

The Effect of Daily Social Skills Instruction on Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities

by Tiffany Edwards

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Abstract

This study explores the effects of a daily social skills intervention, Incredible Flexible You (Volume One), on students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD). This study followed a pre-experimental design, beginning with a 20-day baseline period in which the researcher collected and recorded student daily point sheet data. Data continued to be collected during a 20-day intervention period by using daily point sheets. Scores were prorated to adjust for absences. The mean number of points earned during the prorated intervention period (Mean = 1247.13, SD = 30.41) was significantly higher than the mean number of points earned during the prorated baseline period (Mean = 1200.25, SD = 42.16) [$t(7) = 5.30, p = .001$]. Hence, the null hypothesis, that there would be no significant difference in point sheet scores during the implementation of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) daily social skills curriculum as compared to the baseline period among students with emotional behavioral disabilities within a primary level self-contained classroom, was rejected. Further research on the effect of the daily social skills instruction intervention, Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1), for students with EBD in more and diverse categories may be warranted.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In this study, the researcher attempted to determine if the implementation of the daily social skills intervention, Incredible Flexible You (Volume One) (Hendrix, Zweber Palmer, Tarshis and Garcia Winner, 2013), had a positive impact on the social interaction skills and self-management skills of primary age students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD). The idea that precipitated this study is the fact that students who are diagnosed with EBD struggle in school not only behaviorally, but academically as well. Due to the social and behavioral struggles that students with emotional behavioral disorders experience, they fall behind in their academics. Students with EBD are often one to two grade levels behind same age peers (Bak & Asaro-Saddler, 2013). Students are often behind academically because their behaviors impede their ability to learn. They do not have the self-management and organizational strategies that they need in order to be successful. The lack of these skills also causes poor social interaction skills among their peers, as well as their teachers.

Many students with EBD can access the grade level curriculum, but do not have the self-control strategies to regulate their emotions when faced with various academic, social and behavioral challenges throughout the school day. If these same students can be educated on how to appropriately manage their emotions and utilize self-control strategies, they will be more able to access and make meaning of the curriculum. This researcher has frequently seen intelligent, capable students fail to meet academic content standards due to issues related to their interfering behaviors within the classroom. This researcher was interested in the possible benefits of the

Incredible Flexible You daily social skills curriculum on these students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

The Incredible Flexible You Curriculum is a research-based intervention that has been reported to improve primary age social interaction and self-management skills. The Incredible Flexible You is a Social Thinking educational series that combines a social learning framework with music and dramatic play activities for early learners. Research done by Crooke, Hendrix, and Rachman published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders in 2008 demonstrated that by teaching elementary school-aged students Social Thinking Vocabulary, their increased social awareness lead them to shift their social behavior and generalize basic concepts across settings without a direct social skills behavioral intervention (as cited in Hendrix et al., 2013) In a 2003 study, Choi and Kim reported on a cognitive social learning approach utilized with prekindergarten students who had experienced low peer acceptance. Their findings supported what was found to be true: focusing on the cognitive learning (utilizing concrete concepts and terminology) increases social know-how and subsequently peer acceptance because cognitive learning leads to behavioral changes (as cited in Hendrix et al., 2013).

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume One) daily social skills curriculum on social interaction and self-management skills on students within a primary level self-contained classroom with moderate to severe emotional behavioral disabilities.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was that there would be no significant difference in point sheet scores during the implementation of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) daily social skills

curriculum as compared to the baseline period among students with emotional behavioral disabilities within a primary level self-contained classroom.

Operational Definitions

Social Skills Instruction

Social skills instruction can be operationally defined as the Incredible Flexible You intervention of daily lessons that were directly taught by a process that involves an initial discussion of the skill such as why it is a useful skill to have, then the verbal practice of the steps of the skill. This was then followed by structured opportunities to practice the newly-learned skill, which could be through role plays, and then corrective feedback and reinforcement for their correct usage of the skill. Finally, students were given opportunities to practice social skills learned within their usual academic environment.

Daily Point Sheet Scores

Daily point sheets were the data collection tool used to document students' social interaction and self-management skills. Students could earn up to five points per instructional block of time. The five categories for which a student could receive a point if they did not engage in the behavior were as follows: non-compliance, inappropriate language, aggression, elopement/bolting and property destruction. These behaviors represent social interaction and self-management skills. On a typical day, a student could earn up to 65 points. The point sheet score was the sum of all the points (prorated for absences or shortened school days) earned by a student over the course of the study.

Social Interaction

For the purpose of this study, *social interaction* can be defined as the way students communicate with peers as well as staff members. Social interaction skills were documented on students' daily

point sheets. If students were not interacting appropriately with peers, they would not earn all of their points during that instructional block of time. Students would lose points for social interaction skills if they were engaging in behaviors such as aggression and inappropriate language towards others.

