The Impact of Social Narratives on

Prekindergarten Students' Social Skills

by

Nicole M. Ickes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether providing supplemental opportunities to learn about and practice social skills using social narratives impacts pre-kindergartners' use of two targeted social skills. The participants of this study were enrolled in prekindergarten at an urban school in The Bronx, New York for the 2013-2014 school year. All participants received regular social skills instruction while the treatment group also received a social narrative intervention specifically targeting sharing and appropriate use of personal space. The treatment group participated in 20 minute lessons using social narratives for two weeks. Each week focused on one of the two specific targeted behaviors. It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the frequency with which the targeted social skills were demonstrated in lunch and free centers by students who participated in the social narratives intervention compared to that of similar peers who did not participate in the intervention. Based on the results, the null hypothesis was retained for both the lunch and free centers settings in which observations were made. Research in this area should continue to determine the best methods for social skills instruction.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Social skill are complex; however, they are of critical importance as they "enable children to experience positive consequences during social interaction" (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998, p. 132). Elksnin and Elksnin noted there are different types of social skills: interpersonal, peer-related, teacher-pleasing, self-related, assertiveness, and communication. Teachers need to be aware of the types and importance of social skills as well as strategies that they can use within their classrooms which may improve the social interactions of every child. Many classroom strategies and interventions have been developed and appear to be beneficial for students who exhibit difficulty behaving appropriately in social situations. Some show promise with particular types of students or issues, although others, such as, multiple-step instructional models and social narratives, may encourage pro-social behaviors in all students (Crozier & Tincani, 2007; Fox & Lentini, 2006).

This researcher became interested in learning more about the effects of social skills interventions on peer relationships in her role as an early childhood educator. She observed students in her classroom who struggled with peer relationships due to poor social skills. These observations led her to become interested in learning more about how to best teach social skills in order to improve students' peer relationships.

Statement of the Problem

The study was designed to determine whether providing supplemental opportunities to learn about and practice social skills using social narratives impacts pre-kindergartners' use of targeted social skills. The skills targeted were sharing and appropriate use of personal space.

Statement of Research Hypothesis

There will be no difference in the frequency with which the targeted social skills (sharing and appropriate use of personal space) are demonstrated by students who participate in a social narratives intervention compared to similar peers who do not participate in the intervention.

Operational Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the study and are defined as follows for purposes of the study.

Social skills are skills which enable one to know what to say, to make good choices, and to know how to behave in a variety of social situations.

Social narratives are simple stories that describe social events for the purpose of teaching specific social behaviors to a group of students (Harjusola-Webb, Hubbell, & Bedsem, 2012). For example, a social story about getting in line might include the instructions given by the teacher, what the students do when forming a line and why they do it, and how the target individuals should behave when getting in a line with peers.

Peer relationships are relationships between and among peers; their quality is influenced by how well a child is liked and/or accepted, which is influenced in part by the child's social skills.

Target skills refer to the two social skills addressed within this study: appropriate use of personal space and sharing.

> *Personal Space* is the space maintained around a person's body which helps him or her feel comfortable being near other people and helps others feel comfortable being near him or her.
>
> *Sharing* refers to the act of willingly giving something to, accepting something from another person to use, or using something simultaneously with others.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review examines how social skills interventions are known to affect students' peer relations. In the first section, social skills and social competence are defined and their importance in schools is discussed. The second section describes influences on and assessment of typical peer relations in young children. The third section discusses the relationship between social skills and peer relations. The last section describes interventions used to enhance social skills.

Social Competence and Social Skills

Research such as that reported by Elksnin and Elksnin (1998) indicates that social skills are critical to successful functioning in life, from early childhood to adulthood. They state, "Social skill deficiency in early childhood [is] the single best predictor of significant problems in adulthood" (p. 132). Social skills enable one to know what to say, to make good choices, and to know how to behave in a variety of situations. The extent to which one possesses effective social skills can influence one's academic performance, behavior, as well as, family and social relationships (NASP, 2002). Due to the complexity of defining and studying social skills, researchers and educators alike have categorized social skills into different types: peer-related (conflict resolution), teacher-pleasing (survival), self-related behaviors, assertiveness skills, and communication skills.

Social competence covers a broader domain than social skills. "The term 'social skills' is basically based on behavior and refers to particular behavior types, which a person should perfect to participate successfully in a variety of social settings. [A] person's awareness of how his behavior affects his surroundings and his sensitivity to the needs of others are the

differentiating points of social competence" (Vahedi, Farrokhi, & Farajian, 2012, p.126).

