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THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING FOR ELEMENTARY

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

By
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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Professor

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ABSTRACT

Patricia M. Swenson
The Effect of Social Skills Training for Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities.
2003
Dr. Joy Xin
Masters of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the social skills program

"Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child" for elementary children with learning

disabilities. Two first grade and two second grade students participated in the study. All

students were classified as specific learning disabled and were included in the general

education classroom with instructional support from a resource room. The intervention

consisted of 12 sessions, using the "Skillstreaming" program 20 minutes per day, four days

a week for 3 weeks, and weekly follow-up of review for 4 weeks with a total of 7 weeks.

A multiple baseline design across participating students was used in the study. The

children's behaviors were observed and recorded in three phases; A, Baseline, B,

Intervention and C, Follow-up. The results of the study showed an increase of

appropriate behaviors such as ignoring distractions, listening and contributing to

discussion during phase B, but a decrease during the follow-up phase. Future research is

needed to validate the findings to further examine this "Skillstreaming" program for

primary elementary students.

MINI ABSTRACT

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The Effect of Social Skills Training for Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities.
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This research examined the effectiveness of a social skills program in a general education classroom. A total of four students participated in the study. They were taught prosocial skills using "Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child". Their classroom behaviors: ignoring distractions, listening, and contributing to discussion were observed prior to and after the training. The results showed that appropriate behaviors were increased during the intervention phase, while the same behaviors began to decrease during the follow-up phase of the study.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Social Skills are an essential component and important prerequisite for students'

academic learning (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1993). Social Skills encompass

communicating, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, and managing

conflicts (Goodwin, 1999). Effective social skills involve the ability to initiate and

respond appropriately to others. These skills are the foundation for making and

maintaining friends and interacting successfully with others at school (Vaughn, Elbaum &

Gould-Boardman, 2001). Learning social skills will help students become productive

members of the society. It seems that a social curriculum would be as important as the

academic curriculum because of the importance of social skills for children in school. The

emotional and social context for learning is just as important as the content of academic

learning. Interacting with peers will be the greatest cognitive and social growth of

children, so that they can learn in a socially healthy and safe environment (Walther-

Thomas & Brownell, 1999).

Teachers in today's schools find themselves spending much of their time dealing

with children's behavior problems, such as playground conflict, hallway and cafeteria

disruptions and off task behavior in class (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984). Although

overall rates of serious crime are down in school, overall rates of more serious behaviors,

such as, bullying, theft, harassment and threats remain high (Sprague, et al., 2001). According to Sprague and colleagues (2001), many problems in school were found, such as, (a) ineffective instruction that results in academic failure; (b) inconsistent and punitive management practices; (c) lack of opportunity to practice prosocial, interpersonal and self-management skills; (d) unclear rules and expectations regarding appropriate behaviors; (e) failure to enforce rules and (f) failure to adapt to individual differences. These problems may cause some students' inappropriate behaviors.

In 1975, Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, was passed to mandate free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for handicapped children from ages 3 to 21 (Harwell, 1989). The intent of the law was to provide each handicapped child quality education-ideally in a regular classroom with their peers (Harwell, 1989). Over the years, our view of the social world of children with learning problems has been dominated by the negative reactions of others toward the child (Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). There has been widespread concern over the integration of children and adolescents with disabilities into regular education and community settings, especially, their interpersonal relationships with others (Wiener & Sunohara, 1998).

Children with learning disabilities (LD) were found to experience difficulties in conversational and social problem-solving skills (Hartus & Donahue, 1997). These children are more likely to be neglected and rejected by peers and less likely to be popular than their peers without LD (Wiener & Harris, 1997). Peer acceptance and rejection, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, quality of social interaction, and social

adjustment are major components of social skills in which these children are deficient (Wiener & Harris, 1997). In addition, they have difficulties in establishing and maintaining satisfactory social relationships with peers, and are less accepted and often socially rejected by their peers. There is also accumulating evidence that students with LD experience significantly higher levels of loneliness than their non-disabled peers (Tur-Kaspa, Weisel & Segev, 1998). The experience of loneliness and social isolation of children with LD were evident even during the preschool years before the children's academic difficulties had been identified (Tur-Kaspa, Weisel & Segev, 1998).

According to Farmer and Farmer (1996) the poor peer relations of students with learning disabilities are caused by problematic social behaviors and deficits in cognitive and social skills. Students with LD demonstrate poor social skills in and out of the classroom that may lead to social withdrawal, loneliness, and acting out behavior (Farmer & Farmer, 1996). To assist these children, teachers are morally obligated to train them in social skills, just as teaching any academic subject, such as reading and mathematics.

According to Blackbourn (1989), prompting, verbal rehearsal and corrective feedback combined with systematic positive attention are effective strategies in social skills training. There are many programs available to teach and practice social skills in the classroom. One program is called "The Social Skills Lessons & Activities". It is developed as a curricular-based, real-life situation oriented program to help children build self-esteem, self-control, respect for the rights of others, and a sense of responsibility for one's own actions (Weltman-Begun, 1995). Another program is called "Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child: A Guide For Teaching Prosocial Skills" (usually called

"Skillstreaming"). This program is designed to be used with handicapped and nonhandicapped students in the elementary grades. Because learning disabled students have been found to interact with peers less frequently and in more negative ways than students without LD (Gresham, 1981), prosocial skills instruction should be a central part of their special education instruction (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984). "Easy Stories for Social Skills" is also used for social skills training. This program includes reproducible stories and activity worksheets to help children between the ages of 4 and 8 communicate and interact effectively in social contexts (Schuchardt, 2000). The Foundation for Exceptional Innovations, a nonprofit organization, trains teachers across the country to incorporate social skills instruction within the general education curriculum without the use of any prepackaged, add-on program (Warger & Rutherford, 1996). Among those programs, "Skillstreaming" is the most popular and user-friendly to teachers. A psychoeducational and behavioral approach is used to provide instruction on prosocial skills. These strategies include many important components, such as, modeling, role playing, performance feedback and transfer of training. In this program, each skill is broken down into behavioral steps for teachers to instruct in a step-by-step fashion (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984). The results of the study showed that the mean differences of all the variables showed an improvement of skills using data from a teacher's reported pre and post rating system. In addition, the teachers reported that significant changes did occur, even though the students did not concur (Miller, Midgett & Wicks, 1992).

