

Effects of Skillstreaming Skills Lessons on Middle School Conflict

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Skillstreaming lessons on the amount of conflict recorded by middle school students. The measurement tool used was a data collection sheet where the students recorded the number of conflicts encountered for a total of four weeks, two weeks before and after the Skillstreaming lessons. This study was pre-experimental using a one group pretest posttest design. There was no significant difference between the mean number of conflicts per student before Skillstreaming and after Skillstreaming. Although there is significant research in this area, it should be extended understanding that conflict is ever-changing.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Conflict comes in many forms and is continuously changing. Although there is a definition of the term, how conflict is demonstrated is complex. Conflict can be verbal, nonverbal, physical, and relational aggressive. Understanding conflict means identifying the different types, addressing it appropriately within the schools, and implementing constructive intervention methods to healthily manage and prevent it.

Some conflict can be easily identified, but much of it cannot. This makes it that much more difficult to identify and address. Conflict is happening for students as young as elementary school and continues well throughout adulthood. It is important to address the underlying issues early, rather than later. Often times, conflict is happening within the schools and the staff are unaware. Students, when developing, are unable to be in tune with themselves, their feelings, and emotions because they are not taught how to express them constructively. When given the tools to handle emotions within themselves, students are better able to identify, explain, and understand what is happening to them and what they are doing to others.

The students in the current study were faced with conflict that often stems from factors outside of school. The students struggled to make sense of the conflict they encountered and blamed it on everyone else. They had not been given the tools to constructively express what they were experiencing or what to do with it. Although there are societal issues that contribute to conflict, how conflict is prevented and managed must be addressed by society and the individual. The hope of this research was that by understanding the many facets of conflict and addressing it

through Skillstreaming lessons, students (who become the adults of the world) would have the ability to coherently express what is happening inside them, would be able to self-resolve conflict, and would be able to assist other students in resolving conflicts (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997) .

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a classroom wide social skills training program in helping middle school students become better able to manage their own conflicts with peers and by assisting other students in their interpersonal conflicts.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that the mean number of conflict instances per student will be the same after Skillstreaming lessons instruction than before Skillstreaming lesson instruction.

Operational Definitions

The term conflict is described as a negative interpersonal interaction involving disagreement and/or antagonism between students that requires an adult to intervene in order to mediate or resolve the issue. This definition excludes negative interpersonal interactions that students resolve on their own. Conflict can be verbal (arguments, teasing, etc.) or nonverbal (eye rolling, hand gestures, etc.). Using this description of conflict, students identified and documented the amount of times they experienced conflict within a given day. Thus, in this study, in order for an interaction to be considered a conflict, it had to be perceived and recorded as a conflict by a student.

Skillstreaming lessons are defined as four social skills lessons that were selected from Goldstein and McGinnis' (1997) *Skillstreaming the Adolescent; New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills*. In the Skillsreaming lessons, children were taught basic

interpersonal interaction skills that help students manage behaviors appropriately in different settings with different types of people.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Conflict is a complicated concept that comes in many intricate forms and is unique to each situation. Because conflict is so common, it is imperative to understand types of conflict, recognize how conflict is handled in schools by students, staff, and parents, and identify appropriate intervention strategies to help manage conflict.

Definition and Extent

In order to understand the wide variety of conflict, there are four categories to define this concept: Verbal, nonverbal, physical, and relational aggression. Verbal and nonverbal conflict is a situation that requires an outside person to intervene in order to mediate or resolve the issue. Physical aggression according to Bettencourt and Farrell (2013), is described as hitting, slapping, shoving, or pushing, and nonphysical aggression, teasing, picking on or yelling at others, and calling names. Relation aggression is defined as “behaviors that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion” (Yoon, Barton, & Taiarol, 2004, p. 304). Relational aggression is further broken into four categories of definition: direct control, social alienation, rejection, and social exclusion. Direct control is when an ultimatum is given or a choice is forced upon someone, for example “You can’t be my friend unless...” Social alienation can be as simple as giving the silent treatment or ignoring someone. Rejection is more complex in that a peer will persuade others to reject someone, by spreading rumors to make a particular peer look bad. Social exclusion is excluding someone from the group, whether play or social group.