Another difference between social skills and social competence is that "social skills are behaviors that have to be acquired and performed, whereas social competence represents the environments, values and judgments of these presented behaviors" (Lillvist, Sandberg, Bjorck-Akesson, & Granlund, 2009, p. 54). Generally defined, social competence is "the ability of [those who engage in satisfying interactions and activities with adults and peers] to successfully and appropriately select and carry out their interpersonal goals" (Han & Thomas, 2010, p.470). Social competence takes different forms during various milestones and stages of life. For instance, a two-year-old and a seven-year-old would not be expected to exhibit the same social behaviors or social skills in a given situation. According to Lillvist et al., "Social competence is a developmentally based phenomena rather than a set of specific [behaviors] and involves the evolving understanding of self and others and the ability to form a meaningful relationship with peers" (p. 54).

Most schools initially relied on parents and families to teach children crucial social skills such as interpersonal and conflict resolution skills and schools considered it their responsibility to teach academic skills instruction (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998; NASP, 2002). However, a variety of factors ostensibly related to deficient social skills have caused educators to reconsider the importance of social skills instruction in today's schools. Some of these factors include poor school performance and social abilities and unemployment, as well as violence in schools and communities. Unfortunately, the concerns noted by Elksnin and Elksnin appear even more prevalent today than when this study was published.

Peer Relations in Young Children

Individuals of all ages form relationships with peers. Initial forms of peer sociability emerge during infancy. According to Ladd and Sechler (2012) three types of peer relations emerge during the early childhood years: friendship, peer group acceptance/rejection, and aggressor-victim relations (i.e., peer victimization). According to Ladd and Sechler, "Peer group acceptance/rejection is defined as the degree to which an individual child is liked or disliked by the members of his or her social group" (p. 1). Children participate in different types of peer relations simultaneously. This participation offers children varied resources that contribute to their social development.

Peer relationships are complex and are influenced by a variety of persons. Such influences determine how these relationships function in society. According to Ladd and Sechler (2012), many types of persons such as parents and teachers, the family environment, neighborhoods and community settings, and/or child care and preschool environments, socialize young children's peer relations and social competence in a variety of settings. Ladd and Sechler mentioned that there has been much research on relationships including how they are formed, the experiences within these relationships, along with the possible effects that peer relationships have had on children's development.

Before children can become accepted in their peer group, they first must develop prerequisite social skills or competencies. Peer interactions during play dates, childcare settings, neighborhoods, and schools help to develop these skills. However, when these peer interactions do not happen in a child's life, the child's social competencies are not met. When children's social competencies are not met, children often have difficulty being accepted by their peers, due to their lack of social skills.   Ladd and Sechler (2012) observe that as children venture into

different peer interactions, all are confronted with the social task of joining and becoming an accepted member of a peer group.

The Relationship between Social Skills and Peer Relations

Studies such as those reported by Phillipsen, Bridges, McLemore, and Saponaro (1999) have indicated that the acquisition of social skills plays an important role when determining the quality of a child's peer relationships. They observe that "research has discovered developmental differences in the associations between social behaviors and peer acceptance" (p. 68). Children's social behaviors affect their relationships with peers. Students vary in their acquisition of social skills, which in turn affects their peer relations.

According to Lawson (2003), some children are well endowed with social skills. Lawson indicates that they are very well liked by their peers. However, she notes that some students are ignored or unnoticed by their peers although they appear to be socially adept. She observes that the children who have most social difficulty at school are those who are rejected by their peers. This rejection can occur for many reasons, with aggression being one of these factors.

For young children, the development of positive peer relationships is predictive of better adaptation to school and is a marker of healthy adjustment in school and in life (Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost, & Wainwright, 2005). According to Logue (2007), early childhood settings with play-oriented curricula in which children are socialized into the culture of schooling allow children to learn social skills necessary to participate in group settings. "A significant percentage of preschool children lack the skills required to be socially successful [prior to schooling]. When compared to their socially competent peers [prior to schooling], these young children are at risk for peer neglect, rejection, and bullying" (Green, Drysdale, Boelema, Smart, Van Der Meer, Achmadi, & Lancioni, 2013, p. 60), with experience in a school culture which allows children to

learn necessary social skills, children who are as risk for peer neglect, rejection, and bullying, can gain the skills required to be socially successful.

Researchers often use sociometric techniques such as peer nominations or ratings to measure peer acceptance. However, this method only "provides one perspective of children's peer acceptance. How children themselves feel about their peer acceptance is important because these perceptions may actually guide their behavior with peers" (Phillipsen, et al., 1999, p.29). Sociometric techniques can provide data that indicate how individuals perceive their peer acceptance, and could be a determinant of their social behaviors with peers.