Self-Management

For the purpose of this study, *self-management* can be defined as the strategy in which students stop and observe their own behavior for the purpose of regulating their own emotions in order to continue learning and be a part of the group life of the classroom. If students were not successful in managing their behavior appropriately, they would not earn all of their points during that instructional block of time. The behaviors that would not allow students to earn their points in the area of self-management would be non-compliance, elopement/bolting, physical aggression and property destruction.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review explores emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD) within the classroom, and how social skills interventions impact social interaction skills among these students. Section one defines behavioral disabilities along with the characteristics of emotional behavioral disabilities within the classroom. Section two addresses the relationship between interfering behaviors and social interaction skills. Section three provides various social skills interventions used for students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Section four defines numerous informal methods of assessing social/emotional learning.

Defining Behavior Disabilities

There are several disabilities that are diagnosed in students with significant interfering behaviors within the classroom. These disabilities include Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Allely, 2017). ASD is characterized by either deficit in social communication and interaction, and/or restricted repetitive behaviors (RRBs), interests, and activities. Oppositional Defiant Disorder is categorized for students who exhibit symptoms such as an angry/irritable mood, argumentative/defiant behavior, and vindictiveness. Conduct disorder is when a student displays a pattern of disruptive and/or violent behavior. They struggle to follow rules given. They may also exhibit impairment in prosocial emotions such as a lack of guilt or empathy. According to Allely (2017), “the typical mood of Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) is consistently irritable or angry, while individuals with bipolar disorder experience variability in mood such as euthymia, depression, and mania” (p. 156). DMDD is a recently introduced disorder. Lastly, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

(ADHD) is also a behavioral disability to be addressed. ADHD is divided into two symptom domains of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity). Both of these domains require a minimum of six symptoms in one domain for a diagnosis of ADHD. These various disabilities fall under an umbrella term of emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD).

Students who are diagnosed with these disabilities struggle not only socially, but academically within the school setting. According to McDaniel, Bruhn and Troughton (2017), students with EBD have a wide range of diverse needs across various academic and behavioral domains. In regard to behavior, students with EBD may exhibit multiple problematic behaviors that are not the same for each student. Some students may demonstrate externalizing behaviors such as aggression, disruption, and defiance. Others may present internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, depression, and self-injury, or a combination of externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Due to the social and behavioral struggles that students with emotional behavioral disorders experience, they fall behind in their academics. Students with EBD are often one to two grade levels behind same age peers (Bak & Asaro-Saddler, 2013). Students are often behind academically because their behaviors impede their ability to learn. They do not have the self-management and organizational strategies that they need in order to be successful. The lack of these skills also causes low social interaction performance among their peers, as well as their teachers. “Many students with EBD struggle in both academic and social domains. Their internalizing and externalizing behaviors, accompanied by a low tolerance for frustration, affect their ability to maintain engagement in academic activities” (p. 46).

The Relationship Between Interfering Behaviors and Social Interaction Skills

Positive peer relationships are crucial for students social and emotional growth. “Pupils who experience predominantly positive and high-quality peer relationships at school are more

likely to experience a range of positive outcomes. These outcomes include positive mental and physical health, improved academic performance and successful adult relationships.” (McGrath & Noble, 2010, p.79). School is a time where students should feel safe, welcomed and valued. Teachers should be holding students to high expectations and emphasizing the importance of positive peer relationships within the classroom every day. Research suggests a positive relation between teachers’ classroom management practices and student outcomes (Gage, Scott, Hirn & MacSuga-Gage, 2017). McGrath and Noble state that positive peer relationships are also linked to higher levels of school attendance and student engagement in learning. Students who have positive peer relationships are also more likely to graduate from high school. The connection between student engagement, achievement and well-being is evidently proven to correlate with the students’ overall success rate throughout their academic career (2010).

According to McGrath and Noble, research has shown that over the past years students who have been prone to social isolation and rejection experience negative impacts on their educational and social performance, as well as their overall well-being (2010). Students who have EBD struggle to maintain positive peer and staff relationships. They lack the confidence and social skills needed to appropriately hold and maintain a relationship with other peers, or teachers. McGrath and Noble (2010) found the following:

Positive peer relationships at school are linked to many positive and desirable pupil outcomes such as sound levels of academic performance, optimal levels of well-being and adult mental health. On the other hand social isolation or rejection at school are linked to a range of negative pupil outcomes such as lack of engagement, disconnection to school, absenteeism, being bullied, behavioral difficulties, drug usage, depression and anxiety and social difficulties as an adult (p.79).

