

The Effect of Skillstreaming Intervention on
Students' Non-Independently Resolved Conflicts

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if a modified version of the Skillstreaming curriculum, incorporated into a whole class morning circle routine, would be effective in reducing students' non-independently solved conflicts, or conflicts that necessitated teacher intervention. The measurement tool was a researcher created tally mark system for tracking the number of non-independently solved student conflicts. The study involved a pre-experimental one group pre-test, post-test design to measure the data collected from the tally mark system. The results of the data showed no significant difference in the pre and post data. However, due to researcher observations of other results in the sample group that were not captured in the data, further research on this intervention is merited. Problems stemming from students' lack of social skills and impacting students' academic, behavioral and social development are widely acknowledged in the research. While the data in this study does not show a statistically significant difference, there is potential for further investigation and intervention to improve students' abilities to deal with peer conflict.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students' lack of social skills leading to classroom conflict is a large and significant problem facing teachers and schools working with children of all ages. Studies have shown that students who display poor social skills are more likely to be at-risk academically (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). This can be clearly seen through observation of students who spend more time distracted by conflict or in trouble for conflict are less able to spend time focused on academics. The conflict behaviors of students with poor social skills not only impact their own academics, their behaviors can also impact the time their classmates are able to spend on-task.

There are many interventions, behavior programs and character development programs, which have been researched and used by schools in order to decrease the number of student conflicts. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of using a modified version of the Skillstreaming (McGinnis, 2012) curriculum, tailored to the specific needs of a class with a reputation for student conflict, in order to determine if such an intervention could have lasting effects in reducing inter-student conflicts and developing more positive social skills.

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore ways to reduce peer conflict in the classroom, thereby increasing students' time and focus on academics as well as improving their social skills and resilience both within and outside of school. This researcher has observed problems with peer conflict interfering with learning across many grades and classrooms. When there is peer conflict, often the instructor is asked to or forced to step in to mediate the problem, taking time away from instruction. Often students become so focused on or upset by peer conflict that they are unable to fully focus and participate in class activities. This researcher has

been concerned by the peer conflict among students at her school and is interested in strategies to reduce this problem in her classroom. This researcher hoped that introducing the Skillstreaming Curriculum into morning circle time would help students in her class to learn some of the social skills, self-control skills and self-awareness skills to be able to better handle peer-conflict. By reducing the time spent on teacher intervention in conflict and students' preoccupation with conflicts, this researcher hoped to increase time spent engaged and on-task with academics as well as build students' social skills.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of incorporating modified lessons from the Skillstreaming Curriculum into morning circle time in order to reduce peer conflict in a fourth grade class.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference between the mean number of non-independently resolved student conflicts observed in the 14 school days prior to the intervention using the Skillstreaming curriculum and the 14 school days after the intervention.

Operational Definitions

Non-independently resolved student conflict refers to disagreements that require teacher mediation in the classroom or that require the teacher to refer students to the office. *A classroom mediated conflict* may refer to any disagreement that requires teacher mediation due to any or all of the following: disruption to the class; raised voices; inability to resolve a disagreement independently in the classroom within 2 minutes using peaceful tones thereby wasting learning time and causing the instructor to intervene in order to get students back on task; or anytime students ask to step out of the room to do "peaceful conflict resolution" but are unable to resolve

the problem within 2-4 minutes, give up and ask for teacher presence or raise their voices. A *conflict which requires an office referral* means any conflict which leads to a formal referral to the office which includes conflicts involving name-calling or putting hands on another student. *Teacher mediation* refers to anytime a student or students seek out teacher help to solve a conflict or a teacher must step in to stop the conflict through warnings (verbal or non-verbal) or consequences (e.g.: using the behavior chart, taking something away or moving children away from each other). *Morning Circle* refers to the 15 to 20 minutes set aside by all classrooms in the school for greetings, classroom discussions and community building activities and games first thing in the morning. *Peaceful Conflict Resolution* refers to a series of steps learned by the class at the beginning of the year for solving a conflict. The steps students use are: Say the person's name, tell the person how you feel, tell the person why you feel that way, tell the person what you would like them to do.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research has shown that social skills play a key role in students' overall emotional and social development and well-being as well as their academic achievement (Algozzine, Wang, White, Cooke, Marr, Algozzine, 2012). When students lack social skills, they often waste much instructional time dealing with conflict, unfocused on their tasks, or out of the classroom entirely due to their behavior. Students with severe social problems are also at-risk of several social, emotional and behavioral disorders. Understanding what social skills entail, the problems stemming from lack of social skills and interventions for helping students to develop social skills is essential for helping students to be successful academically, socially and emotionally.

Definition of Social Skills:

There are many social skills that are necessary for students to be able to interact positively with peers and teachers in a school setting. Students must be able to ask for and give help, share with others, ignore teasing and deescalate aggressive behaviors from others in order to be able to focus and succeed in their academic tasks (Social skills training, 2004). In developing social skills curriculum, researchers have come up with many definitions of what social skills entail. A concise definition of social skills is, "socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses and to avoid negative responses" (Social skills training, 2004 p.1).