Interventions to Enhance Social Skills

While there are many factors working against developing effective social skills, there also are many strategies that can help children to acquire such skills. According to a fact sheet by the National Association of School Psychologists (2002), "effective social skills curricula are comprised of two essential elements: a teaching process that uses a behavioral/social learning approach and a universal language or set of steps that facilitates the learning of new behavior" (p.3). Interventions can be implemented in several different settings, including the school level, the classroom level, within small groups and specific settings, or at an individual level. However, at all levels, the emphasis is placed on teaching the desired skill, not punishing negative behaviors (NASP, 2002).

When teaching students social skills, several steps appear to be important. Educators first identify which students need instruction, then select skills to be taught, and finally, teach the social skills (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). Elksnin and Elksnin determined a six-step instructional model which they believe enables students to acquire socials skills in an efficient and effective manner. The steps in their model are to define the skill, describe the skill, provide a rationale,

describe situations in which to use the skill, teach the skill using role-play situations, and help students identify social rules.

An approach to teaching social skills that is based on research conducted by Fox and Lentini (2006), follows a three-stage format. Stage one is skill acquisition, or the show-and-tell stage. Stage two involves fluency, or the practice makes perfect stage. Stage three, the skill maintenance and generalization stage, implies "you got it!" Within the show-and-tell stage, an educator explains the new skill, demonstrates it, gives positive feedback, and provides opportunities for practice. "When a child learns a new skill, he needs to practice to build fluency in the skill" (p. 41). "The final stage of learning [social skills] is maintaining and generalizing the skill - learning it to the point that it becomes a part of the child's social skill repertoire and he uses it in familiar and in new situations" (p. 41). When teaching social skills to children, it is imperative that children reach this last stage so that they can apply the skills independently to real life situations.

Another intervention to teach social skills involves the use of social narratives. "A social narrative is a simple story that describes a social event for the purpose of teaching specific social behaviors" (Harjusola-Webb et al., 2012, p. 31). One type of social narrative is a social story. A social story "is a short story written for an individual that describes a specific activity and the behavior expectations associated with that activity" (Crozier & Tincani, 2006, p. 1803). According to research such as that reported by Harjusola-Webb et al. (2012) and Crozier and Tincani (2006), the difference between a social story and a social narrative is that a social story is individualized and a social narrative is not. Social narratives typically use visual representations of children and events. More (2008) observes that with the recent integrated use of technology within the classroom, social narratives now are able to be digitized hence, "social narrative

interventions are easy to design and implement in a classroom setting" (Harjusola-Webb et al., 2012, p. 31).

Summary

Students' antisocial behavior related to how to handle anger or disappointment, identify how they are feeling, and/or develop relationships with peers, provides an opportunity for teaching in the classroom, through teachable moments or thoughtful instruction (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). Teachers can lead children who may be at risk for challenging behavior, to learn new and appropriate social and emotional skills, by using modeling, role-playing, and/or child-centered developmentally appropriate activities (Fox & Lentini, 2006). It is important for educators to design an approach to teaching social skills that allows children to retain and use these newly learned skills easily and in numerous situations. Educators will increase children's odds for current and future success by supporting pro-social behavior through direct teaching of social skills and integration of social skills instruction within play-based activities and center time. A preschool program which provides an environment that allows children to acquire and use their social skills is a necessity for children who lack social skills.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether using social narratives for prekindergarten students to learn about sharing and personal space impacts the frequency with which they demonstrated those targeted social skills in two school settings in which they frequently engage in social interactions.

Design

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was used to conduct this research. Initially, this study compared the frequency with which two similar groups of prekindergarten students demonstrated the two targeted social skills (sharing and personal space) in the two settings (lunch and free centers). The treatment group was provided one week of instruction for each of the two targeted skills, sharing and personal space. Instruction included use of a social narrative about and practice using each targeted skill. The control group participated in regular class lessons but not the supplemental social narrative interventions. In this study, the dependent variable was the students' observed use of sharing and appropriate personal space. The independent variable was the use of social narratives as an intervention to enhance students' social competence.