To add more data to the previous studies on the effects of social skills training the

present study will use the "Skillstreaming" program for elementary school children with LD. The classroom survival skills will be taught in class. The effect of the training will be evaluated by observing student behavior change.

Significance of the Study

Children with learning disabilities have a difficult time with social interactions with their peers (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984). This skill difficulty may make them be rejected by their peers, therefore they feel lonely, socially isolated, and out of place in classrooms. Although, many studies had been conducted on social skills training for this population, results were still inconclusive on the best way to teach social skills. The objective of this present study was to assess and remediate social skill deficits in and out of the classrooms. The "Skillstreaming Program for the Elementary School Children" was used. It assumed that the results might add more information to previous studies on the effect of social skills training.

Statement of the Purpose

The purposes of this study were to: (a) evaluate the effects of social skills training on the social interaction skills of children with LD, (b) evaluate if their classroom survival skills increase when the training is provided.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in the study:

1. Will the social interaction of children with LD be improved when the social

skills training is provided in class?

2. Will children with LD improve their classroom survival skills when social skills training is provided in class?

Definition of Terms

In this paper the following definitions are used:

Learning Disability-a condition present in children with average or above average potential intelligence who are experiencing a severe discrepancy between their ability and achievement according to the Law (IDEA, 1997).

Non-Learning Disabled (NLD)-children without a learning disability.

Social Skills-cognitive and overt behaviors a person presents in interpersonal interactions ranging from simple nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact and head nods to the complex verbal behavior of offering a compromise that will meet everyone's needs (Schumaker & Deshler, 1995).

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The traditional focus of schools has been on the academic curriculum and few explicit attempts have been made to teach social skills, despite their implications for both classroom learning and social relationships. The tendency has been to assume that children will automatically acquire these skills as part of the development process or as a by-product of a formal education (Cartledge & Milburn, 1980). According to Walther-Thomas & Brownell (1999), social skills are important components of classroom life. Therefore, the social curriculum must be as important as the academic curriculum.

The following review of the literature will focus on two main theories: the social cognitive theory and the behavioral theory for social skills training models to students with learning disabilities. Their existing social skills problems and effects of social skill training for those children will also be covered.

Social Skills Problems of Children with Learning Disabilities

According to Kuhne and Wiener (2000), children with learning disabilities (LD) obtained lower social preference and were liked least in their group than children without LD. They were less likely to be popular and more likely to be socially neglected and rejected. Perhaps the behavioral characteristics such as aggressive or disruptive behavior often displayed by rejected children can also contribute to poor teacher-child

relationships (Parke & Welsh, 1998). Because of the increased stress in school, some learning disabled students are put at higher risk for depression and suicide (Bender, Rosenkrans & Crane, 1999). In addition, teachers have to exclude aggressively behaving children from learning situations, which in turn negatively influences their academic performance (Parke & Welsh, 1998). Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain a close relationship with other children and establish a place for themselves in the peer culture, are seriously at risk (Hartup, 1992). Children with LD were found to be deficient in social perception and role taking (Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Stiliadis & Wiener, 1989) and conversational skills (Bryan, 1981; Wiener& Harris, 1993). They were more prone to internalizing and externalizing behavior disorders (Fuerst, Fisk, & Rourke, 1989, 1990; Mckinney, 1989). When compared to their nonhandicapped peers, children with LD exhibit a variety of deficits in both overt and cognitive social skills. They tend to choose less socially acceptable behaviors in a number of situations. For example, they are less able to predict consequences for their behavior; they misinterpret social cues; they adapt their behavior to the characteristics of their listener less frequently, they perform certain verbal and nonverbal social skills at significantly lower levels; and they perform certain inappropriate social behaviors at significantly higher levels (Schmaker & Hazel, 1984). In addition, children with LD were less likely to assume an assertive role in terms of disagreeing with their classmate's opinion, attempting to negate another's argument, or making persuasive appeals in the conversation to influence others' thoughts and feelings (Hartas & Donahue, 1997).

Elksnin and Elksnin (1998) have found social skills instruction to be a critical component of the curriculum. Some children learn social skills informally at home, while many do not. Children who fail to acquire appropriate social skills have a lower probability of completing school, being employed, and becoming well-adjusted adults. It seems that prosocial behaviors need to be taught in school and social skills need to be integrated into schools' curricular. Research involving elementary students with mild and moderate disabilities suggests that social acceptance and positive social interactions are affected by the child's social competence (Acton & Zarbatany, 1988; Miller et al, 1989; Siperstein, Bak & O'Keefe, 1988). By promoting prosocial behavior through teaching social skills, it is believed that children's appropriate behaviors will increase and they will become successful in school.