Students who present significant interfering behaviors have low social interaction skills across all content areas. These students who present difficult behaviors do feel isolated and not welcome within the academic setting, therefore increasing those negative behaviors. According to McGrath and Noble, students who have poor relationships with peers are more likely to use drugs and engage in socially disruptive behaviors, report anxiety/depressive symptoms, and fail to complete secondary school. In their study, parents of 95 children with ADHD reported that 40 percent of their children had difficulty making friends, 53 percent had problems keeping friends, 53 percent were bossy or aggressive with peers, 47 percent had difficulties with resolving conflict with peers, and 33 percent were stressed and unhappy with the state of their peer relationships (2010). As teachers it is important to be aware of how important positive social interaction skills are for the developing children that are in this world today and how to promote those positive social interaction skills for students within the academic setting. Gage et al., (2017) found that a variety of factors influence student success in school, and that teachers have a major impact on the probability of that success.

Interventions

There are several interventions to assist students with EBD to improve their social skills. Students who are unsuccessful in the general education setting can be placed in separate programs in order to meet their least restrictive environment and receive more intensive interventions and supports. Students with EBD may need more accommodations and supports in order to be successful throughout their academic career. Due to these additional accommodations and supports, a separate classroom with a small group ratio may be necessary. Other supports and accommodations for these students can include daily social skills instruction, counseling,

concrete positive reinforcers, individualized behavior chart, individualized goal setting and self-regulation strategies.

McDaniel et al. (2017) defines daily social skills as “a set of competencies that (1) facilitate initiating and maintaining positive social relationships, (2) contribute to peer acceptance and friendship development, (3) result in satisfactory school adjustment, and (4) allow individuals to cope with and adapt to the demands of the social environment” (p. 54). Daily social skills instruction has been proven to positively impact students with EBD social interaction skills. According to McGrath and Noble, several researchers have identified that the most effective approach to teaching social skills is through an explicit teaching approach. Social skills lessons are directly taught by a process that usually involves an initial discussion of the skill such as why it is a useful skill to have, then the verbal practice of the steps of the skill. This is then followed by structured opportunities to practice the newly-learned skill, which can be through role plays, and then corrective feedback and reinforcement for their correct usage of the skill. Finally, students are given opportunities to practice social skills learned within their usual academic environment (2010). Daily social skills instruction is a tool that any teacher can utilize within the classroom to benefit students with EBD. There are various curriculums, and strategies teachers can implement during daily social skills instruction.

Stop and Think is a social skills curriculum that has been proven to help students with EBD improve their day to day social skills. Stop and Think is designed for students in grades Pre-K through 8. The skills in Stop & Think are targeted into four different groups including survival skills (e.g., listening, following directions), interpersonal skills (e.g., sharing), problem-solving skills (e.g., asking for help), and conflict resolution skills (e.g., handling peer pressure). McDaniel et al. (2017) explains that Stop and Think utilizes a 5-step approach to teaching all of

these social skills: (1) Stop and Think!, (2) Are you going to make a good choice or bad choice?, (3) What are your choices or steps?, (4) Just do it!, and (5) Good job!. This process is designed to assist students in becoming more aware of the problem, evaluating their options, applying strategies, and self-reinforcing. Each social skills lesson follows the same exact process of teaching the desired skill, modeling the 5-step approach, role playing, providing performance feedback, and applying the skill. A brief study was conducted among second and third grade students within a self-contained classroom. They were given daily social skills instruction from the Stop and Think curriculum. The results concluded that there was a decrease in negative social behavior among all the students. Although there is very little research on the outcomes of the Stop and Think curriculum, this study contributes to the literature base indicating the social skills intervention Stop and Think may result in improved social behaviors (McDaniel et al., 2017).

There is a self-regulation strategy in a published study that has been found to be beneficial for students with EBD. According to Bak and Asaro-Saddler, the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) gives students the potential to develop a high level of self-efficacy about their ability to reach academic goals (2013). The SRSD is a six-step process that allows students to use self-regulatory behaviors during the writing process to aide in their academic success. Writing is a trigger for many students with EBD. In order to allow students to feel more at ease, using the SRSD allows students to become more independent and successful during writing instruction, therefore lessening negative social behaviors.

Promoting self-determination daily within the classroom is an intervention that can assist students with EBD. Research from several empirical studies have targeted efforts toward promoting self-determination among students with disabilities. Assessment studies show that students with EBD have limited knowledge about self-determination and are reluctant to engage

in activities that would enhance self-determination (Carter, Lane, Crnabori, Bruhn, & Oakes, 2011). Daily goal setting can be an accommodation to help students with their self-determination. The goal can be something small that is easily attainable for the student. Starting with a small goal will boost student confidence once they see that their goal can be met. This can begin to build that self-determination that students with EBD may be lacking. As the student continues to meet their daily goals, then the goals can begin to be scaffolded to become more challenging. Menzies and Lane (2011) stated:

With assistance, students who would not normally set a goal for themselves can learn to structure their learning by deciding what they would like to achieve and then monitor their progress as they move toward their objective. Goal setting can help students become more efficient learners and to feel more motivated (p. 186).