Each category describes conflict but some are easier to identify than others. Physical aggression is easier to recognize than nonverbal conflict and the reaction to physical aggression

can be identified more quickly. If someone is hit, they may hit back or respond just as aggressively. Someone who is being teased may be reluctant to join a partner or ask the teacher to move their seat. This can take longer to uncover. Of the four categories, relational aggression is the hardest to identify because it is the most complex form of conflict.

Reasons for Conflict

Because conflict is so broad and continuing to develop in the sense of defining it, there are continuous studies on what it is, how to understand and manage it, and why students engage in conflict.

Further Defining Conflict

There is a problematic issue with conflict—often, it is confined to simple definitions that are easily identifiable as well as punishable. This makes it better to deal with conflict because it can be targeted and dealt with quickly. According to Yoon et al. (2004), Conflict has been limited to overt actions like physical conflict or verbal conflict that is usually condoned by one person or there is a “ring leader.” Relational aggression deals most with the conflict that often goes unnoticed by adults because it is so relational, meaning of or pertaining to relationships. This type of conflict happens often in groups as opposed to one on one. It can be difficult to believe a child when they report that “everyone” is picking on them. It seems as though the child is exaggerating when in fact, they have been rejected from a social group. This type of conflict is unknown to many and not knowing how to identify it can result in being unable to intervene adequately. Education on relational aggression is imperative to be able to identify and address the situation.

Perceptions of Conflict

Perception is important when analyzing conflict and why students engage in it. Students view conflict, what it is, and how to handle it differently. They will often learn from what they see around them and how conflict is modeled for them. When looking at a child who is often involved in conflict situations, one must also look at what is happening around them that impacts them directly such as their own demographics, family, school or peer support, environment, society, stress levels and academics (Bettencourt & Farrell, 2013; Kalberg, Lane, & Lambert, 2012). These different groups can determine how a student responds or reacts when confronted with conflict. Bettencourt and Farrell (2013) believe children are exposed to certain types of behaviors and mimic those behaviors when in similar situations. At home, a child may be told or shown to retaliate in the same manner if someone hits them. Although the rules differ in the school setting, the child is use to behaving in a certain manner and will do what they are told at home. The child does not want to be seen as someone who cannot fight or inferior to their peers and will fight back to prove themselves.

Children are not only influenced by their family, they are also influenced by their peers, who as they grow older spend more and more time with (Lochman et al., 2010). Adolescence is a pivotal time for children to find friends and feel accepted which can result in partaking in behavior one normally would not. When the child reaches adolescence, the academic demands increase. There is a heavier workload and children are expected to do a certain amount of work independently. Self-determination is vital during this time and the child must learn to balance their personal, social, and academic lives (Kalberg et al., 2012). Behavioral problems and low academics are related and each can lead to the other. Again, students feel the need to impress those around and it can be at the expense of their academics. Adolescences also take into account

how their teachers perceive them. If they feel the expectations are low, they will not find it important to do anything different (Carlisle, 2011). There are many factors at play when children decide how to react to certain situations and their reactions may vary depending on who is watching and what is expected of them (Bettencourt & Farrell, 2013).

Family Impact

As stated above, family perception plays a huge role for the child dealing with conflict. Fosco, Stormshak, Dishion, and Winter (2011) argue that family relationships and parental monitoring highly influences the amount or degree of conflict for students. When a parent or guardian is positively involved in the student's life, they are less likely to partake in risky behavior. Families, more specifically caregivers, are highly influential figures for their children and it can go either way. The children can range on the scale from "angel child" to "destructive" and it can depend on the relationship with their families. The closer the child is to their caregiver, the more likely they are to try to please them by earning good grades and staying out of trouble, avoiding conflict. If the child feels accepted within their family and the caregivers are active in their child's life, they are less interested in participating in problematic behavior. Children need significant relationships where they feel valued. When this is present, they are able to better manage conflict or problematic situations. They also have an adult they can trust and can talk to about these stressful situations.

Interventions

Although conflict is difficult to identify and understand because it is so complex, there are numerous intervention programs for students and staff. As conflict is developed and defined, there are more programs to help adults, parents and school officials, understand what conflict can look like and how to model and teach proper managing skills.