Social Skills Training Theories and Models

There are two models in teaching social skills. The first relies on the behaviorist principals of using contingencies to shape and reinforce desirable behaviors in order to ignore the undesirable behaviors (Oglivy, 1994). B. F. Skinner is considered as the father of the Behaviorist movement. According to Boeree (1998), Skinner's entire system is based on operant conditioning. Operant conditioning differs from classical conditioning in that, whereas the classical relies on an organism's response to some stimulus in the environment, operant conditioning relies on the organism's initiating an action followed by some consequence. The principals of operant conditioning were first applied to education in programmed instruction. One part of the Behavioralist's view is

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to shape a desired behavior that is called shaping. They believe one gets the desired response when it is taught and learned through conditioning of the desired behavior. Shaping takes you through this conditioning in a step-by-step process of complex behaviors to get to the desired results (Skinner, 1969). To educators it would be considered behavior modification, such as a token economy. According to Boeree (1999), another person who follows a behaviorlist view is Jean Piaget. He believed that even infants have certain skills in regard to objects in their environment. These skills were called schemas and these were skills that were learned through conditioning. Once learned, Piaget called this "assimilation". Assimilation is when a new object is put into an old schema. This is how Piaget believed learning takes place. He also suggests 5 stages of development when these schemas are learned. Some psychologists, however, believe that the behaviorist does not explain enough the interaction of subjects on their perceptions (Boeree, 1999).

In 1986, Bandura's social cognition, and learning was advocated. This model includes: (1) Existence (the structure of knowledge a person possesses about social cognitive phenomena); (2) Need (a person's awareness that a situation requires some social cognitive activity); (3) Inference (the selection of an actual strategy); and (4) Application (subsequent behavior in which a person engages as a consequence of inferences made) (Thompson & Bundy, 1995). From this theoretical perspective, human functioning is viewed as the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. For example, how people interpret the results of their own behavior informs and alters their environments and the personal factors

they possess, which in turn, inform and alter their subsequent behavior. This is the foundation of Bandura's (1986) conception of reciprocal determinism (Pajares, 2002). A study by Thompson, Bundy and Wolfe (1996) tested Bandura's social cognitive theory approach with an assertiveness training curriculum. The study focused mainly on the relationship between stored cognitive information and behavioral performance. The researchers found that sixth graders could learn and retain cognitive information basic to the understanding of the assertiveness curriculum. However, they found when they tested the measures to include a role-playing assessment of verbal assertive behavior, it was unable to show that the trained adolescents performed better than those without training. Thus, these results support Bandura's (1986) assumption that the acquisition of symbolic information is not sufficient for behavior change. It is suggested to use social skills training with a component of role playing.

Effects of Social Skills Training Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities

While there were many programs used to teach social skills to students with LD, the "Skillstreaming" Program was developed based on both the behavioral and social cognitive approach. This program has created a structured learning approach to teach social skills. Structured learning is a psycho-educational and behavioral approach for providing instruction in Prosocial skills. It consists of (1) modeling, (2) role playing, (3) performance feedback, (4) transfer of training (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1984). A joint study between the Orange County Public School System and the University of Central Florida has been conducted to examine skill building and competence training as an

additional component of behavior management. The "Skillstreaming" Curriculum was used to teach alternative skills to deal with aggressive behaviors and other problems in school and community settings (Miller, Midgett, & Wicks, 1992). A total of 70 students classified as emotionally disturbed in self contained classrooms in a large urban school district in Florida participated. The students ranged in age from 6 to 17 years with IQ scores ranging from 80 to 130. They were 7 black females, 26 black males, 3 white females, 33 white males and 1 Hispanic male. They were all academically able, but behaviorally needed a more restrictive environment. These students were taught by a multidisciplinary staffing team. Before using the "Skillstreaming" Curriculum, teachers and staff were trained, during a one-week in-service and two follow up sessions in a year. Both students and teachers used a Likert-type checklist of 60 questions rated for elementary and 50 for middle school of the prosocial skills in five areas: (a) classroom survival skills, (b) friendship making skills, (c) skills for dealing with personal feelings, (d) skill alternatives to aggression and (e) skills for dealing with stress. Small group discussion of the problem along with modeling by the leader and role-playing of alternative skills were taught and practiced on field trips. The results of the study showed that the mean differences of all the variables showed an improvement as reported by the teachers in a pre-versus post ratings by both elementary and middle school teachers, with higher ratings from the middle school teachers. On the post checklist, the ratings by teachers on skills learned did not match the ratings by students on the same skills. In addition, even though teachers reported that significant changes did occur, the students were unaware of the changes in behavior.

Another study by Ciechalski and Schmidt (1995) used the "Skillstreaming Program" in a year-long study to teach 54 fourth grade students enrolled in two social skills classes. One class was a treatment group including 6 gifted students, 14 regular students, and 7 special education students. The other was a control group consisting of 6 gifted, 15 regular and 7 special education students. The Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) was used to measure students' personal attitudes toward their social, academic, family, and personal areas of experience. The form is designed for students ages 8 through 15 including 58 items with separate scoring about General Self, Social Self-Peers, Home-Parents, School-Academic, as well as, a total score. The Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem-Rating Scale (BASE) was also used to measure children's academic self-esteem through a direct observation on their classroom behaviors. The skills of the "Skillstreaming Program" integrated in the curriculum including "asking for help", "listening", "following directions", "contributing to a conversation" and "giving a compliment." The results of the study showed that both gifted students and students with learning disabilities receiving the social skills training improved on the Social Attraction factor of BASE. In addition, students with learning disabilities who learned to work together with their non-disabled peers were better accepted than those with learning disabilities without the training. The results of the training showed that students who were able to practice the social skills in the classroom were better equipped to be successful in school, the community and future workplace.