Carter et al. (2011) examined 81 studies that primarily addressed self-determination elements as intervention components (i.e., self-management and self-regulation, problem solving, goal setting and attainment) or outcome measures (i.e., self-efficacy, problem solving). They were able to conclude that those various intervention components benefited students' self-determination. Self-determination is a skill needed for students to be successful throughout their academic career, as well as throughout life.

Superheroes Social Skills program is a relatively new social skills training intervention that incorporates peers in order to promote generalization of target social skills. Even though this intervention is newer, several studies have found the intervention to result in positive outcomes for individuals with ASD and peers with shared deficits (Radley et al., 2017). Five preschool age students participated in a study that used the Superheroes Social Skills intervention. The sessions were 1.5 to 2 hours long and lasted for 5 weeks. The students attended sessions twice a week.

The current study was able to conclude that the Superheroes Social Skills curriculum is useful in promoting accurate skill demonstration in preschool age children and reducing child-related stress of parents and guardians of preschool age participants (Radley et al., 2017).

Students behaviors may be so severe within the general education setting, that they are removed and placed in a behavioral self-contained classroom. According to Veenman, Lunman and Oosterlaan (2018), behavioral programs are used to address negative social behavior. These behaviors include externalizing behaviors such as aggression, elopement, and property destruction. These programs use various techniques to avoid negative behavior such as clear concise rules, and consistency. These programs also use consequent techniques to reinforce appropriate behavior and reduce inappropriate behavior such as various reward systems and time-out systems. “Behavioral classroom programs have small beneficial effects on disruptive behavior and on-task behavior. Results advocate universal programs for entire classrooms to prevent and reduce disruptive classroom behavior” (p. 1). These programs can have positive effects on students’ social behaviors. Similarly, according to Ledford and Wehby, systematic grouping of students in small groups benefit students’ social skills in a positive way. During a study, one student with ASD was grouped with three to four other students who were at risk for academic difficulties. There were five different groups total. Results of this concluded that this grouping benefited both groups of students. All students learned three sets of target behaviors (2015). Small group settings are also beneficial to students with EBD, whether a self-contained classroom or within the general education classroom. There is a school wide three-tiered social skills intervention that is found to be beneficial on the impact of student social skills. “A comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered model of prevention offers benefits for supporting students academically, behaviorally, and socially” (Carter et al., 2012, p. 548). Social Skills

Training and Aggression Reduction Techniques plus Time-Away (STARTPlus) includes components of social skills training at the universal primary level, small group instruction at the targeted level, and individualized, intensive intervention in problem-solving and conflict resolution at the tertiary level (Albrecht, Mathur, Jones & Alazemi, 2015). When students come to school, they should feel safe, welcomed and valued. A school wide social skills intervention can help students with EBD achieve those feelings of comfort. “SST was integrated in the three-tiered framework and contributed to prosocial behavior development, reduction in negative behavior, and increase of academic achievement for many students in participating schools” (p. 582). When students are engaged in a positive school climate, they are more likely to become successful and less likely to engage in negative social behaviors.

The Incredible Flexible You Curriculum is a research-based intervention that has noted to improve primary age social interaction and self-management skills. The Incredible Flexible You is a Social Thinking educational series that combines a social learning framework with music and dramatic play activities for early learners. The teaching across the series is sequential and concepts build upon each other, therefore it is important that Volume 1 be used before moving on to Volume 2. The curricula consists of detailed lesson plans, in-classroom structured activities, educational plan goals, and learn-at-home family letters. Volume 1 introduces the following Social Thinking concepts and vocabulary: Thinking Thoughts and Feeling Feelings, The Group Plan, Thinking With Your Eyes, Body in the Group, and Whole Body Listening. The concepts in Volume 2 build off those in Volume 1: Hidden Rules and Expected and Unexpected Behaviors, Smart Guess, Flexible and Stuck Thinking, Size of the Problem, and Sharing an Imagination. Research done by Crooke, Hendrix, and Rachman published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders in 2008 demonstrated that by teaching elementary school-

aged students Social Thinking Vocabulary, their increased social awareness lead them to shift their social behavior and generalize basic concepts across settings without a direct social skills behavioral intervention (as cited in Hendrix et al., 2013). In a 2003 study, Choi and Kim reported on a cognitive social learning approach utilized with prekindergarten students who had experienced low peer acceptance. Their findings supported what was found to be true: focusing on the cognitive learning (utilizing concrete concepts and terminology) increases social know-how and subsequently peer acceptance because cognitive learning leads to behavioral changes (as cited in Hendrix et al., 2013).