Many researchers have further broken down this definition into what they consider to be the foundational, or key social skills that students must have in order to be successful. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, the foundational social skills for students' well-being are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management,

positive peer relationships, concentration and persistence (Ashdown et al., 2012). Elliott and Busse categorize social skills by breaking them down into five clusters- cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy and self-control (as cited in Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, Tribe, 2006). What all of these definitions have in common is the fact that they present several external and internal skills. Students must be able to master the many internal skills of how they think about themselves, others and their responsibilities. They must also master the many external skills of how to respond to others and their responsibilities. It is no wonder with such a complex set of skills that so many children struggle in some form or another with social skills.

Deficits in Social Skills:

There are many contributing factors that may go into why a child may struggle with social skills. First, children might have an acquisition deficit, meaning that they have never learned the social skill in the first place. On the other hand, children might have a performance deficit, which means that they know the social skill but fail to use it in certain situations.

Children may also have fluency deficits, meaning that they have not had the chance to practice certain social skills adequately. Finally, children may also have interfering deficits, such as anxiety which hinder them from acquiring certain social skills. It is essential to understand all the reasons why children may have social skills deficits in order to meet the individual child's needs for social skills development (Denham et al., 2006).

Problems stemming from lack of social skills:

Research has shown that social skills are crucial for students' success. Without adequate social skills, students face serious problems in many areas. First, social skills are extremely tied to academic achievement. Poor social skills often lead to poor academics. Social skills are also

critical for students' social and emotional well-being. Students lacking social skills may also be at-risk for social and behavioral disorders.

According to Oakes, at least six percent of the student population is at-risk for Emotional Behavior Disorder, or EBD. Students with EBD have severe problems with social skills and behavioral issues. Problems with EBD have been proven to often go hand in hand with academic problems. In fact, students' social skills have been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of their academic success (Oakes, Lane, Cox, Magrane, Jenkins, Hankins, 2012). In a meta-analysis of 270 research studies, it was found that aspects of students' social skills had more effect on students' academic success than even their peer group, classroom culture, or method of instruction (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). There are many reasons that social skills affect academics so negatively. Students with EBD often have poor academic engagement, problems with motivation, frequent behavior problem and office referrals (Oakes et al., 2012). It has been estimated that academic difficulties, especially in the areas of math and reading, for students with EBD or at-risk for EBD range between 25% to 97% (Scott, Alter, Hern, 2011). Only one percent of students with EBD receive special education services. It is critical, therefore, to be able to better ascertain students who may be at-risk for EBD and create interventions to help those students with social skills in order to help them improve their academics (Oakes et al., 2012).

When children lack social skills, they often vacillate between the extremes of passivity and aggression. These extremes can lead to many problems in healthy social and emotional development. On one side, students who are shy and withdrawn often respond to conflict situations by ignoring which only serves to perpetuate the problem. On the other side are students who have trouble with anger and low-frustration levels and often respond with

retaliation and aggression. This extreme also perpetuates problems. In order to have healthy social and emotional development, children need to be able to respond to conflict activity, through problem-solving and help seeking. Children who tend towards the extremes of passivity and aggression must be taught how to respond actively in order to have healthy social and emotional development (Augustyniak, Brooks, Rinaldo, Bogner, Hodges, 2009 ; Rudolph, Abaied, Flynn, Sugimura, Agoston, 2011) .

For the sake of children's social and emotional development, therefore, and for the sake of their academic success, it is critically important to understand ways to better teach and equip students with social skills. Effective social skills interventions are vital for students struggling with social skills or at-risk for social, emotional and behavioral disorders.

Social Skills interventions:

Types of interventions:

Although there are a myriad of interventions that have been used and researched for helping students with social skills, they all stem from and contain elements of three main categories of interventions. The three categories for social skills intervention approaches are known as operant, social learning and cognitive behavioral (Social skills training, 2004).

Operant interventions are mainly used when there is a performance deficit (Denham et al., 2006). The premise of this type of intervention is that the child already knows the social skills but is not using them. Operant interventions seek to change children's social behaviors through positive and negative reinforcement. The most common form of operant intervention is reinforcing the child consistently for displaying the desired social behaviors. A more complex form of operant intervention does just the opposite. Instead of reinforcing the child for displaying the desired social behavior, the child is instead reinforced after regular time intervals for *not* displaying the undesirable social behaviors. While reinforcements for displaying or not displaying certain social behaviors are useful, most agree that these

interventions are best used in conjunction with also teaching correct social behaviors (Social skills training, 2004).

Social learning interventions are based on social learning theories of Walters and Bandura (“Social skills training, 2004). These interventions are based on teaching positive social behaviors through modeling. Children who are struggling with social skill see the skills modeled for them. They also see the positive reinforcement of praise given to those modeling the correct social behaviors. Modeling interventions have been shown to be especially effective when they are peer-mediated. Children are more likely to follow the modeled behaviors when they see their peers modeling them. Peers are also better able to monitor how well the children learning the social skills are able to put them into practice in actual situations (“Social skills training, 2004).

Many interventions are entirely based on, or at least contain some element of the cognitive behavioral approach. These interventions are focused on teaching children ways to think about their social actions and attitudes. One of the ways students are taught to use metacognition about their social behaviors is through coaching. Coaches present the steps for thinking about and acting in a ‘social situation. The skill is then rehearsed with the coach and finally, the coach provides feedback to the child about their performance and how to continue to use the skill in the future. The coach may be a psychologist, teacher or peer. There are also many SPS programs, or social problem solving programs. These programs are often used with whole classrooms. These programs help students to think about their social choices by teaching students to, “(i) Identify and define the problem, (ii) determine alternate ways of reacting to the problem, (iii) predict consequences for each alternative reaction, and (iv) select the “best” or most adaptive alternative” (“Social skills training, 2004 p. 3).