Another program called Individualized, Classroom-Based Social Skills Training was developed by Wiener & Harris in 1997. This program combines coaching and social

problem solving approaches. There were seven classes divided into three different schools with four general education classrooms of 45 children (38 boys and 7 girls) in three self-contained classrooms, between the ages of 8 years 0 months and 12 years 11 months participating in the study. All classrooms were randomly selected for the intervention. Thirteen children received a 6-week intervention, 7 received a 12-week intervention and 25 were in a control group. All participants were learning disabled in self-contained settings except for the control group. The researchers based their study on an adaptation of the Social Life Game, a social skills training program developed for adults with developmental disabilities, similar to the Monopoly game. The objective was to adapt the game to make it developmentally appropriate for 8 to 12 year old children with LD. The teachers used a Structured Learning Skills Checklist for the purpose of the training goals. The checklist consisted of a 5 point rating scale with 50 social skills questions related to classroom behaviors, conversational skills, skills for discriminating and expressing feelings and possible alternatives to aggression. Data were collected on pretest, posttest and follow-up on all children during the kindergarten, first, second and third grades. A review of the study showed that it was an effective social skills training program, although the results were not as expected. The Social Life program was effective in increasing social skills and decreasing behavior problems and maintaining appropriate behaviors for a year. It was found that the intervention treatment appeared to starve off deterioration in peer relationships as opposed to actually increasing peer acceptance. The study recommended that the program not be used as a behavior management or crisis intervention strategy.

Vaughn, Zaragoza, Hogan and Walker (1993) conducted a four-year longitudinal study to investigate the social skills and behavior problems of students with learning disabilities. Three groups were selected for this study. The LD group consisted of all students identified as LD by the local school district special education placement team during their second grade year. The low average (La) group consisted of 10 students not referred for special ed services but had low reading and math scores. The academic, age, ethnicity and age of both groups matched as closely as possible to the subjects in the LD group. The average, high average (AHA) group consisted of 10 students whose second grade reading and math scores were in the 60 percentile. Both the Standford Achievement Test (SAT) and a short form of the Weshsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R) were used for the testing of all children. The Social Skills Rating Scale and the Revised Behavior Problem Rating Checklist were used to assess children's social skills and behavior problems. The teachers completed the SSRST and the behavior rating scale on all children during the kindergarten, first, second and third grades. The results of the study showed a significant difference among the three groups. The students with LD received the lowest scores of social skills. The researchers proposed that social competence is a higher order of ability and similar to intelligence. They investigated the social skills of children with LD from kindergarten to third grade for four years. They then compared them to low average and high average ability children prior to and following social skills training. Overall, there was no significant difference in social skills ability between low average and learning disabled children in the four years following the study. There was only a difference in children with high

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average ability when compared to the other groups. They conclude in their findings that children with learning disabilities may have underlining problems other than developmental that may cause the social skills deficit. However, the study didn't address whether social skills should be taught in the early grade to reduce some inappropriate behaviors. It appears that an early detection is necessary.

Summary

In reviewing the previous research, it can be determined that children with LD can benefit from Social Skills Training. Students with LD have deficits in social skills and need to be taught to initiate and maintain friendships, or enhance their social status. Social skills training was found to be effective for regular or gifted students. The most effective programs, according to the research findings, must include a combination of both behavioral and social cognitive theories. They must include (1) modeling, (2) role playing, (3) performance feedback and (4) transfer of training. Strategies that research has shown to be most effective in training children social skills are programs that use a structured learning approach and allow for reinforcement to generalize in real life settings. This approach based on behavioral and social learning theories may become an appropriate training model effective in teaching social skills to students with learning disabilities.

The present study provided the social skills training to students with LD. By learning the classroom survival skills the students could enhance their learning with less disruptive behaviors, therefore, become productive members in class. To date there are

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a variety of social skills programs to teach children with learning disabilities with favorable outcomes. However, the early intervention on social skills for those children is limited. The current study has concurred what previous researchers have established using the "Skillstreaming Program", for children at the primary elementary grade level to learn social skills and to examine their outcomes.

Chapter 3

Methods

Participating Students

Two first grade and two second grade male students with the age range from 6 to 8 years participated in the study. All students had been classified as having a specific learning disability and eligible for special education according to the state administrative code (2001). They attended a resource room for a half-day and another half day was spent in a general education classroom of a public school in a suburban area of Southern New Jersey. All of the students were included in all specials and lunch with their non-disabled peers during their school day.

Student 1:

D is a boy with a chronological age of 6 years, 4 months. He has been classified as having a specific learning disability and receives instruction in a resource room and the related service of speech and language therapy. He doesn't pay attention during large group lessons when he is playing with something in his hand, such as string or tiny pieces of paper that he tears from his worksheets. Because of the behavioral problems, he has received an unsatisfactory evaluation on all his reports this year. In addition, he sometimes argues with other students sitting next to him or in his group due to the peer's accusation that he is being mean without sharing. He has no friends and makes up outlandish stories about himself and his friends. It appears that he's lonely and not liked

by his peers.

Student 2:

H is a male with the chronological age of 6 years, 4 months. He has been classified as having a specific learning disability and receives instruction in a resource room. He is a pleasant first grader who always wants to please his teachers with a good sense of humor. He gets sad sometimes and reports that he has no friends, although it appears he does have some friends sometimes. He never talks of bringing friends home or having friends in class, though he seems to have friends to play with in the after school program. He only speaks of being friends with his Mom and Sister.

In class, H is very distractive, but quiet at his seat. He usually doesn't know what he should be doing and that sometimes annoys students around him. He makes faces when sitting in class, which causes the other children to laugh and disrupt the class. He is funny at times but sometimes talks like a girl, by which other students made fun of him. He has difficulty following the teacher's directions. Therefore, his listening skills and participation in class discussion is problematic. When playing games in the schoolyard he has difficulty joining in or taking turns with the other children. Most times he prefers to stand and watch until he is invited to play.