Participants

Participants included students in two prekindergarten classes at a large urban elementary school in The Bronx, New York. The students ranged in age from four to five years. The students were assigned randomly to the two classes of 18 students each at the beginning of the school year. Before and during the study, each class remained together throughout most of the school day, although students in both classes did interact with one another during exercise time,

breakfast, recess, lunch, a portion of interdisciplinary instruction, and snack time. For

convenience and because they were similar in nature, the researcher's class of 18 students was

assigned to the treatment group and received the social narratives intervention. The other class

was assigned to the control condition and did not receive the social narratives intervention. The

treatment group consisted of 11 male and seven female students. Among the treatment group

members, four students were Caucasian, five were Hispanic, and nine were African-American.

The control group consisted of eight male and 10 female students. Among the Control Group

members, one student was Caucasian, seven were Hispanic, and 10 were African-American.

Instruments

The instruments used for this study were two teacher-created social narratives and a chart

of observational data. The social narratives were developed and used to address two targeted

behaviors that reflected poor social skills which the researcher observed as impeding positive

peer relationships in her class. These included personal space and sharing. The social narratives

week-long lesson plans for each of the interventions are posted for review in Appendix A. A

sample observation chart is in Appendix B.

Observation data were collected by teacher and a co-teacher. Students were observed in

groups of nine before and after the intervention period. Baseline data reflecting the frequency

and quality of use of personal space and sharing were recorded for two days, once for each

student during free centers one day and lunch time the other day. Unbeknownst to the students,

six observations each were made for each of the nine students in each group for 30 second

intervals during the 30 minute observation period, allowing for a 90 second transition period at

the start and end of each observation session. Data from these observations were then tallied for

each student and for the two groups for each setting. Post-intervention data were collected in the

same manner and settings over two days while the students were in the same groups of nine as they were for the pre-intervention observations.

Procedure

Students in two prekindergarten classes of 18 students each were observed in static groups of nine children (who were randomly selected prior to the intervention) for two days for one half hour in each of two setting: free centers and lunch. The frequency with which the students and groups displayed the targeted behaviors over the two days was tallied by the researcher and a co-teacher. The targeted behaviors observed were use of appropriate personal space and sharing.

The frequency of demonstrating each behavior was compiled for each child in both groups in each setting (free centers and lunch) at the end of the two day baseline period and totaled to reflect the number of times the social skill was observed being demonstrated for the group. To collect these data, each child was observed in each site while in a group of nine children. Each child was observed individually to see if he or she was sharing or using personal space appropriately for a total of six 30 second intervals in each setting, and baseline observation data were recorded as either: 1= no problem with target skill when observed, 2= having an issue with it when observed/ no adult intervention (comment), 3= having an issue/adult intervened (comment), 4= not interacting with peers when observed (comment), or 5= no peers around child.

After the two day baseline period, in addition to regular social skills support within the classroom, students in the treatment group received daily intervention using social narratives for a period of one week each for the two targeted skills. The intervention was provided to the entire class at one time. The intervention included daily review of the social narrative and discussion, role-playing, and activities related to the targeted skill for each social narrative. The control

group received the regular social skills support but did not receive the supplemental social narrative interventions.

After the two week intervention was completed with the treatment group, all students in both prekindergarten classes were observed again using the same process as in the baseline phase. The incidence of appropriate use of personal space and sharing were again tallied in free centers and lunch, for each child for six 30 second intervals each in each setting.

Comparisons of pre-test and post-test data were made to determine whether there were significant changes in the frequency with which the treatment and control groups exhibited the targeted social skills over the course of the study. Results of those comparisons follow in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The study was designed to determine whether providing supplemental opportunities to learn about and practice social skills using social narratives would increase pre-kindergartners' use of targeted social skills (sharing and appropriate use of personal space). It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in the frequency with which the targeted social skills (sharing and appropriate use of personal space) were demonstrated by students who participated in a social narratives intervention compared to similar peers who did not participate in the intervention.

Observations were made of each student in both of two groups of nine in the experimental condition (the researchers' class) and two groups of nine in the control condition who were enrolled in another pre-kindergarten class. In order to gather multiple observations of each child, unbeknownst to the students, observations were made for each of the nine students in each group for five 30 second intervals during 30 minute observation periods which took place during free centers and lunch. Observations targeted the two specific social skills taught to the experimental group, sharing and using appropriate personal space. Observations were coded using the following system in order to get detailed data about the students' interactions: 1 (no problem with target skill when observed), 2 (having an issue with it when observed/no adult intervention), 3 (having an issue/ adult intervened), 4 (not interacting with peers when observed), or 5 (no peers around child).