Some have said that cognitive behavioral interventions are most effective with adolescents, as they have reached the formal operational stage and are better at self-reflection.

However, research suggests that cognitive behavioral interventions are also highly effective and extremely important for younger children as well. Cognitive behavioral interventions help children of all ages to recognize maladaptive “self-talk” and use positive “self-talk” instead (Augustiniak et al., 2009).

Research has not been able to conclusively prove that one of these types of interventions is more effective than the other (Denham et al., 2006). Many interventions, in fact, often contain elements of several if not all of these three main intervention approaches.

Methods of intervention

Just as there are several types of interventions, there are also several methods for administering social skills interventions. Some interventions are administered to small, pull-out groups of children who are identified as being at-risk due to poor social skills. Other interventions are designed to be used for a whole-class setting or even as a school-wide program. Interventions for whole-class or school settings are designed to not just help students who are at-risk, but to help all students to increase their social skills thereby protecting them from possibly becoming at-risk. Most interventions are designed to help students who are at-risk or who have already been identified as having an emotional, social or behavioral disorder. However, many of the interventions can be adapted to be used in a more mixed group setting with both at-risk and not at-risk students. Many interventions can also be adapted in who administers them. Some are administered by school psychologists or social workers. Some are administered by teachers. As previously discussed, many have been proved to be effective when administered by peers. The key for selecting the method and type of intervention is understanding the needs of the students for whom the intervention is being used (Social skills training, 2004).

Examples of social skills interventions

In order to understand the types and methods of interventions, it is important to look at a few examples of interventions that fall into the different categories. By examining several types of interventions, it becomes easier to ascertain how different interventions are designed to meet the needs of various students and student groups.

One social skills intervention method that has been used and adapted by many schools is the PBIS method. PBIS stands for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. This intervention is a school-wide intervention. It uses elements of operant and cognitive behavioral interventions. First, it defines the behavioral and social expectations. It also directly teaches what those expectations should look like. There are also rewards to positively reinforce those displaying the expected behaviors and clear consequences for those that do not display the desired behaviors. Besides being a whole class social skills intervention, PBIS also seeks to support students who are identified as being more at-risk for severe social skills deficits. Students identified as being at-risk are given additional re-teaching of the desired social skills through additional small group interventions which may include further methods of interventions beyond the general PBIS intervention (Cuccaro & Geitner, 2007).

There are many other social skills instruction programs that are used school-wide that are then taught more in-depth as an intervention for students who are identified as at-risk. For example, one study was done in several schools that used a social skills program, known as BITS, or behavior instruction in the total school. This school-wide social skills program was used in conjunction with academic interventions as a part of the RTI system for identifying and intervening for students who are at-risk academically. The premise behind this study was that joint academic and behavioral interventions will be much more effective overall. Because the

social skills interventions are building on what is already going on school-wide, they are more effective, just as the academic interventions are building on what is being already taught academically. The purpose of this study was to prove that social skills and academic skills should both be supported school-wide and interventions for both academics and social skills should be used together as a part of RTI in order for growth to take place in both social and academic areas (Algozzine et al., 2012).

There are many other whole school social skills, or character development programs that can be adapted to be used more intensively as interventions, such as the Positive Action curriculum. These whole-school programs not only provide extra support for students needing interventions, they create less need for interventions in the first place by teaching social skills to the whole school, raising both the social and academic performance of the entire student body (Oakes et al., 2012).

There are also many curriculums available to be used as interventions for either whole-class or school settings as well as small groups. For example, the Skillstreaming curriculum has been used in many research studies as a social skills intervention. This curriculum is a mix between the social learning and cognitive behavioral approaches. It has many lessons on various social skills. It starts each lesson by having the teacher model how to deal with each social situation. It then proceeds to coaching the students on how to deal with the situation, having them role-play the situation, providing feedback and then having the students apply the skill they have learned to real-world situations (McGinnis, 2012) In one study, elements of the Skillstreaming curriculum were used for a small group intervention targeting at-risk students. This program was called the ALPS, or Alternative to Lunch Program for Students. This program pulled students out for a social skills intervention group during lunch period and used several

lessons from the Skillstreaming curriculum in order to target the behaviors with which students were struggling (Cuccaro & Geitner, 2007). This same curriculum can also be used in a whole-class setting, in order to help students already at-risk and to prevent other students from becoming at-risk. It can be taught by psychologists, teachers and even used for peer-mediated interventions (McGinnis, 2012).

There are several other curriculums similar to the Skillstreaming curriculum, but which have been designed to be used in whole-class settings as prevention strategies for keeping students from becoming at-risk. One such curriculum is the PATH curriculum, which stands for Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies. This curriculum clearly uses the cognitive behavioral approach, seeking to help students understand their emotions as well as conflict situations and providing them with strategies for thinking about those emotions and situations. This curriculum was designed as a whole-class curriculum with the belief that it will act as prevention for students who may be at-risk of having EBD in the future (Bardon, Dona, Symons, 2008). The “You Can Do It” program is also a curriculum based on the cognitive behavioral approach. This curriculum highlights the importance of children’s thinking and self-talk on their emotions and behavior. It can be used for small groups, but was primarily designed to be used on a daily basis, integrated with the classroom curriculum in order to prevent students from becoming at-risk for behavioral, social or emotional disorders (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

Obviously there is an abundance of curriculum and programs that can be used for interventions and preventions for social skills problems. They can be used as school-wide, whole-class or small group programs. They can be administered by a variety of personnel. The key, however, is figuring out the effectiveness of the various options as well as how each option meets the needs of students’ particular situations and struggles.