Student 3:

K is a boy with the chronological age of 8 years, 3 months. He has been classified as specific learning disability and receives instruction in a resource room. He is a nice child but shuts down if corrected. Sometimes, he is argumentative with other children and adults. He states he has no friends and seems to be aware of his problems. He

constantly repeats other's responses in a conversation. Sometimes he tells lies and physical and verbally fights with other boys. It is easy for him to be in arguments and become upset, and turn-taking is the major skill he lacks.

In class he does not pay attention to the teacher's instruction. His distractive behaviors include out of seat, cleaning out his desk, or drawing in the middle of the lesson without permission. If the teacher corrects him he gets defensive and argues with the teacher in the middle of the instruction.

Student 4:

M is a male with the chronological age of 8 years, 1 month. He has been classified as having a specific learning disability and receives speech and language therapy as a related service. He wears a device in his mouth to keep his tongue from pushing on his teeth any farther and to stop his thumb sucking. Sometimes he tells lies to classmates and teachers that makes others exclude him.

In the classroom he sits but does nothing while he is required to work at his desk. Because he keeps quiet in class, he is often left alone. He lacks social skills, such as turn taking and anger control when upset. He doesn't seem to have friends in class, nor does he talks about playing with friends at home. Table 1 presents the general information about the participating students.

Table 1: General Information of Participating Students

Student	Age	Grade	Classification	Years in Special Ed
D	6.4	1	SLD*	1
H	6.4	1	SLD	1
K	8.0	2	SLD	1
M	8.0	2	SLD	1

* As defined in the state code, SLD refers to Specific Learning Disability

INSTRUMENT/ MATERIALS

"The Skillstreaming: The Elementary School Child Social Skills Program" (1984) was used for instruction. This program addresses the needs of social skills for students who display aggressiveness, immaturity, withdraw, or other behavioral problems. The "Skillstreaming" approach utilizes modeling, role playing, performance feedback and transfer (homework). By learning the skills listed in the program, students can develop competence in dealing with interpersonal conflicts and use self-control. The curriculum contains 60 skill lessons and five skill groups including, Classroom Survival Skills, Friendship-Making Skills, Dealing with Feelings, Alternatives to Aggression and Dealing with Stress. In this study, of the 60 lessons, the students learned the prosocial skills including lesson 2) listening; lesson 10) ignoring distractions; and lesson 15) contributing to discussion.

MEASUREMENT

A behavior observation checklist (see Figure 1) was used to observe student behaviors to determine skills needed for social skills training as baseline. This checklist included 3 target behaviors as identified in Skillstreaming Skills: listening, ignoring distractions and

contributing to discussions. Listening is described as looking at the teacher, thinking about what is being said, raising your hand to ask a question on topic. Ignoring distractions refers to counting to five, saying to yourself, "I won't look. I'll keep on working, continuing to work and saying to yourself, "Good for me. I did it!".
Contributing to discussions includes deciding if you want to say something, asking yourself, "Is this related to the discussion?", deciding exactly what you want to say, raising your hand and when you are called on, say what you want to say. The observation was conducted for 40 minutes in Science and Social Studies for the second grade and Language Arts for the first grade for 5 days the first week with a total duration of 4 weeks, during which those social skills are taught as the intervention. The same observation was conducted as follow-up for 4 weeks with a total of 20 days, during which the skills were reviewed.

Figure 1: Behavior Observation Checklist (time interval of 10 minutes)

Observe Date: Time:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Target Behavior										
2. Target Behavior										
3. Target behavior										

* target behavior 1= listening   * occurrence "+"
2 =ignoring distractions   nonoccurrence "-"
3= contributing to discussions

Procedures

Training Procedures

The students received social skills training using the "Skillstreaming Program" in their Resource Room. The training provided a structured learning format for a small group, 20 minutes each day, four days per week. Components of the structured learning lesson are: (a) modeling—showing the student what to do. All the steps of the skill are demonstrated by the lead teacher and an assistant. All skills steps must be acted out properly and in the proper sequence. (b) Role Playing-helping students learn how to apply the modeled skill to their lives. All modeled steps should be discussed and relate to the students' lives. After the students discuss and relate it to their own lives the skill must be practiced. (c) Performance Feedback-a brief feedback follows each role-play. It helps the main actor find out how well he followed the role play and gives confidence to try it in a real life setting. (d) Transfer of Training-reviewing what is learned in the structured lessons and transferring them to other settings in the students' lives. Homework assignments are given once each week to practice the skills outside the Resource Room where the skills are taught. Figure 2 shows an example of the procedure.

Figure 2: Social Skills: Training Procedures

1. Modeling-the teacher and co-teacher taught the students each step of the required skill to be learned and showed them how to do the skill.
2. Role Play-the teacher and co-teacher acted out the skill incorrectly and correctly. The co-actors, those not in the study, pointed to the steps of each skill on the chart. The students also acted out the skills in the resource room and learned how to apply the skills to their lives
3. Performance feedback-following each roll- play a brief feed back is given to let the actors know how well they followed the role play.
4. Reinforcement Enhancements-students performing the correct steps of the skill were given tickets to save for prizes weekly.
5. Transfer of Training-Weekly homework was assigned to practice the skills outside the Resource Room where the skills were taught.

Measurement Reliability

An Inter-observer Reliability was conducted. Two observers, the researcher and her aide in the regular classroom and Resource Room completed all observations together. Participating children's behaviors were observed before the intervention and continued until the training was complete. A behavior checklist was used to record appropriate target behaviors for a period of 5 days. The behaviors were observed each week and were recorded again after the intervention. The target behaviors included listening, ignoring distractions, contributing to discussion. Reliability was established by the following formula: agreement/agreement + disagreement + omission x 100.