Teacher to Student

Educators are taking steps to incorporate social skills into everyday learning in order for students to become more familiar with how to conduct themselves in certain situations.

According to Leffert, Brady, and Siperstein (2009), knowing how to regulate oneself in certain social situations in the classroom helps students to make academic progress. A three step model was proposed to teachers to help teachers infuse social skills into their everyday curriculum: planned instruction, impromptu responses, and classroom modifications. With planned instruction, teachers will integrate social skills instruction into formal lesson plans for all academic subjects. Impromptu responses encourage students to practice what they have learned in the planned instruction. This can be with or without the assistance of the teacher. Classroom modifications are made to accommodate the setting in which the students learn to help better their learning. This three step plan puts responsibility in the hands of the teachers to expect a certain behavior of their students. These steps help students form healthy relationships with their peers and adults by knowing how to react to conflict.

Having teachers teach students how to conduct themselves in social settings, in and outside of the classroom, helps students to view their teachers in a different light; they are able to form strong relationships with adults. Students must feel their teachers have their best interest and want them to succeed in all aspects of their lives (Carlisle, 2011). According to Carlisle, there is a need for belongingness and this can be achieved through positive peer relationships and positive school climate. Healthy teacher-student relationships impact how students behave and their ability to manage conflict. Carlisle believes that in building positive student-teacher relationships, it will increase students' perceptions of the support they receive and students' have support of the teachers and adults. Teachers and adults are intricate parts of helping students

manage their conflict. Fosco et al. (2012) said that youth who have close relationships to their caregivers are more likely to seek them for advice. In this case, the teachers are the adults who foster the positive relationships by teaching social skills while setting an example of what those social skills can look like in different settings. Regulating emotions is a necessary step in teaching emotion skills. Leffert et al. (2009), designed a Model Schema to follow a structure when handling conflicts: “Notice and interpret social cues, consider goals, decide on a strategy, try it out, and review outcomes” (p. 5). This schema helps teachers make conflict resolution practical and relatable to their students’ everyday lives and situations. This also gives students simple and quick steps to follow in the midst of conflict.

A more specific program to help students exhibit appropriate management skills for conflict is Aggression Replacement Training (ART), a psychoeducational intervention (Glick and P. Goldstein, 1987). According to Glick and P. Goldstein, inappropriate behaviors are a result of poor pro-social skills. This particular intervention training is for those who work directly with those labeled juvenile delinquents or aggressive. This training is made up of three components that take a minimum of ten weeks each: (Structured Learning Training, Anger Control Training, and Moral Education).

In Structured Learning Theory (STL), students are taught prosocial behaviors in small groups consisting of six to eight students. There are four steps for implementing the prosocial behavior:

“Modeling, showing several examples of expert use of behaviors constituting the skills in which they are weak or lacking; role playing, providing several guided opportunities to practice and rehearse these competent interpersonal behaviors; performance feedback, providing praise, reinstruction, and related feedback on how well the youth’s role playing

of the skill matched the expert's model portrayal of it; transfer training, encouraging youth to engage in a series of activities designed to increase the chances that the skills learned in the training setting will endure.” (Glick & Goldstein, 1987, p. 357)

During the SLT, the students are taught a range of social skills such as beginning social skills, advanced social skills, skills for dealing with feelings, skills with dealing with stress, and planning skills.

With SLT, there is Anger Control Training (ACT) which helps students to find ways not to have their anger keep them bounded. In this training, students are expected to bring an example of a hassle defined as an anger arousing experience which is recorded in a “hassle log” binder. The students respond to their hassles by identifying triggers, identifying cues, using reminders, reducers, and self-evaluation.(Glick & Goldstein, 1987, p. 357).

Lastly, there is Moral Education, “a set of procedures designed to raise the young person's level of fairness, justice, and concern with the needs and rights of others” (Glick & Goldstein, 1987, p. 357). Each of these components is taught to the student by the expert in hopes that the student will be able to use and apply these steps to their own lives, becoming an expert themselves. Once an expert, the students can then teach their peers how to manage conflict appropriately.