Effects of Interventions

Overall, research has shown that social skills interventions are moderately effective in helping students to exhibit better social skills. Several meta-analyses have been done of research studies on social skills interventions. These analyses have shown that the effect of the interventions vary depending on the type of intervention and the type of intervention group. For example, it was found that interventions with mixed groups of prosocial youth and deviant youth were much more effective than those only consisting of deviant youth. This is thought to be because of the positive effect of peers modeling prosocial behaviors (Social skills training, 2004).

There are many studies that prove the effectiveness of social skills interventions on social skills and behavior as well as academic achievement. Each study varies in its results as they all use different interventions and student sample groups. It is important therefore to look at examples of the results of a few studies in order to get a general picture of the effects of social skills interventions.

Social and Behavioral Effects of Interventions:

Several studies prove a significant effect on children's behavior and social skills due to social skills interventions. One meta-analysis of 43 studies states that, "social skills training produced significant improvements in children's level of social interaction and cognitive problem-solving abilities" (Denham et al., 2006 p. 35). On a smaller level, one can also look at the particular effect of several specific studies. For example, research on the ALPS program shows that children who were a part of this program showed improved behavior in the cafeteria and at gym, which were the targeted areas for this intervention (Cuccaro & Geitner, 2012). Another intervention used the Prepare Curriculum, which uses the cognitive behavioral

approach. For this study student self-reports were used as the pre and post-measures of the study. After the intervention, students reported a much greater ability to deal with emotional stressors and to use coping skills (Augustyniak et al., 2009). The YCDI program reported that the intervention group had much greater measures of positive emotions and behaviors and lower negative emotions and behaviors than the control group that did not receive the YCDI social skills intervention (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Although the each individual study and intervention uses different methods and different measures for proving the success of those methods, overall it is clear that social skills interventions are effective in helping students to exhibit more positive social skills and behavior as well as improving their overall social and emotional well-being.

Academic Effects of Interventions:

Studies not only prove the effectiveness of social skills interventions on behavior and social skills, they also prove an increase in academic achievement due to the intervention. For example, while the YCDI intervention initially showed no significant difference in the academic achievement between the experimental and control group, when the reading levels of the students with the lowest reading achievement were examined, it was found that lower achieving students within the intervention group made two standard deviations more growth than similarly low achieving students in the non-intervention group, proving that the social skills intervention has a significant impact on the academic achievement of struggling students (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). This data makes sense as students struggling with social skills have been shown to often struggle with academic skills. Therefore it is the students struggling the most with both social and academic skills that will make the most improvement academically due to social skills interventions.

In another study social skills interventions were given in conjunction with academic interventions, as the students with social and academic needs often coincide. This study proved that the students receiving both interventions improved significantly over the control group not receiving the interventions. The premise behind this multi-level intervention was that problems with social skills create interfering problems with learning. Therefore, academic and behavioral deficits should be addressed simultaneously in order to truly increase the academic performance (Algozzine et al., 2012).

Limitations to Intervention Effectiveness

While research clearly shows that social skills interventions can have a significant effect on children's social-emotional well-being as well as their academic achievement, there are also many limitations to the effectiveness of these interventions as well. One factor that limits the effectiveness of social skills interventions is the time period over which the intervention is administered. Meta-analyses of studies on various interventions have shown that interventions which take place over shorter time spans are less effective than those that administered over a longer time frame (Social skills training, 2004). Many studies have also shown that the effectiveness of social skills interventions decreases over time (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

There are several ways to help students to better generalize the skills they have learn to real-life situations and to help them to continue using those skills more long-term. First, interventions need to have follow-ups with students to continue to develop their social skills in real-life situations (Social skills training, 2004). Also, parents and other influential adults and youth in the children's lives should be familiarized with the strategies and concepts children have been taught in the interventions in order to help them generalize what they have learned to broader contexts (Augustyniak et al., 2009). In order for social skills interventions to be most effective, therefore,

they must take place over long-time periods, include follow-ups that help students to apply the skills they have learned to real-world situations, and include other significant people in the child's life to help them generalize the social skills they are learning.

Summary

Social skills are an extremely important topic for teachers and schools to understand. The job of schools and teachers is to help ensure students' social and emotional well-being and academic success. Both of these are inextricably linked to students' social skills. Without adequate social skills, students are in danger of becoming at risk for many social and behavioral disorders. Since behavior and motivation are closely tied to academic success, poor social skills also lead students to become at-risk for academic failure. It is essential, therefore, for schools and teachers to become familiar with what developmental social skills entail. They must further become familiar with possible deficits that students may have in mastering and exhibiting those social skills as well as methods of prevention and intervention to help students from becoming at-risk due to lack of social skills. Teachers and schools should seek to know the different types and methods of interventions in order to select interventions that will best meet their individual student needs. Ideally, all schools would seek to implement some form of social skills program or curriculum as the best form of intervention is prevention by laying a foundation for all students for understanding social skills. Furthermore, students would benefit most highly from social skills training that is given to all students, at-risk or otherwise, as well as training that is given consistently, in multiple environments and by multiple influential people in their lives.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of incorporating modified lessons from the Skillstreaming Curriculum into morning circle time in order to reduce peer conflict in a fourth grade class.