Informal Methods of Assessing Social/Emotional Learning

There are various tools and assessments that can be used to assess students social and emotional learning. This can range from teacher made checklists, surveys, classroom observations, and rating scales. Formal rating scales that can be used include Behavior Assessment for Children (BASC), Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist, Social Responsiveness Scale, School Social Behavioral Scale, Devereux Student Strengths Assessment, Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scale, and the Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scale (SSIS). These tools and assessments are important in order to address students social and emotional learning. Teaching social skills is important on the impact of students social and emotional learning, but there has to be ways to assess and monitor students' social and emotional growth.

Social skills instruction should be reflective of students' individual needs. Walker and Barry stated that after assessments are complete, teachers select a social skills goal or target based on the students' instructional needs. If there are multiple skill instruction needs, teachers should look at the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), to prioritize skills. Beyond the IEP, skills

that compromise safety such as aggression, or elopement should be targeted next. This is then followed by skills that disrupt classroom instruction for the individual student or the class as a whole such as interrupting others or calling out. Students may need skill instruction with a skill content area such as starting a conversation or more precise instruction in specific skills within the content area such as organizing materials (Walker & Barry, 2018). After the plan is set, the teacher can begin daily social skills instruction using the intervention of their choice. After direct instruction is taught, the next step is to generalize those skills into settings and situations throughout the school day. Generalization opportunities may arise at various situations throughout the school day. The next step would be to allow the student to self-monitor the social skills learned. This could be through a teacher made checklist or chart. Finally, social skills should be assessed and reassessed throughout the academic school year (Walker & Barry, 2018).

Summary

In conclusion, positive peer relationships are important for students to reach their fullest potential. Similarly, to students who have academic difficulties, early intervention for students with EBD is crucial as students are increasingly resistant to treatment the later it is delayed (Menzies & Lane, 2011). Students need to be taught tools and strategies that they can use to cope with their EBD in order to become more independent learners; the quicker they learn these tools and strategies through daily social skills, the quicker they can begin to regulate. “An emerging emphasis within educational programming for students with disabilities is a focus on equipping students with the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that foster self-determined behavior” (p.100). Students with EBD benefit from various social skills interventions across all academic content areas in order to become independent, successful learners.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of the daily social skills intervention, Incredible Flexible You (Volume One), and determine whether it had any impact on the social interaction skills and self-management skills of primary age students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD).

Design

The study had a pre-experimental design in which students served as their own controls in a variant of the one-group pre-test post-test. Social/emotional/behavioral scores, using daily point sheet data were generated during a baseline and a treatment condition. The independent variable was whether or not the intervention Incredible Flexible You (Volume One) was taking place. The dependent variable was student point sheet data in the areas of social interaction and self-management skills.

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of eight primary aged students within a self-contained classroom for moderate to severe emotional behavioral disabilities within a suburban elementary school in Maryland where 23.7 percent of students at this school receive Free and Reduced Meal Services (FARMS) and 24.8 percent receive special education services. Convenience sampling was used in this study.

The classroom in which the research was conducted was one in which all students had emotional or behavioral difficulties requiring special education services within a self-contained setting. 4 of the 8 students enrolled in the course read one or more levels below grade. One

student had a diagnosis of ADHD, one student had a diagnosis of Autism, and six students had the special education classification of emotional disability. All of these children fell under the umbrella of EBD. Of the eight students, three were Caucasian and five were African American. There were seven boys and one girl. These students consisted of two first graders, five second graders and one third grader. Within this self-contained classroom there is one lead teacher, a social worker, and two paraeducators. These staff members always monitor student behaviors and record both positive and negative behaviors on students' individual point sheets.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the daily point sheet. The daily point sheet was a behavior chart that documents where students earn points that tie to self-management and social interaction skills. Students could earn various positive behavioral rewards and incentives for points earned on their point sheet. The instrument was designed by this researcher and there is no reliability or validity data.

Each student had a daily point sheet where staff records points earned as well as points lost. All staff whom interact with the child would assign points to the student. This could include the classroom teachers, social worker, psychologist, specials teachers, speech language therapist and any other staff members in the building that worked with the student. All staff were trained on the daily point sheet at the beginning of the school year so that there is consistency in points assigned. Students could earn up to five points, but they also have the ability to lose those points as well. Points lost were associated with various interfering behaviors such as non-compliance, inappropriate language, aggression, elopement/bolting and property destruction. These behaviors represent social interaction and self-management skills. The rules followed were the same for each student within the classroom therefore, all their point sheets looked the same.