Research Design

A multiple baseline design across participating students was used in the study. The baseline data were recorded prior to the social skills training in phase A. Students' behaviors were observed weekly on an ongoing basis. At the completion of observing each three sets of behaviors as the baseline prior to the training, the researcher taught the

skills and then observed the same behaviors in phase B, Intervention, to see if any improvement was made when the "Skillstreaming Skills" were taught. The follow-up observation, in phase C, would also show whether the skills maintained after the training in one month. The baseline, intervention and follow-up phases were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and a line graph was presented to demonstrate the behavior change.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of using the social skills program "Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child" in class for 2 first grade and 2 second grade students. All were classified as specific learning disabled and included in the general education room with instructional support from the resource room. They were observed prior to the social skills training to find out what skills should be taught. The skills of ignoring distractions, listening and contributing to discussion were decided upon for integration into the class curriculum. The intervention of social skills training consisted of 12 sessions, 20 minutes per session, one time per day, four days a week for three weeks, with a follow up session to review the skills for four weeks.

A classroom assessment chart was used to analyze the effectiveness of the program. The behavior occurrences and non-occurrences were observed daily for each target behavior. For the purpose of this study, the daily tallies were compiled into weekly totals. This was used to see if the target behaviors that were directly related to the social skills program increased or decreased as a result of the intervention. Figure 1 presents the results.
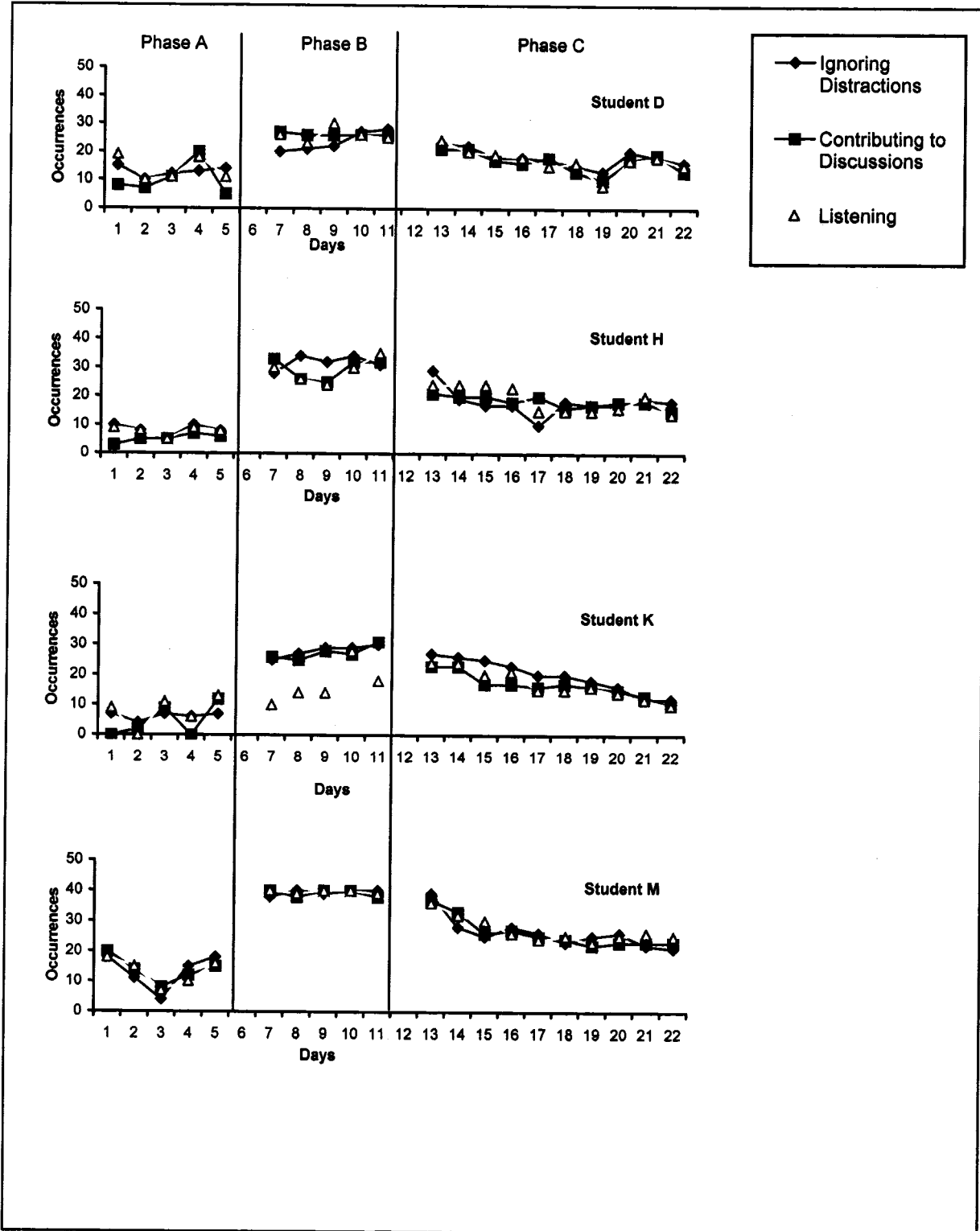
Figure 3

Figure 3 shows the effects of the social skills training using the "Skillstreaming Program". In phase A, Baseline, all 4 students had low behavioral occurrences of listening, contributing to discussion, and ignoring distraction. In phase B, Intervention, all 4 students increased the appropriate target behaviors for the Classroom Survival Skills. Each student showed an initial improvement after training, with a slight decrease of occurrences during the weeks following the intervention, the follow-up, phase C.