Design

The design that was used for this study was a variant of the pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. The sample group was a convenience sample consisting of an entire fourth grade classroom. The dependent variable in this study was the frequency of non-independently solved conflicts. The independent variable was whether or not the children had yet participated in the Skillstreaming intervention. Before the intervention began, the researcher observed and recorded non-independently solved student conflicts for fourteen days using a tally system. Each time there was a non-independently solved conflict involving one or more students, the researcher recorded a tally by the students' names along with the class period during which the conflict occurred. After the pre-intervention data was collected, five weeks of intervention began. During the intervention weeks a social skills lesson from the Skillstreaming curriculum was taught and discussed throughout the week during morning circle, which lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. Homework on the social skill was given to all students, and students were given the opportunity to discuss how they were able to apply the skill during morning circle throughout the week. After the intervention, fourteen days of post-intervention data was collected using the same methods used for the collection of pre-intervention data.

Participants

The participants in this study were the researcher's entire fourth grade class. This class consisted of fifteen students between the ages of nine and eleven. All students in the class live in a neighborhood in a city in the mid-Atlantic region. Fourteen of the fifteen students were African American. One was bi-racial. There were eight boys and seven girls in the class.

Not all students in the class displayed poor social skills when dealing with conflict behavior. However, there were several in the class who dealt with conflict poorly so frequently that the researcher decided it was best for the whole class to receive the intervention. As all of the students were introduced to the social skills, those who already had better social skills could further encourage their peers to use the skills they were learning by modeling them. All of the students would develop a common language for dealing with conflict and therefore be better equipped to help and encourage others when there was a conflict. Furthermore, because so many students in the class had problems with creating conflicts and dealing with conflict situations, students who were not as conflict prone were nevertheless, frequently drawn into conflict situations. By including all students in the intervention, the entire class formed a common language for dealing with conflict and were able to encourage one another to use the steps they had been taught. Students who frequently caused conflict were able to learn better strategies for avoiding it, while students who had to deal with other students involved in conflict were able to learn better strategies for deescalating the conflict.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study for the pre and post intervention data collection was a tally system created by the researcher. This tally system was used to record every instance of non-independent student conflict throughout the time that students were in the classroom. Each time

there was a non-independent student conflict, the researcher would create a tally mark by the initials of the students involved in the conflict. If, for example, two students were arguing about whose turn it was in a game and were unable to stop arguing until the teacher intervened, a tally mark would be recorded by each student's name. If one student was yelling at another student, for example, about taking their pencil that would also be recorded as a conflict, as the instructor would have to step in and remind the student that yelling is not allowed. In such a situation, a tally mark would only be recorded by the one student's name who was yelling as the other student did not engage in the conflict. The tally sheet for collecting data on conflict was divided up not only by students' initials, but also by class periods. This allowed the researcher to observe if there were certain class periods or times of day when conflicts more frequently occurred.

As this tally system for recording student conflict was created by the researcher, there is no information about the reliability and validity of the instrument or normative data. There was no other observer to provide inter-reliability data. However, as the researcher created the operational definitions for conflict in the classroom, she was well equipped to be able to identify and record conflict in her classroom.

Procedure

This study was conducted between February 4th and May 9th 2014. The pre-observation data was collected over a 14 day period. This period was not consecutive as there were many snow days, testing days, and session breaks which interfered with data collection. In order to match the number of days that pre-observation data was collected, post-observation data was also collected over a period of 14 days. However, post-observation data was collected over a consecutive time period as there were no snow days or breaks occurring during the period of the

post-observation data collection.

The intervention was taught over a five week period during morning circle. Morning circle is a routine used throughout the school as a way to build classroom community, hold classroom meetings and discussions, and start the day positively. Since the Skillstreaming curriculum requires group discussions as well as role-play, morning circle seemed the most natural time for these lessons to occur. Originally, the researcher had intended to teach the Skillstreaming lesson on Tuesdays during morning circle and discuss how students had applied the skills they had learned on Tuesday during Friday's morning circle. However, due to scheduling interruptions and time constraints, the researcher had to become more flexible in instructing and discussing the lessons. In order to accommodate these interfering variables, the researcher ended up incorporating some of the Skillstreaming lesson or discussion into almost every morning's circle routine. In order to understand how this was accomplished, it is important to understand the structure of a Skillstreaming lesson.

A Skillstreaming lesson follows nine steps: 1. Define the skill 2. Model the skill 3. Establish the student skill need 4. Select the first role player 5. Set up the role play 6. Conduct the role play 7. Provide performance feedback 8. Assign skill homework 9. Select the next role play. In order to be flexible with the timing available, the researcher attempted to begin each new Skillstreaming lesson on Tuesdays. She would explain the purpose of the skill, why it was important, and how it could be applied in the classroom. She would then have the class brainstorm various scenarios within and outside of the classroom where they might be able to use the skill. This activity followed steps 1 and 3 of defining the skill and establishing the skill need; often that was all that would be covered in a day. The next day the researcher would role-play using the skill in one of the scenarios discussed by the students. She would model her