On a typical day, students could earn up to 65 points. This is roughly 5 points per 30 minutes throughout the entire school day. These time segments were broken up into 13, 30-minute segments for which students could earn up to 5 points per segment by following directions the first time they are given, using appropriate language, respecting self and others, remaining on task and keeping hands, feet and objects to self. Students would earn all five points if they demonstrated all of those listed behaviors. However, if behaviors such as non-compliance, inappropriate language, aggression, elopement/bolting and property destruction occurred, students would lose a point each time one of those behaviors occurred. Staff records how many points the students earned for each time segment at the end of the time segment. For example, if a student was able to follow all directions and had good behavior during the math block, they would earn a 5. If a student hit another student or staff member they would lose one point for each occurrence. Therefore, if this behavior occurred 3 times, the student would earn a 2 for that time segment. Another example would be if a student hit a staff member once, didn't follow directions twice and used inappropriate language once, they would earn a 1. If a behavior occurred more than five times, they would simply receive a 0 for that time segment as there are no negative scores. However, behavior frequency is recorded onto the point sheet for each time segment for each student. Once points are lost, they cannot be earned back. Data is recorded on the point sheet during each time segment before assigning points so that all behaviors are taken into consideration and documented. The point sheet score was the sum of all the points (prorated for absences or shortened school days). Staff records this data and frequency of behaviors onto a chart for each student at the end of each day.

Procedure

The researcher introduced daily point sheets to the classroom in the beginning of the school

year in 2018. Students were given direct instruction about their points sheets and how they were able to earn points, but also about how they can lose points. The point sheet followed the student throughout the duration of the school day. They were given reminders about the classroom rules and how to earn their points throughout the school day. Students could earn AM and PM rewards based on the points they earn on their daily point sheet. If they earned 27 points in the morning, they were then able to choose from the prize bin which consists of candy, erasers, pencils, stickers, temporary tattoos, etc. The same process occurred for PM reward at the end of the day as well. Students were also able to earn lunch bunch within the classroom for earning all 5 of their lunch points during the lunch time segment for the week. They were also able to earn lunch bunch if they go a week without any teacher time-outs. Teacher time outs are warranted when the students' behaviors directly impact other students learning or safety. During a teacher time-out, students were required to go to the support area and sit for 5 minutes. If students earned 75% or more of their points during the week, they were able to shop at the school store on Friday. Students earned \$1 of school store money for all time segments on their point sheet that they earned a 4 or a 5 in. At the end of the day, the point sheets went home with the student for families to review with the student, sign and return to school.

Baseline point sheet data for each student was reviewed and recorded from the month of February 2019 before beginning the Incredible Flexible You (Volume One) Intervention in March 2019. The baseline period ran for the same amount of time as the treatment period, each period lasting a month.

On March 4th, 2019, the researcher and her social worker began Volume 1 of the social skills intervention Incredible Flexible You. The researcher is also the special education classroom

teacher within this classroom. Student behaviors were tracked and monitored utilizing their daily point sheets during the month of March.

The teaching across the series is sequential and concepts build upon each other, therefore it is important that Volume 1 be used before moving on to Volume 2. The curriculum consists of detailed lesson plans, in-classroom structured activities, educational plan goals, and learn-at-home family letters. Volume 1 introduces the following Social Thinking concepts and vocabulary: Thinking Thoughts and Feeling Feelings, The Group Plan, Thinking With Your Eyes, Body in the Group, and Whole Body Listening. The concepts in Volume 2 build off those in Volume 1: Hidden Rules and Expected and Unexpected Behaviors, Smart Guess, Flexible and Stuck Thinking, Size of the Problem, and Sharing an Imagination. (Hendrix et al., 2013).

During the month of March 2019, the researcher and her social worker focused on Volume 1 specifically on thinking thoughts and feelings, the group plan, thinking with your eyes, body in the group and whole body listening. These skills are essential for students to understand in order to successfully communicate and interact with others. These skills were taught daily for a forty-five-minute block of time every morning. Songs from the curriculum would be played during the beginning of each lesson so that students would know that it was time for social skills. These songs directly relate to content taught throughout the intervention. Social skills were taught by giving direct instruction using the whiteboard, as well as giving opportunities for role play. Group discussions would also be held about what were appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in certain social situations. For extra motivation, students could earn fuzzies for participation within the social skills lessons. These fuzzies were used to fill up a jar. If the jar was filled by the end of the social skills lessons, students could choose a prize. Students were taught specifically about their heart and their brains and how they work together in order to make

choices during the day. They were taught about how their brain has thoughts, but sometimes those thoughts can be unrelated to what they should be doing. Students were taught that thoughts can come into our head, but don't always have to be said. Students were taught about body language and how that can show what people are feeling. Students were also taught tools and strategies such as thought bubble popping, deep breathing and changing the channel.