Chapter 5

Discussions

The purpose of this present study was to examine the effectiveness of social skills training and its impact on the behaviors of students with learning disabilities. The researcher used the "Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child" program to teach 4 students three target skills. They were classroom survival skills including ignoring distractions, listening and contributing to discussion. These skills were taught over an eight week period of intervention. Using a behavior observation sheet, a record was kept daily for 40 minutes per day during a Social Studies class for two second graders and a Language Arts class for two first graders. Their behaviors were recorded daily to see if any changes may occur.

In this study 3 questions were posed. The first question was to examine if social interaction skills of children with LD improved when the social skills training was provided in class. The findings show that the social interaction skills of all students increased by 10 to 30 points during the intervention, phase B and were slightly lower during the follow-up, phase C, but never returned to the lower occurrences as in the baseline, phase A. The second question was to examine if classroom survival skills of children with LD were improved when social skills training was provided in class. The findings show an improvement of 10 to 30 points during the intervention, phase B for all skills, with a slight drop in occurrences during the follow-up, phase C. In examining the

data and the positive increase of behavioral occurrences of classroom survival skills and social interaction skills, this researcher has found that the students are much more confident. They speak positively about their ability and confidence to participate in the general education classroom. In addition, they have requested that the social skills training in the classroom be continued. It appears that they like to learn social skills of the "Skillstreaming" program.

The results of the intervention and follow-up showed that all four students increased their positive behaviors in the general education classroom. For two students, with low behavioral occurrences during phase A, the baseline, a remarkable improvement was shown during phase B, the intervention and continued the positive behaviors, with only a slight drop in occurrences during phase C, the follow-up. The two students with very low behavioral occurrences during phase A, the baseline, showed a great improvement initially during phase B, the intervention and slowly made a continual slide back downward during the follow-up period, phase C. Their behavioral occurrences never returned to the original low level in the baseline. The children said they were happy to have the social skills lessons during the three weeks of the intervention, phase B. They expressed that they wanted the lessons to continue each week so that they could get better at making friends. Perhaps this social skills training should be integrated into their academic program as a regular curricular in class, so that students can receive instruction naturally as a class routine instead of special sessions.

The findings in this present study are consistent with Cierchalski and Schmidt's study (1995). Both studies have found that when social skills training is provided in the

classroom, children with LD would be better socially than those without training. The only difference is that the age group of students is much younger in the present study. It has been found that the participating students in the present study were successful in learning the skills of the same program only with minor adaptations in teaching procedures. Having first and second graders participate in the study, instead of 4th graders as samples in Cierchalski and Schmidt's research (1995), the current findings may add data to their study and expand the student's population for social skills training using the "Skillstreaming" program.

There are some limitations in the study. The first is the small size of the sample group. In a Resource Room, children are from multiple grades taught in small groups. This size of class consisted of fewer students in each group. In addition, the students were in different grades, 2 in 1st grade and 2 in 2nd grade. Thus, the observation of their skills had to be completed at different times during the day. The second limitation is that the three skills were selected by the researcher randomly, without previous consultation with other teachers or students to really understand what skills the students were having difficulty with in the general education classroom. The third is that there were some variables this researcher could not control, such as, student absences which caused changing dates of observations during phase B of the intervention. There were several days when the first grade children went outside for good behavior reward or watched a movie in class. This caused a delay at a critical time in the observation period. Therefore, it may impact the study results.

Future studies with a bigger size of sample and various grade levels would be

recommended. A third person as an observer to validate the data would also be suggested

to make accurate observations.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects on the social skills training program "The

Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child" for first and second grade students with

learning disabilities. The classroom survival skills, including ignoring distractions,

listening and contributing to discussion were taught and practiced. The results indicated

that the students showed a great improvement in all three skills. This may imply that

social skills training is needed and can be integrated into academic curricular to

positively impact students with learning disabilities as young as their primary grade.

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Appendix A

January 2, 2003

Dear Parents,

For the past several years I have been attending classes for a Master's Degree in Special Education at Rowan University. I am currently in my last two semesters and will be graduating in May, 2003. For my final project I am to write a paper on Social Skills Training. I am writing today to ask for your permission to have your child be a part of my research. As part of the study I will have them answer questions about turn taking, starting a conversation, and general questions about play. In addition, I will observe them in the classroom and playground to see how they interact with their peers. I will then determine which skills I need to teach them to become better at play and school interactions. If I find that they already have good skills in these areas, then no intervention will be needed. I will just need to report those findings in my research.

I would like you to know that all my research will be kept completely confidential and only numbers will be used. My research will only be used for my personal writing and will be destroyed after my use.

I hope in researching this topic that I am able to further develop your child into a skilled communicator, who can make and keep friends, both in and out of school.

Your help would be greatly appreciated in pursuing my endeavor. I have attached a permission slip for your use. Please sign and return as soon as you can. If you would like to discuss this further, you may call me at School #4.

Sincerely,

Patricia Swenson
Resource Room Teacher

I give my permission to have my child observed and tested for the research paper

The Effect of Social Skills Training for Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities

and for Social Skills Lessons in class and during recess during the 2002- 2003 school year.

_____

signed

Appendix B

Social Skills Lesson Plans

Day 1 General rules for all lessons
Introduction to Social Skills

Lesson 1: *Objective*- To go over group rules and procedures to teach social skills until firm.
Procedure- have group make up rules on how group will perform and put on chart to display and practice.
1. Only one person speaks at a time.
2. Keep hands and feet yourself.
3. Stop, look and listen.
4. Help one another learn.
Evaluation- both oral and written response.
Follow-up- go over newly made rules and practice them.