metacognition, going through the various steps for the skill with either another student or the student-teacher as her partner for the role-play. This activity followed step 2 of modeling the skill. Depending on the time, a pair of students would be chosen to role-play another scenario using the steps of the skill. Occasionally, the student role-play was moved till the next day. While the students were acting out a scenario and practicing using the steps for the skill, the other students in the audience were assigned one step of the skill to carefully watch. After the two students performing the role-play had finished, the students in the audience discussed how well they were able to complete each of the steps they had been assigned to watch. The first day the new skill was introduced, the researcher would hand out a homework paper for students to fill out if they used the social skill they had learned. These activities followed steps 4 through 8. Due to time constraints, step 9- beginning another role play was skipped. Instead, more time was given to discussing how students applied the skills they learned through their homework. Filling out the homework was optional, and students were given several days to complete the homework. Students were allowed to fill out their homework if they used the skill of the week either in a situation in school or out of school. If students chose to complete their homework, they were given a chance in morning circle after the skill was done being taught and all role-plays were complete to share how they had applied the skill. After students shared how they used the skill, they were asked to self-evaluate how well they used the skill. They were then allowed to call on one another to share one way they used the steps well in order to accomplish the social skill. If students shared how they used the social skill during morning circle time, they were given a certificate for that skill. Frequently, so many students wanted to share how they used the skill of the week that sharing time had to be spread over two or even three morning circle times.

The skills that were covered over the period of the five weeks were as follows: Dealing with an Accusation, Dealing with your Anger, and Responding to Teasing, Avoiding Trouble and Accepting the Consequences. These skills were chosen based on problems that the researcher frequently observed as causes of student conflict in the classroom.

After the five weeks of intervention through the Skillstreaming lessons incorporated into morning circle time, the researcher once again observed and recorded student conflict over a period of fourteen days. This post-observation was conducted in order to determine whether or not students would continue to apply the skills they had learned throughout the intervention to reduce classroom conflict.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore how the instances of non-independently resolved conflicts would be affected after using Skillstreaming lessons for conflict resolution as an intervention. After comparing the pre and post observation data it was found that there was no significant difference in the mean number of non-independently resolved student conflicts in the baseline (Mean = 6.87, SD = 6.44) and the post-intervention periods (Mean = 5.13, SD = 5.83) [$t(14) = 1.61, p \geq .05$]." See Table 1.

The null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between the mean number of non-independently resolved student conflicts observed in the 14 school days prior to the intervention using the Skillstreaming curriculum and the 14 school days after the intervention failed to be rejected.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results for Number of Non-Independently Resolved Student Conflicts Before and After Skills Streaming

Period	Mean	Std. Deviation	T statistic
Before Skills Streaming	6.87	6.44	1.61 (NS)
After Skills Streaming	5.13	5.83	

NS = non-significant at $p < .05$

N = 15, df = 14

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study looked at the impact of using a modified version of the Skillstreaming curriculum in morning circle on peer conflict. The incidents of students' non-independently solved conflicts prior to the intervention were compared with the incidents of non-independently solved conflicts following the intervention in order to determine the impact of the intervention on student behavior. The null hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference in the number of non-independently resolved conflicts prior to the intervention and after the intervention. When the data was compared, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. However, the data was trending in the right direction, moving from a mean of 6.87 to a mean of 5.13.

Implications of Results

On a practical level, the results of this study provide many reasons for using the Skillstreaming curriculum as a means to help students learn social skills and conflict resolution strategies. Although the results of the study were not statistically significant, the full impact of the intervention was unable to be captured through the data.

By incorporating Skillstreaming lessons into the morning circle routine, students were able to learn steps for thinking about and addressing social issues such as dealing with an accusation or with anger. The data collected only provided a picture of the number of times that students were involved in non-independently resolved conflicts. The data was unable to capture, however, the number of times that students used what they learned from the Skillstreaming curriculum in order to avoid conflict both within and outside of the classroom. Throughout the intervention period, as well as after the intervention period, the instructor frequently observed students using the steps they had learned in Skillstreaming lessons in order to calm themselves

down before it escalated into a conflict. Also, the data was unable to capture the shift in classroom culture that the intervention enabled. By discussing and practicing the social skills together, this intervention gave students a common language for addressing many situations that might lead to conflict. This common language enabled students to walk through the steps for addressing a problem with each other, reminding each other to count to 10 to calm down or to use “I” language to talk about how what the other student did made them feel. Students frequently practiced and discussed possible scenarios where the conflict resolution strategies of the lessons might be used, thus making it easier for them to see where they might apply those skills to real scenarios in the classroom. The classroom became a safe place in which to practice those skills since all of the students had learned the steps and language of the skills together. As a result of the time spent on Skillstreaming lessons in morning circle, it became a part of the classroom culture to be aware of scenarios where social skills or conflict resolution skills might be needed. Even though students did not always use the skills they had learned in every conflict scenario, they were able to reflect independently and as a class on how they could have approached scenarios differently. Researcher observations suggested that due to the intervention, the class perceived conflicts differently- they were more aware of them, they had a common language for dealing with them, they could encourage one another to use their social skills steps, they could reflect on how they did or did not use those steps, and they responded more positively to students attempting to use the language and steps they had learned in order to solve their conflicts independently.