After the intervention, to prepare to compare pre and post-intervention results, students with missing data were deleted from the dataset, resulting in groups of 15 experimental and 12 control participants. The frequency of observations of issues with sharing or use of personal

space which were coded with 2's and 3's were tallied for analyses as they reflected observed

incidents of issues with the targeted social skills. Table 1 contains descriptive statistics of the

frequencies with which the target behaviors were observed and coded as issues (rated a 2 or 3)

both before and after the social skills intervention was administered to the experimental group.

The statistics are presented separately for the experimental group and the control group.

Table 1
Pre and Post-Intervention Descriptive Statistics for Observed Incidents of Difficulty with the
Targeted Social Skills by Group (codes of 2 and 3)

	Group	N	Mean	Range	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Free Centers						
Pre Sharing Issues	Experimental	15	1.000	0-3	1.069	.276
	Control	12	.833	0-2	.835	.241
Post. Sharing Issues	Experimental	15	.600	0-2	.828	.214
	Control	12	.250	0-2	.622	.179
Pre Personal Space Issues	Experimental	15	2.400	0-5	1.454	.375
	Control	12	.667	0-3	.985	.284
Post Personal Space Issues	Experimental	15	.333	0-1	.488	.126
	Control	12	.417	0-2	.669	.193
Lunch						
Pre Sharing Issues	Experimental	15	.067	0-1	.258	.067
	Control	12	.083	0-1	.289	.083
Post Sharing Issues	Experimental	15	.000	0	.000[a]	.000
	Control	12	.000	0	.000[a]	.000
Pre Personal Space Issues	Experimental	15	2.867	0-5	1.684	.435
	Control	12	2.000	0-4	1.279	.370
Post Personal Space Issues	Experimental	15	.800	0-2	.676	.175
	Control	12	1.250	0-2	.866	.250

a. t cannot be computed because the standard deviations of both groups are 0.

These results indicate that the mean number of incidents observed per child in the

experimental group decreased after the social narratives intervention for both sharing and for

personal space during both lunch and free centers. Before the intervention, mean incident

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frequencies ranged from .067 sharing-related incidents at lunch to 2.867 personal space-related

issues at lunch for the experimental group. After the intervention, means for the experimental

group ranged from a low of no incidents of sharing problems at lunch to .8 incidents of personal

space-related issues at lunch.

For the control group, the incidents of issues with both social skills observed also

decreased in each setting. Post intervention means (they did not receive the intervention) ranged

from no incidents of sharing issues at lunch to 1.25 personal space-related issues at lunch.

To determine whether the pre and post intervention mean incidences of social skills

differed significantly across the groups before and after the social narrative intervention, t-tests

for independent samples were run to compare them. The results follow in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of t-tests for Independent Samples Comparing Frequency of Issues with Sharing and

Personal Space in Free Centers and Lunch for Students Who Received and Did Not Receive a

Social Narrative Intervention

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Free Centers							
Pre Sharing Issues	.442	25	.662	.167	.377	-.609	.943
Post Sharing Issues	1.214	25	.236	.350	.288	-.244	.944
Pre Personal Space Issues	3.526	25	.002	1.73	.492	.721	2.746
Post Personal Space Issues	-.375	25	.711	-.083	.222	-.542	.375
Lunch							
Pre Sharing Issues	-.158	25	.876	-.017	.105	-.234	.200
Pre Personal Space Issues	1.473	25	.153	.867	.589	-.345	2.079
Post Personal Space Issues	-1.518	25	.142	-.450	.296	-1.06	.161

As noted under Table 1, no t-test was computed for post lunch sharing as the standard deviation for post lunch sharing incidents was 0. (No sharing incidents were observed for any students in either group at lunch after the intervention.) T-test results assessed the significance of the mean differences between the frequencies with which the two groups exhibited issues with the targeted social skills in Free Centers and Lunch.

Regarding Free Centers, the t-test results indicated that the mean pre-intervention frequency of social skills issues observed did not differ significantly between the experimental and control groups for sharing (t=.442, p<.662) but did for personal space (t=3.526, p<.002). Post-intervention observation data from free centers showed the experimental and control groups did not differ significantly in the number of sharing (t=1.214, p<.236) or personal space issues they had (t=-.375, p<.711), so the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in the frequency with which the targeted social skills (sharing and appropriate use of personal space) were demonstrated by students who participated in a social narratives intervention compared to similar peers who did not participate in the intervention was retained for free centers.

Regarding the lunch observations, the t-test results indicated that the mean pre-intervention frequency of social skills issues observed did not differ significantly between the experimental and control groups for sharing (t=-.158, p<.876) or for personal space (t=1.473 p<.153). Post-intervention observation data from free centers showed the experimental and control groups did not differ significantly in the number of sharing issues (there were none observed for either group) or personal space issues they had (t=-1.518, p<.142), so the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in the frequency with which the targeted social

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skills were demonstrated by students who participated in a social narratives intervention compared to peers who did not participate in the intervention was retained for lunches as well.