Once Volume One was taught and concluded, data taken from daily point sheets was then compared from February 2019 to March 2019 to see if the use of the Incredible Flexible You curriculum had any impact on the daily social interaction and self-management skills among students within the classroom. Point sheet values were prorated for absences. The point sheet values from the two conditions were compared using a non-independent samples t-test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume One) daily social skills curriculum on social interaction and self-management skills on students within a primary level self-contained classroom with moderate to severe emotional behavioral disabilities. A non-independent samples t-test was conducted with the independent variable being whether or not the intervention, Incredible Flexible You (Volume One), was taking place and the dependent variable being student point sheet data in the areas of social interaction and self-management skills. Scores were prorated to adjust for absences. The mean number of points earned during the prorated intervention period (Mean = 1247.13, SD = 30.41) was significantly higher than the mean number of points earned during the prorated baseline period (Mean = 1200.25, SD = 42.16) [$t(7) = 5.30, p = .001$]. Please see Table 1. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference in point sheet scores during the implementation of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) daily social skills curriculum as compared to the baseline period among students with emotional behavioral disabilities within a primary level self-contained classroom was rejected.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-statistic for Points Earned During Prorated Baseline and Intervention Periods

| Condition | Mean | SD | t-statistic |
|--------------|---------|-------|-------------|
| Baseline | 1200.25 | 42.16 | 5.30* |
| Intervention | 1247.13 | 30.41 | |

N = 8

* Significant at $p \leq .001$

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the daily social skills intervention, Incredible Flexible You (Volume One), had any impact on the social interaction skills and self-management skills of primary age students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD). The null hypothesis was that there would be no significant difference in point sheet scores during the implementation of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) daily social skills curriculum as compared to the baseline period among students with emotional behavioral disabilities within a primary level self-contained classroom. The mean point sheet scores were greater after one month of receiving the daily social skills intervention of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) so the null hypothesis was rejected.

Implications of the Study

The results of the study indicate that Incredible Flexible You is an effective intervention. Along with point sheet scores increases, significant interfering behaviors also decreased. Since point sheet scores increased while interfering behaviors decreased, then it would stand to reason that teachers, specifically those in self-contained classrooms, could meaningfully influence student learning and success through explicit daily social skills instruction in social/emotional/behavioral, self-management and social interaction domains.

Students who struggle with managing their emotions may benefit from working towards an incentive during the social skills instruction. Social skills is an area where these students are behind same age peers, so it can be a time of frustration for the students. Having an incentive such as an edible, break, or computer time, will encourage these students to try their best to

participate in the social skills lessons in order to access the instruction to begin to improve their social/emotional/behavioral performance.

The feasibility of the social skills intervention, namely in terms of any instructional costs associated and potential disruptions within the social skills lessons is a factor that teachers will need to consider when considering implementation. Within the duration of this study, disruptions were minimal as students would be removed from the classroom if they were distracting the learning of others. For example, if a student were to become verbally aggressive, they would be asked to leave the room to cool down within the support area before returning to the lesson. Most students in the class were willing to engage with the process, and the few who were initially reluctant seemed to buy-in after noticing that the expectations were clear and simple and that many of their peers were willing to engage and comply. The researcher found that initial teaching on social skills and opportunities for modeling and practice were necessary for the students' understanding of the process.

Based on the findings, it would be beneficial for teachers within a self-contained classroom to teach the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) curriculum as daily social skills instruction for students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Students within a self-contained classroom all receive special education services in the area of social/emotional/behavioral domains, therefore social skills are a part of the majority of students' Individualized Education Programs. Teachers can easily create a social skills block during the day in order to implement daily social skills instruction.

Theoretical Consequences

The findings of this study create a positive and optimistic view for students who have been diagnosed with emotional behavioral disabilities who all receive special education services

in accordance with their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). With the implementation of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume 1) social skills intervention, the student point sheet data increased while aggressive and non-compliant behaviors decreased. Based on the data collected, it is supported that teachers have a positive impact on student point sheet data and, ultimately, an important role in delivering have a positive impact on student point sheet data. Teachers need to be aware of how important positive social interactions skills are for students within the academic setting. Gage et al., (2017) found that a variety of factors influence student success in school, and that teachers have a major impact.

If students' positive behaviors significantly increased as a result of the daily social skills intervention of the Incredible Flexible You (Volume One) curriculum, it would lead that teachers within self-contained classrooms could meaningfully influence the behaviors and success of students by teaching daily social skills lessons, particularly the Incredible Flexible You curriculum.