Student/Student to Student

Although some intervention plans focus on teacher and adult education, most plans focus on the student, for it is the student who makes the decision to change their behavior. Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007) focus on “Transforming Power” which helps students not only change their outlook on negative situations, but also help them turn their conflict into learning opportunities. With “Transforming Power” is Project WIN (Working out Integrated

Negotiations) and is composed of four steps: “Listening skills, anger management, Using “I” to assert ones feels, and generating solutions that meets the needs of all parties involved” (p.2). This method focuses on the thought process of the students and helps them to take control over their situations. Students are charged with finding or creating constructive ways to handle complex situations. With this intervention, there is more than one winner in the outcome. Leffert et al. (2009), said “It should be noted that these skills are not discrete behaviors, such as cooperating or giving eye contact, but rather fundamental building blocks of social problem solving that are important in all social situations” (p. 7). This alternative idea of handling conflict has to be ingrained and believed by the students applying the techniques. Project WIN instills values and students can keep and use these techniques in multiple situations.

Interventions like Project WIN focus not only on the practical aspects of conflict, but also the theoretical aspect. Flanagan, Vanden Hoek, Ranter, and Reich (2012) conducted an intervention plan that helps students to focus on forgiveness as a coping response. This intervention is the most personal and gives students the chance to be empowered through managing conflict in useful ways. Although forgiveness is defined as “a coping response employed in response to interpersonal transgressions”, students are given the task to make the definition personal to them (p. 1216). The process of forgiveness allows students to ponder not only their actions, but the actions of others towards them and gives them the choice of keeping the negative emotions or to replace them with healthier ones. This intervention puts sole responsibility on the student and gives them the choice to change their emotions and thoughts. They become in control of how they react to what they are experiencing.

In addition to working on how they experience conflict, interventions that allow students to help their peers are very beneficial to reducing the amount of conflict encountered. This type

of intervention helps students because they are able to put in practice what they have learned while teaching others. Carlisle (2011) believes that students need opportunity to have meaningful experiences in their learning environments. When students are given the tools to help others, their feeling of worth increases. Fosco et al. (2012) emphasized the necessity for significant adult relationships and these relationships can impact how a student behaves. When students are placed in leadership roles by teaching social skills to their peers, they are not only engaging in healthy relationships with adults, but they are being treated as such. Because adolescents are highly influenced by their peer group, this can establish positive change. In a study conducted by Blake, Wang, Cartledge, and Gardner (2000), emotionally disturbed middle school boys served as social skills trainers for their peers. This study is unique because the student trainers did more than one on one sessions with their peers which is normally what happens when there is student to student teaching. These students were able to take a more professional role by formally teaching their peers in a classroom setting during school. In doing this, the students feel supported in what they are doing, what they are teaching. There are expectations set for them including what they set for themselves and each other. Of all the interventions, this intervention can be the most effective because of the pivotal role of the students and their influence on their peers.

Individual

Students learn a great deal from role models and their peers. In addition to this help, students must understand how to manage conflict on their own. There are steps one can take to resolve and manage their own conflict without needing a third party to intervene. Arnold P. Goldstein compiled many intervention strategies (which he and others created) students can use

to prevent and control their anger or aggression which may lead to conflict. One strategy is dealing with provocation. There are four levels consisting of four steps.

“Preparing for a provocation: 1. I can work out a plan to handle this. 2. If I find myself getting upset, I’ll know what to do. 3. Time for a few deep breaths of relaxation. Feel comfortable, relaxed, and at ease. 4. This could be a testy situation, but I believe in myself.; Confronting the provocation: 1. Stay calm. Just continue to relax. 2. You don’t need to prove yourself. 3. It’s really a shame that this person is acting the way she is. 4. There’s no need to doubt myself. What he says doesn’t matter. Coping with arousal and agitation: 1. My muscles are starting to feel tight. Time to relax and slow things down. 2. Getting upset won’t help. 3. It’s reasonable to get annoyed, but let’s keep a lid on. 4. My anger is a signal of what I need to do. Time to talk to myself.; Self-reward: 1. It worked! 2. I’m doing better at this all the time. 3. I actually got through that without getting angry. 4. That wasn’t as hard as I thought.” (Goldstein, 1983, p. 158)

The levels and steps above are typical responses to provocation. This intervention is based on the person’s ability to talk themselves through what they are experiencing. It is solely based on their own personal ability to exert control.