Table 2 shows that there were no significant differences in the groups' observed incidents post intervention and that both the treatment and control groups target behaviors improved in all settings. The mean differences show that the only area in which the treatment group was observed to have more frequent issues observed per student after the intervention was sharing during free centers; however, the difference was not large enough to be statistically significant (t=1.214, mean difference= .35, p<.236).

In order to get more detailed description of the observed behaviors, observations denoted whether the events merely occurred, for which they were coded a "2", or whether they were of an intensity such that an adult intervened to address the incident. In those cases, the observations were coded a "3". Below in Table 3 are descriptive statistics for the mean frequency with which students in each group and setting were assigned ratings of "3", meaning they were observed having an issue regarding sharing or use of personal space during which an adult intervened.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Mean Observed Incidences of Targeted Behaviors in Which Adults

Intervened Disaggregated by Setting and Group

Frequency of Adult Interventions During the Five 30 Second Observation Sessions	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Free Centers					
Pre Sharing	Experimental	15	.533	.640	.165
	Control	12	.667	.651	.188
Post Sharing	Experimental	15	.600	.828	.214
	Control	12	.083	.289	.083
Lunch					
Pre Sharing	Experimental	15	.067	.258	.067
	Control	12	.083	.289	.083
Post Sharing	Experimental	15	.000	.000[a]	.000
	Control	12	.000	.000[a]	.000
Free Centers					
Pre Personal Space	Experimental	15	1.067	.961	.248
	Control	12	.250	.452	.130
Post Personal Space	Experimental	15	.267	.458	.118
	Control	12	.250	.452	.131
Lunch					
Pre Personal Space	Experimental	15	2.200	1.320	.341
	Control	12	1.667	.985	.284
Post Personal Space	Experimental	15	.733	.704	.182
	Control	12	1.250	.866	.250

a. t cannot be computed because the standard deviations of both groups are 0.

Table 4 contains the results of t-tests comparing the frequency of the groups' observed incidents of the targeted behaviors in which an adult intervened.

Table 4

Results of t-tests of Independent Samples Comparing the Experimental and Control Groups'

Mean Observed Incidences of Targeted Behaviors in Which Adults Intervened

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Free Centers							
Pre Sharing	-.534	25	.598	-.133	.250	-.648	.381
Post Sharing	2.057	25	.050	.517	.251	-.001	1.034
Lunch							
Pre Sharing	-.158	25	.876	-.017	.105	-.234	.200
Free Centers							
Pre Personal Space	2.706	25	.012	.817	.302	.195	1.438
Post Personal Space	.095	25	.925	.017	.176	-.347	.380
Lunch							
Pre Personal Space	1.163	25	.256	.533	.459	-.411	1.478
Post Personal Space	-1.712	25	.099	-.517	.302	-1.138	.105

The results of the t-tests indicate that after the social narrative intervention, the rate of observed adult interventions were significantly higher for one group or the other in one case. The experimental group was observed having an adult intervene more often for sharing issues in free centers (t=2.057, p<.05). Before the intervention, the frequency of observed social skills issues which (apparently) warranted adult intervention only differed significantly for personal space in free centers, during which the experimental group had a higher incidence of adult intervention (t=2.706, p<.012).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether using social narratives for

prekindergarten students to learn about sharing and personal space impacts the frequency with

which they demonstrated those targeted social skills in two school settings in which they

frequently engage in social interactions. Analysis of the results from the study revealed that

there was no statistically significant difference in the frequency with which the targeted social

skills (sharing and appropriate use of personal space) were demonstrated by students who

participated in a social narratives intervention compared to similar peers who did not participate

in the intervention. Based upon these findings, the null hypotheses were retained for both lunch

and free center settings.

Implications of Social Narratives for Improving Pre-kindergartners' Social Skills

The intervention of using social narratives in the classroom had an impact on the target

behaviors (sharing and use of appropriate personal space). However, these behaviors were noted

to improve for both the experimental and the control group.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations could pose threats to the validity of this study's conclusions and their

applicability to other research, settings or populations. One threat to the validity of this study and

its results may be the varied usefulness of the social narratives across students within the

treatment group. All students do not learn the same way or demonstrate the same degree of

difficulty with all social skills, including the two examined in this study.

The limited duration of the intervention also may have limited the intervention's potency.

