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CONCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AT RISK ON BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROGRAM CREATE: A STORY OF ONE PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Students' misbehavior in the classroom is a common scenario. In some researches, students' misbehavior is associated with social skill deficiency resulting in behavior problems and poor academic achievement. This study is timely and vital in addressing the need for a program that will reinforce positive discipline in the classroom. The Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (EsP) of Benjamin B. Esguerra Memorial National High School (BBEMNHS) maintains that the intervention program with the goal to Change, Reinvent, and Elevate Attitude Towards Excellence (CREATE) of students that are at risk is essential to lessen if not eradicate misbehavior in the classroom. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized, particularly pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental design and phenomenographical analysis. Survey questionnaire, anecdotal records, and focus group interviews were used for data gathering. This research was anchored on the inculcation approach of set absolute values processed according to social skills processing of change: seeing, thinking, and doing. The common classroom misbehaviors such as not submitting projects/homework, cutting classes, absenteeism, and violating school rules were garnered from the respondents. Interactive games are found to be the most effective among the enabling activities. Lectures are perceived to be the least effective. Pre-test and post-test of the respondents' social skills have significant difference, while, students' conceptions on the effect of the CREATE program generate a binary opposite effect such as acceptance vs. denial, resolve vs. status quo, and applying vs. defying. Further studies in gender and grade level implementation of the program may be undertaken using this baseline research.

Keywords

Students at Risk, Intervention, Action Research, Students' Misbehavior, Social Skills, Continuous Improvement Program, Phenomenographical Study

1. Introduction

Classroom management and management of student behavior are skills that teachers gain and develop over time. Effective teaching occurs when the teacher is able to manage the host of tasks and situations in the classroom daily. Although careful preparation of lesson plans and

teaching aids are necessary tasks and form the heart of teaching, behavior management is what challenges most teachers (Meddour, 2017).

Students' misbehavior cause major disruptions in the classroom and if left unchecked, even minor offenses can escalate into bigger issues. Patac (2015) wrote that effective classroom management incorporates environment modification in order for behavior modification to transpire. On the other hand, the use of proactive behavior and high student involvement coupled with the teacher's organizational ability contribute to a well-managed classroom.

This research therefore deals with exploring an alternative approach in handling students with said problems. It aims to bridge theory and practice by developing a model program that will possibly aid both the school and the community in solving this real-life situation.

1.1 Social Skills

Students' misbehavior in school is a typical scenario. Students' misbehavior is associated to social skill deficiency, where children without adequate social skills students are at risk for difficulties including behavior problems and poor academic achievement (Wu, Lo, Feng, & Lo, 2010; Comides, 2014). Social skills are learned behaviors that facilitate in amplifying social underpinning and curtailing destructive interactions with others (Greshan, 1990; Greshan & Elliott, 1990). According to Comedis (2014), the common social skills expected of students are the following: cooperation, observed as students' attention to instruction and doing their assignment correctly and on time; self-control, observed to be related to ignoring peers distractions and encouraging in conflict with classmates during lecture and classroom activities; and assertiveness, observed to include encouraging others to join the activity and acting as a leader in a group. Assertive students sometimes question the classroom rules and fairness.

In addition, Collins, Gresham, and Dart (2016) describe that student social skills manifest in asking for help when needed and interacting appropriately with others. Alternatively, social skills deficiencies are manifested in students' behavior such as dropout (Ryan, Reid & Epstein, 2004; Collins, Gresham & Dart, 2016), delinquency, aggression, and conduct problems (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Ladd, 1981, cited by Collins, Gresham & Dart, 2016). Such experiences usually result to many negative outcomes (Collins, Gresham, & Dart, 2016).