Summary

Conflict is consistently evolving and changing. It is necessary to look at conflict, what it is and why students engage in it, in all aspects including and outside of the norm. Students have demanding lives and are being pulled in numerous directions. They must feel validated in what they do. Giving students the tools to handle conflict is necessary in their being able to lead healthy lives academically, socially, and emotionally. The tools given must not be limited to the classroom, but also must include the obstacles they encounter outside of the classroom. In

addition to being taught the necessary skills to manage conflict, they also must be given the opportunity to demonstrate what is learned by putting it into practice and enhancing on the meaningful learning experiences. Peer to peer interaction is most important because of the influence they hold over one another. Ultimately, students choose if and how they will engage in conflict but with the help of their peers, positive actions can take place in handling different situations. They will help each other to make the right choice when engaging in conflict.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study was pre-experimental using a one group pretest posttest design. The participants served as their own control. The dependent variable was the number of conflicts experienced per student. These were recorded on data tally sheets over the course of four weeks in two week increments, before and after the Skillstreaming lessons. The participants were responsible for their data tally sheets which they carried throughout the school day, tallying the conflict they encountered. The independent variable was whether or not students had yet received the Skillstreaming lessons. These lessons were taught over the course of four weeks, one lesson each week.

Participants

A convenient sample of students was used from a public, Title I, middle school in a city in the mid-Atlantic region. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2003), “Title I, Part A is a federal program that provides financial assistance to local school systems and schools with high percentages of poor children to support the academic achievement of disadvantaged students.” Students were selected to be in the study because they were participating voluntarily in an after school program. The after school program, which is free and run by school employees, is academic and activity oriented. It is offered five days a week. There are rotating coach classes by content offered based on the needs of the students. There are also sports and clubs (chess, media, etc.). The students’ behaviors had no part in their selection for participation of the study. Each student received a data collection sheet where they recorded their adult intervened conflict, for a total of four weeks. Not all students initially selected participated

for the study in its entirety. One male student transferred to another school. Another male student did not return after the first week of Skillstreaming lessons. The final student participants consisted of four males and three females, all in seventh grade except one who is in the eighth grade. All students are of the African American/Black heritage and in regular education classes.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a data collection sheet that was created for this project. The data collection sheet was filled out by the students, two weeks before the Skillstreaming lessons and two weeks after. When they were engaged in conflict that required an adult to intervene to mediate the situation, they were to place a tally mark next to the day of the occurrence. More than one conflict could be recorded per day. The students were not required to specify (e.g., indicate whether it was verbal or nonverbal) or write anything describing the conflict. The form was turned in and students discussed verbally the types of conflict they encountered and why they were unable to resolve the conflict on their own. There is no reliability or validity in the data for the data collection sheet. There was no one else recording conflict incidents in order to obtain a measure of inter-rater reliability.

Procedures

Previously unfamiliar to the students, this researcher met with students to explain the study. During the first meeting with the student participants, each student was given a parent consent form, to be signed by the parent and student, outlining the expectations of the project. Each student was asked to tally the amount of conflict encountered on a weekly basis, during the school day for a total of four weeks, two weeks before Skillstreaming lessons and two weeks after. There was a data collection sheet for each week, totaling four data collection sheets.

Each student was given two data collection sheets for the first two weeks. The data collection sheet defined conflict as verbal (arguments, teasing, etc.) and nonverbal (eye rolling, hand gestures, etc.). In addition to the descriptions of the conflicts given on the handout, a discussion followed about example scenarios that should be marked as conflict. Directions given to students were as follows: For each day (regular school hours and during the after school program), place a tally mark for each conflict you have with another student at school that requires adult intervention. Adult intervention can be giving a reprimand (for example, telling you to stop), giving a punishment/consequence (for example, giving you detention or sending you to the office), helping you resolve the conflict (for example, helping you work out your differences), or having you separate from each other (for example, having you change groups or seats). Mark each conflict only one time, even if there are multiple consequences (for example, the teacher tells you to stop and separates you). Students were told to record conflict if they came in conflict with another student in the study; both parties would record the conflict on their data collection sheet.