This intervention was offered for only two weeks which may not have provided enough time to

enable all students to achieve success. Students responded well to the intervention activities that reinforced the social narratives; however, because students had only one week to work on each skill, they had limited opportunities to practice the targeted skills. At times, the instruction appeared to be rushed and the researchers concluded that the participants would have benefitted from more opportunities to process and practice the targeted skills.

The observation strategies used also may have limited the ability to apply results from the study to other populations or settings. These observation strategies limited the amount of time the researcher could watch each student to thoroughly analyze the antecedents and consequences of their social skills issues and successes. It became apparent that the 30 second observation intervals were too short to observe many details about the targeted behaviors beyond tallying how often they occurred.

Connections to Prior Research

Some of the results of this study and observations made by the researcher were inconsistent with the findings of other research on social skills interventions. According to research conducted by Fox and Lentini (2006), social skills instruction needs to follow a three-stage format: skill acquisition, fluency, and maintenance and generalization. This study's social narrative interventions were formatted in a similar way; students used social narratives to gain skill acquisition and then completed activities to gain fluency. However, the intervention was limited in duration, and the time provided was insufficient for all students to reach the final stage where they internalized the behaviors and exhibited them independently. In accord with More's (2008) observations, the use of digital technology made the creation and presentation of the social narratives quite simple. As noted, "social narrative interventions are easy to design and implement in a classroom setting" (Harjusola-Webb et al., 2012, p. 31). This researcher found it

convenient to implement the intervention within her classroom using an integrated technology approach.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research regarding social skills with prekindergarten students should be conducted to determine appropriate interventions, materials, and time needed for students to demonstrate growth in the targeted social skills. Students would benefit from more intervention time, as well as more opportunities to practice each targeted skill in both instructional and real-life settings.

The researcher would modify the observation strategies when replicating this study, adding more settings such as recess and afternoon free centers, and increasing the time for each observation window. Limiting the observation intervals, to 30 seconds per student, made the pre- and post-test observations difficult to record. The brief intervals also may have compromised the researcher's ability to track the frequency of incidents accurately in cases where one incident may have overlapped multiple observation intervals or involved multiple students.

Future research on improving social skills should include and compare different interventions such as social narratives and read-aloud texts about social skills. Additionally, such research should examine the effectiveness of various interventions with different age groups and in diverse settings to demonstrate more clearly the types of interventions that are most effective and under what circumstances the interventions work best.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether providing supplemental opportunities to learn about and practice social skills using social narratives would increase pre-kindergartners' use of targeted social skills (sharing and appropriate use of personal space) in two relatively unstructured school settings, lunch and free centers. Results indicated that using social

narratives to teach pre-kindergartners appropriate social behavior did not result in significant

gains for the treatment group but appeared to work for some students. Also, the duration for

intervention is important at this age and prekindergarten students appear to need more than a

week to understand and take ownership of the targeted behaviors. Finally, it is important to

differentiate intervention for students, as no one intervention works for every child.

A foundation of social skills is critical for success in school and life. Therefore, it is

important for educators to identify students who need help with particular skills and to use

interventions and groupings which are likely to result in growth by those particular students and

their peers.

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APPENDIX A
Personal Space Social Skills Lesson: What is Personal Space?

Objective: -SWBAT recognize and use their and others' personal space.
PKFCC Standard: *PK.SED.1.f: Identifies the range of feelings he/she experiences, and that his/her feelings may change over time, as the environment changes, and in response to the behavior of others.* *PK.SED.2.c: Demonstrates an ability to independently modify his/her behavior in different situations.* *PK.SED.7.c: Adjusts behavior as appropriate for different settings and /or events.*
Materials: Social Narrative: *What is Personal Space?* Hula Hoops Various picture of people using personal space and those invading personal space
Day 1: Teacher will read *What is Personal Space?* Teacher will explain personal space refers to the distance between two people. Your personal space is the space around your body that helps you feel comfortable near other people and helps them feel comfortable near you. It's like an invisible bubble you carry around with you. Have students stand up and show their personal space edges, by putting their arms out. **Day 2:** Teacher will reread *What is Personal Space?* Discussion will occur following the story. Guiding Questions: 1.) "How close to other people should you stand or sit? Show me." 2.) "How does it feel when someone stands too close to you?" 3.) "Are there times when it is OK to stand very close to other people?" Teacher will introduce how to use "too close" statements. **Day 3:** Teacher will reread *What is Personal Space?* Play Don't Invade My Personal Space-Student will put arms out and spin in a circle. Then teacher will put arms out and spin in a circle. Then teacher will stop spinning, step back and put arms down. Teacher will have child walk towards her until they think they have reached the edge of the teacher's personal space, then they should stop. Then teacher will put arms out and spin slowly. If her arm bumps the child, then she will say "too close" and have the child try again. If the child's arm does not touch the child, then the child gets to be it. Continue with a few rounds. **Day 4:** Teacher will reread *What is Personal Space?* Play "Too Close" Tag. Explain to students that the hula hoop represents our personal space. With a group of children, play tag using hula hoops. The children must hold the hoop around them as they run. The person who is it tries to "bump" his hoop into their hoops. If he bumps anyone, they are it. Also explain that if any player bumps any other player's hoop accidentally during the game, their bubble "pops" and they are out. If anyone touches anyone, by bumping hoops or any other way, the person bumped must say "too close." The student who invaded the other's space must drop their hoop on the ground and sit inside it. **Day 5:** Teacher will reread *What is Personal Space?* Review activities this week and discuss