The data also cannot capture the discussions about social skills and conflict that were made possible through the intervention. Students were able to wrestle with difficult questions about using social skills and responding to conflict situations. Several morning circle times were spent

discussing whether or not it is okay to respond to teasing by ignoring it or telling the other person calmly how you feel instead of retaliating. The ability to have a space where students could start to think about the reasons and implications for not responding to teasing with anger may have a profound effect on how students think and act about this issue in the future. Data could never capture in a few weeks the importance of such skills. These discussions enabled students to share how they were using the skills they had learned at home and at school. They were able to hypothesize about possible times when they might use to use the skills. They were able to talk about the problems they had encountered or might encounter in using those skills. These discussions all provided a great foundation for students to be more aware and reflective about social skills and conflict. The impact of that foundation cannot not be measured in such a short time period.

Finally, the data is unable to show the researcher observed growth in self-confidence that was evident in students' ability to deal with conflict situations. Having the language to deal with the conflict, having clear steps to follow, having practiced those steps in many scenarios and discussed the difficulties that might arise in various scenarios, students felt safe to use the skills they had learned to confront real-life problems. Although the data demonstrates that students did not always choose to use their strategies to solve conflicts independently, the data cannot truly reflect that more students were able to feel empowered to respond in situations that might lead to conflict. Before the intervention, many students felt that conflict situations were beyond their control. They felt powerless to deal with the social situations they encountered in positive ways. The intervention gave students the language, the tools and the practice to begin to see conflict resolution as within their control. They began to see that they had a choice in how to respond to conflict scenarios.

Even though the data does not reflect a statistically significant decrease in non-independently solved conflicts, the following observed classroom changes support the use of Skillstreaming: the avoidance of conflicts, the classroom culture and language established for resolving conflicts peacefully, the space for discussing the complexities of social skills and conflicts and the rise in students' confidence in addressing conflict situations. However, from a practical standpoint, additional research that would objectively quantify these researcher observed changes would be necessary before a strong recommendation could be given to institute Skillstreaming across elementary school classrooms.

Theoretical Consequences

On a theoretical level, the results of this study do not provide compelling evidence in support of the theory that social skills training programs such as Skillstreaming improve student ability to handle conflict. While the data was trending in the right direction, there was not enough of a difference between the pre and post data to prove that the difference was a result of the intervention, and not the result of chance.

Threats to Validity

The most obvious threats to the validity of the study are the limitations in how the study was conducted. First, the sample size of the study was extremely small, with only fifteen students in one class. This limited the statistical power which made the study less sensitive to the potential effects of the intervention. In addition, the nature of interpersonal conflicts in a classroom is that some children are disproportionately more likely to get into conflict. Since the sample size was so small, it was not possible to control for the impact of children who tended to be outliers in the frequency of their conflicts.

An additional concern is that there was no control group. Consequently, there were no comparison group controls for internal validity risk factors such as history and maturation.

Another threat to internal validity was the short time frame of the intervention and data collection which may have limited the ability of the study to capture the effectiveness of the intervention. The study was conducted over a short period of time, with the pre-observation data being collected over a period of 14 days as well as the post-observation data. The intervention itself was only conducted over a period of five weeks, with only five Skillstreaming lessons being taught. It is impossible to know, therefore, what the outcomes of the study may have been with longer periods of time for establishing a baseline for students' non-independently resolved conflicts or how students' behavior may have been affected by a longer intervention period.

Additionally, there were several interfering variables that affected the internal validity of the study throughout the weeks of data collection as well as the weeks of intervention. First, the weeks of data collection prior to the intervention were often interrupted. There were several snow days and half days that made it difficult to collect data consistently and consecutively. These disruptions to routine may have also affected students' behavior. The weeks of post data collection contained several fieldtrips, but the data was able to be collected on consecutive days. It is difficult to compare how the various disruptions to normal classroom routine may have affected student behavior and the data.

Another variable that affected the internal validity of the data was that there was a student teacher in the classroom during the weeks of pre-intervention data collection. Over the period of the three weeks, the student teacher was gradually taking over teaching more subjects. Classroom management techniques varied between the student teacher and the researcher. By the time of the post-intervention data collection, her internship was completed and the instructor

had resumed teaching all subjects. Consequently, the pre-intervention data and the post-intervention data were collected during periods of different teachers and classroom management styles.

There were a few instances of absentee students or students who were not always in the classroom that may have also impacted the data collection. Students were rarely absent from this classroom, however, a student being absent may have affected the number of non-independently solved conflicts. Furthermore, there were several times when particular students were not present in the classroom which may also have impacted the data collection.

An additional threat to internal validity was statistical regression. The children in the class had a high frequency of non-independently resolved conflicts prior to the intervention. As will be discussed below, the class had even been targeted for an additional intervention for social skills and conflict resolution training. When individuals present with high levels or frequencies of behavior, there is a tendency for regression towards more average levels or frequencies of behavior.

A threat to the external validity was that the study was conducted in just one fourth grade classroom in an urban area. Consequently the results do not generalize to children of a wide variety of demographic backgrounds or to children of different age ranges such as early elementary, middle, or high school students.