After two weeks of collecting data, students received four Skillstreaming lessons over the course of four weeks (one per week). The Skillstreaming lessons were chosen from Goldstein and McGinnis' (1997) *Skillstreaming the Adolescent; New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills* and were about forty minutes including acting through scenarios. The four lessons taught were as follows in order: Self Control; Avoiding Trouble with Others; Keeping out of Fights; Being a Good Sport. Each lesson in the book was set up with a topic, steps to work through the conflict, and scenarios. The students were taught the lessons by being introduced to the topic in question form, having them think of times they may have encountered this specific type of conflict. After reading and discussing each step aloud, students were

presented with an example scenario (not from the book) to walk through the steps and model how to follow the steps. Students were grouped and given a scenario from the book or created their own. Students then acted out the scenarios for each other. While a group presented their conflict, those in the audience were asked to take note of each step and if the group presenting exhibited that step.

Once the groups finished presenting, the students discussed further different conflicts they encountered and how they would have liked to handle them and hope to handle them in the future.

The mean number of conflicts per student in the two weeks prior to the intervention was compared to the mean number of conflicts per student in the two weeks after the intervention were compared by a non-independent samples t-test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Skillstreaming lessons on the amount of conflict recorded by middle school students.

Within the limitations of a very small sample size, there was no significant difference between the mean number of conflicts per student before Skillstreaming (Mean = 14.60, SD = 16.88) and after Skillstreaming (Mean = 6.80, SD = 8.17) [$t(4) = 1.07$, $p > .05$]. (see Table 1).

The null hypothesis that the mean number of conflict instances per student will be the same after Skillstreaming lessons instruction than before Skillstreaming lesson instruction is accepted.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results for Conflicts per Student Before and After Skillstreaming

Period	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Statistic
Before Skillstreaming	14.60	6.88	1.07 (NS)*
After Skillstreaming	6.80	8.17	

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

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Skillstreaming lessons on the amount of conflict recorded by middle school students.

Implications of Results

The results of this study showed that there was no statistically significant evidence in support of the intervention. The null hypothesis that the mean number of conflict instances per student will be lower after Skillstreaming lessons instruction than before Skillstreaming lesson instruction failed to be rejected. However, the study has a very low number of ($n=6$) and very limited statistical power. Consequently, it was very unlikely that group difference would be found. When considering the differences in mean number of conflicts per student (14.60 to 6.80), it seems likely that the intervention had a positive impact, although it cannot be proven.

Due to the lack of significant findings, no firm recommendations can be made. However, the limited data provides preliminary support for the use of Skillstreaming. Educators could use Skillstreaming as one of their strategies for reducing conflict. In teaching Skillstreaming lessons, students can find constructive ways to navigate conflict, thus reducing conflict. Skillstreaming lessons specifically give the responsibility to take control over their actions and the way they respond to conflict and those involved. The conflict is reduced when the student feels they are able to choose between multiple decisions with desired and undesired consequences. In having options when making the right decision, they are able to see they are not trapped in making the wrong decision.

Theoretical Consequences

As noted, within the context of very limited statistical power, the researcher was unable to provide statistical support for the intervention. However, the trend of the data, in conjunction with researcher observations, provides some support for the theory that social skills training can help children be better able to handle conflict.

Threats to the Validity

The sample size for this research was a major threat to the validity of the study. The sample size was very small and essentially too small for meaningful statistical analyses. With such a small sample size, the power was extremely low. In addition, if there were any children with outlier data, it would disproportionately impact the data. An additional concern is that with the small number of sessions and the small number of participants, if any of the participants were absent and missed a Skillstreaming lesson, it would impact the validity of the results. Because of the small sample size, with very limited variability in demographics (e.g., all middle school age, African American/Black heritage, urban students), the results cannot be generalized to the entire United States population.