Day 2 Contributing to Discussion
Step 1: Modeling

Lesson 2: *Objective*- To have the teacher and co-teacher model the skill for Contributing to Discussion until student is firm.
Procedure- teacher and co-teacher will model the different steps of the skill while a student not in the social skills group will point to the different steps on the chart until learned. Different situations will be modeled for understanding. Answer any question students may have about steps and situations.

Skill Steps for Contributing to Discussions

1. Decide if you have something to say.
2. Does it make sense?
3. Say what you want to say.
4. Raise your hand.
5. When you are called on, say what you want to say.
Evaluation- oral response.
Follow-up- situations are critiqued by students using steps of skill.

Day 3: Contributing to Discussion
Step 2: Role Playing

Lesson 3: *Objective*- To have students role play different situations for contributing to discussion incorrectly and then correctly until firm.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Students will role play incorrect and then correct ways to contribute to their classroom discussions. Answer any questions students raise during and after role play.
Follow-up- situations are critiqued and corrected using skill steps.

<u>Day 4: Contributing to Discussion</u>
<u>Step 3: Performance Feedback</u>

Lesson 4: *Objective-* To have students constructively talk about the performance of their peers on the social skills contributing to discussion.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Discuss performance of prior day's role play and decide if all skill steps were followed by performers.
Follow up- Answer any questions raised during performance feedback.

<u>Day 5: Contributing to Discussion</u>
<u>Step 3: Transfer of Skill (Homework)</u>

Lesson 5: *Objective-* To have students transfer skills in other places by completing homework journal.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Discuss week's skills and how to do steps for a variety of situations. Do short vignettes of skills learned for different scenarios at home and at school.
Follow up- Answer questions, critique vignettes, and give homework.
Homework- every night use steps in journal and draw a picture or write a sentence when you use the skill steps at home. Have parents sign journal.

<u>Day 1: Listening</u>
<u>Step 1: Modeling</u>

Lesson 1: *Objective-* To have the teacher and co-teacher model the skill for listening until student is firm.
Procedure- teacher and co-teacher will model the different steps of the skill while a student not in the social skills group will point to the different steps on the chart until learned. Different situations will be modeled for understanding. Answer any question students may have about steps and situations.

Skill Steps for Listening

1. Look at the person who is talking.
2. Sit quietly.
3. Think about what is being said.
4. Say yes or nod your head.
5. Ask a question about the topic to find out more.

Evaluation- oral response.
Follow-up- situations are critiqued by students using steps of skill.
<u>Day 2: Listening</u>
<u>Step 2: Role Playing</u>

Lesson 3: *Objective-* To have students role play different situations for contributing to discussion incorrectly and then correctly until firm.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Students will role play incorrect and then correct ways to contribute to their classroom discussions. Answer any questions students raise during and after role play.
Follow-up- situations are critiqued and corrected using skill steps.

Day 3: Listening
Step 3: Performance Feedback

Lesson 4: *Objective-* To have students constructively talk about the performance of their peers on the social skills contributing to discussion.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Discuss performance of prior day's role play and decide if all skill steps were followed by performers.
Follow up- Answer any questions raised during performance feedback.

Day 4: Listening
Step 4: Transfer of Skill (Homework)

Lesson 5: *Objective-* To have students transfer skills in other places by completing homework journal.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Discuss week's skills and how to do steps for a variety of situations. Do short vignettes of skills learned for different scenarios at home and at school.
Follow up- Answer questions, critique vignettes, and give homework.
Homework- every night use steps in journal and draw a picture or write a sentence when you use the skill steps at home. Have parents sign journal.

Day 1: Ignoring Distractions
Step 1: Modeling

Lesson 1: *Objective-* To have the teacher and co-teacher model the skill for listening until student is firm.
Procedure- teacher and co-teacher will model the different steps of the skill while a student not in the social skills group will point to the different steps on the chart until learned. Different situations will be modeled for understanding. Answer any question students may have about steps and situations.

Skill Steps for Ignoring Distractions

1. Count to five.
2. Say to yourself, " I won't look. I'll keep on working."
3. Continue to work.
4. Say to yourself, " Good for me. I did it!"

Evaluation- oral response.
Follow-up- situations are critiqued by students using steps of skill.

<u>Day 2: Ignoring Distractions</u>
<u>Step 2: Role Playing</u>

Lesson 2: *Objective-* To have students role play different situations for contributing to discussion incorrectly and then correctly until firm.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Students will role play incorrect and then correct ways to contribute to their classroom discussions. Answer any questions students raise during and after role play.
Follow-up- situations are critiqued and corrected using skill steps.
<u>Day 3: Ignoring Distractions</u>
<u>Step 3: Performance Feedback</u>

Lesson 3: *Objective-* To have students constructively talk about the performance of their peers on the social skills contributing to discussion.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Discuss performance of prior day's role play and decide if all skill steps were followed by performers.
Follow up- Answer any questions raised during performance feedback.

<u>Day 4: Ignoring Distractions</u>
<u>Step 4: Transfer of Skill (Homework)</u>

Lesson 4: *Objective-* To have students transfer skills in other places by completing homework journal.
Procedure- Review skill steps. Discuss week's skills and how to do steps for a variety of situations. Do short vignettes of skills learned for different scenarios at home and at school.
Follow up- Answer questions, critique vignettes, and give homework.
Homework- every night use steps in journal and draw a picture or write a sentence when you use the skill steps at home. Have parents sign journal.