Threats to Validity

One internal threat to the validity of this study is instrumentation. The instrument used was a teacher created point sheet. These point sheets are filled in by multiple adults throughout the student's school day. One adult might assign a student different points based on their own subjective view of the situation versus another adult. Teachers may have judged behaviors differently based on their awareness of whether it was the baseline or intervention period. This could be intentional or unintentional but does pose a threat to validity.

Another threat to internal validity is the wide degree of interfering behaviors and what those behaviors look like for individual students. There are multiple factors that would cause students to demonstrate negative interfering behaviors including changes in routine, transitions to non-

preferred activities, academic demands, not earning rewards, etc. All students are different and their behaviors range drastically. One behavior could cause one student to lose a point, but maybe not for another based on the frequency, intensity and duration of behaviors for individual students. In addition, a threat to internal validity is the novelty effective which is a reactive arrangement. Students can go through a “honeymoon” phase in which behaviors are not seen for a set period of time in response to a given intervention.

A threat to the external validity was the way in which students were selected. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling based on the course taught by the researcher and its respective student enrollment of eight students with EBD. This creates a threat of selection-treatment interaction because the students may not be representative of the EBD population. In addition, this intervention was only given to elementary school students with EBD at the primary grade level within a self-contained classroom. The impact of this intervention was also only limited to the performance on student’s individual daily points sheets. Other factors may have been affected that were not listed on the daily point sheets.

Connections to Previous Studies/Literature Review

The results of this experiment are consistent with those of previous studies and existing literature. The positive effects of social skill interventions have been widely noted in various studies, in which a few are outlined below.

In a 2003 study, as cited by Hendrix et al., Choi and Kim reported on a cognitive social learning approach utilized with prekindergarten students who had experienced low peer acceptance. Their findings supported what was found to be true: focusing on the cognitive learning (utilizing concrete concepts and terminology) increases social know-how and subsequently peer acceptance because cognitive learning leads to behavioral changes (2013).

There was a similar study conducted on the effectiveness of the Stop & Think social skills curriculum (McDaniel et al., 2017). A brief study was conducted among second and third grade students within a self-contained classroom. They were given daily social skills instruction from the Stop and Think curriculum. The results concluded that there was a decrease in negative social behavior among all the students. Similar to this researcher's study, the McDaniel study found that a daily social skills intervention within a self-contained classroom among students who present significant interfering behaviors was effective.

Another similar study was conducted on the effectiveness of the Superheroes Social Skills program which is a social skills training intervention that incorporates peers in order to promote generalization of target social skills. Even though this intervention is newer, several studies have found the intervention to result in positive outcomes for individuals with ASD and peers with shared deficits (Radley et al., 2017). Five preschool age students participated in a study that used the superheroes social skills intervention. The sessions were 1.5 to 2 hours long and lasted for 5 weeks. The students attended sessions twice a week. The study was able to conclude that the Superheroes Social Skills curriculum is useful in promoting accurate skill demonstration in preschool age children and reducing child-related stress of parents and guardians of preschool age participants. Although the Superheroes intervention was not daily like the one in this researcher's study, there was still a positive impact on the behaviors of students who presented interfering behaviors.

Implications for Future Research

To secure a more valid set of data, researchers should expand their selection of sample groups. Students of different ages, across multiple contents, under teachers with various

teaching styles and instructional approaches should be studied to determine the effects of the intervention. In addition, both the baseline and intervention periods might be longer than one month, to address the novelty effect.

In a future related study, researchers might also take into consideration the accuracy of point sheet data and how it can be enforced/validated. Although staff were given explicit instruction and modeling on the student daily point sheet and how to assign points, future research could do this more extensively. Staff could have a set guideline on how to assign points to individual students in accordance to their daily point sheet. This would increase the validity of the point sheet data in the future. Also, a study in which an outcome measure is more specifically aligned to social skills versus a point sheet could be beneficial.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the daily social skills intervention, Incredible Flexible You, had a positive impact on behavior, as measured by point sheet data, among eight students with EBD within a primary self-contained classroom. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that teachers within a primary self-contained classroom would see positive results in reducing interfering behaviors and increasing appropriate behaviors within the classroom from teaching a daily social skills intervention.

A child with an EBD diagnosis could have some intrinsic characteristics that could mean less success in a classroom when compared to peers without those same characteristics such as aggression, property destruction and non-compliance. However, instructional and behavioral strategies can be put in place in the classroom for the proven and documented benefit of EBD students. Daily social skills instruction may be one of those methods. With clearly taught,

consistent parameters related to social skills interventions, students with EBD can find a means to manage their emotions that would prevent interfering behaviors.

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