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with students how they can remember people's personal space. In small groups, students will sort pictures of people using personal space vs. people invading and chart how to respect our friends' personal space in different settings: free centers, lunch, working at tables, in line, recess, morning exercise, dismissal.

Follow-Up/Extension

Students will keep practicing using appropriate personal space; teacher will reinforce not invading others' personal space with reinforcement during the school day focusing on settings where students are having difficulties: free centers, recess, and lunch.

Sharing Social Skills Lesson: How do I Share?

Objective: -SWBAT understand and discuss sharing by role-playing.
PKFCC Standard: *PK.SED.4.c: Shares materials and toys with other children.* *PK.SED.5.b: Uses multiple pro-social strategies to resolve conflicts (e.g., trade, take turns, problem solve).*
Materials: Social Narrative: *Sharing* Newspaper Blocks Pencils Crackers Stickers Narrative writing paper
Day 1: Teacher will read *Sharing*. Teacher will explain that sharing means to have or use something with others. Children sit in a circle. Give a beanbag to one of the children indicating it is his or her turn to speak. Ask the child, "What is something you could share with a friend?" After the child answers the question, he or she passes or tosses the beanbag to another child. Play until every child has a turn. **Day 2:** Teacher will reread *Sharing*. Discussion will occur following the story. Present the following examples to the group, one at a time. After each, ask the children whether it would be easy or hard for them to share in the situation. Encourage them to talk about what they would do, and why. The whole group is reading a book, and there aren't enough copies to go around. There's only one brownie left on the plate. Three people are sitting on a sofa, and the fourth person has nowhere to sit. Ask the group to think of other examples when sharing is necessary. Then class will work together as a team to complete a puzzle, by taking turns and sharing the puzzle. **Day 3:** Teacher will reread *Sharing*. Play "Share Your Wealth." Give student some blocks, and ask them to share the blocks with everyone in the room. Teacher will choose students by pulling a name stick from the jar, and they will share (pass out) the item to the class. If child needs help, teacher will say: "Give one to _____", etc. Continue with other students and other items (pencils, crackers, stickers) You want to convey the message that sharing is a normal way of life and sharing spreads joy. Students will thank their friend when they share with them with a smile and a verbal thank-you. **Day 4:** Teacher will reread *Sharing*. Play "Islands." Create a group of "islands," made up of unfolded newspapers taped to the floor. Children move around and between the islands while music plays. When the music stops, everyone must find an island. Encourage children to share islands. For variety, remove an island, ask children to visit a different island each time, or have everyone wearing a certain color go to the same island.

Day 5: Teacher will reread *Sharing.*   Review activities this week and discuss with students how they can remember to share in the classroom and at school. In small groups, students will write about a time they shared or someone shared with them and how it made them feel.

Follow-Up/Extension

Students will keep practicing sharing; teacher will reinforce sharing with a verbal praise, a sticker, recognition from Mr. G, positive note home, a heart for the H.E.A.R.T chart, a clip up on the behavior chart.

Sample Data Collection Sheet
Control Group Post Personal Space Observations

PERSONAL SPACE

	Student	Free Centers					COMMENTS
		30 minutes total					
	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	
Group		1-6 min	7-12 min	13-18 min	19-24 min	25-30 min	
1							
1							
1							
1							
1							
1							
1							
1							
1							
2							
2							
2							
2							
2							
2							
2							
2							
2							

Key:

1= no problem with target skill when observed

2= having an issue with it when observed/ no adult intervention (comment)

3= having an issue/ adult intervened (comment)

4= not interacting with peers when observed (comment)

5= no peers around child