-rater reliability.

Finally, an extension of this study would be to provide actual social skills training to students, then have students and teachers re-rate their social skills abilities to measure any differences between before and after treatment scores. These data could be compared to a control group, as well as regular education sample.

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