The participants were used as their own controls. There was a one group pretest posttest design in which number of conflicts before and after the intervention were compared. This creates significant threats to internal validity. It is difficult to say if the participants changed due to the independent variable or due to causes unrelated to the independent variable like the passage of time (i.e., maturation) or other events that occurred during the study (e.g., history).

In addition, the participants were responsible for collecting their own data during the four data collection weeks and were responsible for tallying the amount of conflict they encountered throughout the week. Although they had been trained in identifying conflict

situations and had a paper with explanations, there is no way to know if they were accurate in recording conflicts. They were also aware of the purpose of the data collection which could consciously or unconsciously influence their recording of conflicts.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Prior to this study, other studies have shown that social skills training leads to students exhibiting acceptable behavior that limits conflict involvement. According to Leffert et al. (2009), the social skills model schema contributed to students modeling appropriate social behaviors. Another study showed that students who participated in Aggression replacement training were able to control their anger and were more frequently turning to solutions that were more socially acceptable than choosing undesired behaviors (Glick & Goldstein, 1987).

In the study by Leffert et al (2009), the social skills model schema was implemented during the school day, for general education students, to help students navigate the conflict they were experiencing in school. Social skill objectives were embedded in everyday lesson plans to make the social skills a regular part of the content learned throughout the day. This resulted in more engagement from the students. The Aggression replacement training was designed for an alternative school environment where students were exhibiting aggression; it was used as an intervention model, in addition to what they students learned in school (Glick & Goldstein 1987). It can be used for an adult who encounters problem behaviors from a student.

Both studies, although differing in the details of the intervention, found that once students were able to take control of the outcome of their conflict, they were less likely to choose an outcome that would result in their being reprimanded. The students wanted to feel as though they had control over how they behaved.

The participants in the current study, like in the studies mentioned above, wanted to be in control of their outcome. In the beginning stages, the participants would report their classmates' conflicts to make sure they reported according. During the Skillstreaming sessions, they were excited to report how they followed the steps of the session and how it worked for them, positive or negative. The participants found power in being able to choose their outcome. Thus, in considering the observations from the current study and the results of previously published research, it appears that a desire to control outcomes is important to students as they learn better ways to handle conflict.

Implications for Future Research

Future research that examines how students respond to conflict would help adults understand why students are engaging in and responding the way they do. One suggestion is to look at positive reinforcements and the different types of positive reinforcements. Students are more likely to respond constructively to conflict when given an incentive. Determining the most effective types of positive reinforcements, more so intrinsically, can help students continue to respond in a socially acceptable manner. Perhaps in a future study two groups can participate in Skills streaming with a focus on conflict resolution. In one group, students can be given systematic, concrete positive reinforcements (such as tokens for the school store or praise statements) when they avoid conflict. In the other group, the children do not receive systematic, concrete positive reinforcers. The frequency of conflicts between the two groups can then be compared.

Another suggestion would be to study the students who demonstrate appropriate social skills on a consistent basis to understand how they are able and why they choose to do so. Understanding the drive behind their social skills can help adults give tools to other students to

do so and students can serve as positive examples for students who struggle with social skills. Perhaps children who consistently demonstrate appropriate social skills would be able to take a peer mentor role in conjunction with Skillstreaming lessons. The amount of conflict could then be compared between children who had a peer mentor and children who did not have a peer mentor.

Lastly, treating social skills and conflict like they are a part of everyday life instead of foreign concepts can help students to better adopt them. Integrating social skills into everyday content curriculum will help students be better apt at navigating conflict and responding to constructively. This can limit the number of distractions during the school day. A future study could examine the effectiveness of Skillstreaming when it is used on a school wide basis with instruction during regular school hours.

Summary

This study does not provide statistically significant evidence to support that Skillstreaming lessons reduce the amount of conflicts students encounter during the school day. However, the sample size was extremely small and trends in the data and researcher observations suggest that Skillstreaming is likely an effective intervention. Future research, including research with larger sample sizes and a more diverse population, will be necessary to provide empirical evidence that the intervention is valuable for reducing conflicts among middle school students. Based on observation, the researcher learned that students prefer to be in control of how they respond to others and if given the tools to respond in a respectful manner, they will. It is important to find effective interventions for reducing conflict resolution so students can be and feel they are in control of their outcome.

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