Finally, one of the most significant interfering variables in this study was that there was another intervention going on simultaneous to the study. This created a multiple-treatment interference threat to external validity. This class had been identified by the school as a class with a significant lack of social skills and conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, an after-school program addressing these issues was made available to the class. This program, called

Discovery Club, began shortly before this study and continued throughout the study. In order to have consistency between what was being taught in Discovery Club and what was being taught through Skills Streaming, the instructor met with the Discovery Club teacher in order to learn the methods she was teaching for social skills and conflict resolution. The after-school teacher explained that the purpose of the program was to teach students self-awareness. As students learned how to be aware of their own feelings, they could better express those feelings to others as well as better be able to understand another's perspective. She taught the students many self-calming techniques. She also used group activities where students would have to use the social skills they were discussing and then reflect on how their use had affected the group's ability to accomplish their goals. The overarching goal of the program was to help students develop an internal locus of control, where students were able to be aware of their own emotions and take control of situations, realizing that they could resolve situations themselves and not need to depend on an outside mediator. There were many ways that what students learned in Discovery Club overlapped with the Skillstreaming lessons. For example, the Skillstreaming lessons asked students to use self-calming exercises before dealing with many scenarios. Students who took part in Discovery Club would describe the techniques they had learned to the whole class during the Skillstreaming morning circle lessons. About half of the students in the class took part in the after-school Discovery Club intervention. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether any decrease in those students' non-independently solved conflicts was due to the Discovery Club intervention, the Skillstreaming intervention, or from an interaction in which strategies from the two interventions overlapped and reinforced each other in different contexts.

Connections to Previous Studies

There are many studies that have been conducted on improving students' social skills and conflict resolution skills in the classroom since the problem of students' lack of social skills has been widely acknowledged as a significant problem affecting schools (Algozzine et al., 2012). These studies have used many different methods for teaching students' better social skills such as school-wide behavior plans, classroom instruction and small group pull-outs for students who are most at-risk. The Skillstreaming curriculum can be used in any of these methods and many studies have used either the Skillstreaming curriculum, or curriculums similar to Skillstreaming using all of these methods.

Just two examples of such similar studies are the ALPS program study which was researched by Cuccaro and Geitner (2012) and the "You Can do it Program" which was researched by Ashdown and Bernard (2012). The ALPS program, or Alternative to Lunch Program, was a program that used the Skillstreaming curriculum with a small group intervention to help students with behavioral issues at lunch or gym. This study found that students who participated in the study were able to improve in targeted areas of behavior (Cuccaro & Geitner, 2012). The "You Can Do It Program" used approaches similar to the Skillstreaming curriculum in order to teach students to deal with social issues. The "You Can Do It Program", took place with a whole class intervention, and was designed to be taught each day as part of the class routine. In this study it was found that the intervention group had much greater measures of positive emotions and behaviors and lower negative emotions and behaviors than the control group that did not receive the YCDI social skills intervention (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). These are just a few of many examples that demonstrate the effectiveness of using the Skillstreaming curriculum, or similar programs, to improve students' social skills.

In considering why the current study did not find significant results indicating the effectiveness of Skillstreaming in contrast to the aforementioned studies, an important factor appears to be the duration of the intervention. According to literature review articles, research has shown, that the studies that are the most effective are those that take place over longer periods of time, with skills being reinforced in many settings (Social skills training, 2004) (Augustyniak et al., 2009). As discussed previously, the intervention in the current study lasted only 5 weeks and involved only 5 Skillstreaming lessons. Although not all studies on social skills interventions similar to this study show improvement in students ability to use social skills over a long period of time, many do show significant improvements in students' behavior, social skills and academics. A factor in the lack of significant findings in the current study may also be the choice of outcome measure. It was not sensitive to all the potential effects of Skillstreaming such as those on positive and negative emotions and positive behaviors that were demonstrated by Ashdown and Bernard (2012). In addition, it was not sensitive to all types of negative behavior.

Implications for Future Research

This study provides many implications for future research. First, it would be beneficial to conduct a study over a longer period of time in order to establish a more valid measure of students' non-independently solved conflicts both before and after the intervention period. Also, it would be beneficial to see whether or not, with a longer intervention period the trend in the data towards a decrease in non-independently solved conflicts might become a statistically significant trend. Furthermore, it would be interesting to gather additional data measuring different aspects of students' behavior rather than focusing on non-independently resolved conflicts. For instance, data could be collected on how many times students solve conflicts

independently prior to and after the intervention. There could also be student self-assessments of how they feel about their self-confidence in addressing situations that might lead to conflict prior to and after the intervention.

It would also be beneficial to conduct the study with a larger number of participants in order to ascertain whether or not the intervention would become more effective if it was able to be conducted across many multiple reinforcing settings. If the whole school used aspects of the Skillstreaming curriculum for morning circle, the language and skills of the curriculum would become part of the school culture, not just the classroom culture. Also, there could be parent meetings and more explicit communication with parents about the intervention in order to partner with parents in reinforcing to be able to help reinforce the skills being taught.

Summary/ Conclusion

The results of this study show that there was not a statistically significant difference in the amount of students' non-independently solved conflicts after the Skillstreaming intervention. However, there were many positive results of the intervention that were observed by the instructor. After the intervention, the instructor observed students using the language and steps they had learned through the intervention in order to solve conflicts independently. The instructor also observed an increase in students' self-confidence in their ability to deal with situations that might potentially lead to conflict, there was also a shift in classroom culture towards being more aware of conflicts and of the role each student has in controlling the outcome of various social situations. Based on these observations in conjunction with the body of literature supporting the use of social skills training, it is clear that further research should be conducted incorporating the Skillstreaming curriculum into morning circle time, but for a longer time-period and on a more school-wide basis. By increasing the length and scope of the

intervention, students would hopefully attain higher mastery of the social skills across many settings as well as gain a greater self-confidence in their ability to address social situations which would help them behaviorally, academically and socially.

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