The link of social skills, academic performance, and success of students are proven in previous researches. According to McClelland and Tominey (2009), children's social skills are important for early school success and later adjustment. While social skill deficits undesirably influence academic input and achievement, they also aggravate pre-diagnosed learning

difficulties in certain situations (Dodge & Pettit, 2003; cited by Zach, Yazdi-Ugav, & Zeev, 2016, cited in Wight & Christine, 2008). Thus, students with social skills deficiency sometimes tend to misbehave (Zach, Yazdi-Ugav, & Zeev, 2016). Moreover, Zach, Yazdi-Ugav and Zeev (2016) assert that there is consistent proof that social skill deficits are characteristics found in students with learning disorders. Based on Dobbins, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, and Tincani (2010), research has acknowledged that children without adequate social skills are at risk for difficulties including peer rejection, behavior problems, and poor academic achievement. Also, social inability can be a lifelong problem since social incompetence can be more debilitating and detrimental to success in life than learning problems. Children who lack social skills can cause troubles for teachers within the typical education classroom. They often disrupt class, entail special academic support, and seldom develop positive relationships with their teachers (Baker et al., 2008; Birch & Ladd, 1998, cited by Fisher, Reynolds, & Sheehan, 2016).

Social skills are proven to be enablers of students' success in their studies (Zach, Yazdi-Ugav, & Zeev, 2016; Collins, Gresham, & Dart, 2016). Students with positive social skills inevitably know how to communicate, influence, and interrelate with another person, without unnecessary conflict. Likewise, Odom, McConnell, and Brown (2008, cited by Frey, Elliott, & Kaiser, 2014) claim that learning-related social skills include listening, following directions, and participating in a group. A child's social skills influence his or her peer acceptance and friendship development, which are related to school adjustment, academic achievement, and self-management skills (Frey, Elliott & Kaiser, 2014).

Based on the above literature, there seems to be a correlation between promotion of social skills and continuation of an inclusion attitude in education, where students' academic achievements are encouraged and behavioral problems are reduced (Zach, Yazdi-Ugav & Zeev, 2016). In addition, corporal punishment and coercion are no longer encouraged in correcting behavior; instead, positive discipline is promoted in correcting students' behavior in both public and private schools (deped.gov.ph, 2016). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ohchrorg, 2018) declares:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to protect the child from all forms of violence. State Parties are also required to "take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

In line with the K to 12 program, all students should also be given equal opportunities to be at par with other students who are achievers. Since social skills and behavior are linked with the academic achievement of students, providing an intervention to correct the social skills deficiencies of students is therefore necessary in developing positive social skills. Hence, this research firmly believes that the use of activity-mediated intervention program which inculcates absolute values can improve the social skills of students with the said deficiency.

1.2 Intervention Program

The intervention program in this action research is based on Social Skills Training (Lane, Wehby, Menzies, Doukas, Munton, & Gregg, 2003). The use of activity-mediated instruction is supported by the three processes underlying social skills: seeing, thinking, and doing. The lesson plan of the proposed curriculum are composed of activities (games, video, icebreakers, etc.), processing questions (guide questions), and application (reflection and commitment to apply the values learned) in the spirit of camaraderie, and positive and happy learning environment. According to Gresham et al. (2001, cited by Dobbins, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Tincani, 2010), direct intervention is needed for students with social skills deficit in order to avoid the cycle of ineffective and unproductive social interactions leading to peer rejection and lack of positive social relationships. For this reason, educators are encouraged to be knowledgeable regarding the direct instruction of social skills and proper methods in designing and implementing social skill instruction. This should be supported by researches on effectiveness of social skill programs (Goldstein, Miklowitz, & Mullen, 2006 cited by Dobbins, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Tincani, 2010).

According to Dobbins, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy and Tincani (2010, cited in Caldarella & Merrell, 1997), important domain should be observed in planning social skill instructions. The proponents of the intervention should consider the following components: (a) a typical social skill classification system; (b) a profile of social skill strengths and weakness; (c) a template on which to design social skills instruction; (d) an outcome-based measurement system; and (e) assessment in terms of cause, prognosis, and responsiveness to social skill interventions. Following the characteristics of an effective social skills training or intervention program above, this study proposes an intervention program and instructional plan premised on reflective activities (inspiring videos, games, and group peer using peer facilitation, questions) and inculcation of select absolute values aimed at changing the social skills deficit of BBEMNHS

students. The salient feature of this intervention instruction (Appendix A) has been cited as an agent of change:

On real-life and inspiring stories. The power of story has been utilized across time and culture. Stories have been agents of personal transformation in part because they change our brains (<https://aeon.co/essays/once-upon-a-time-how-stories-change-hearts-and-brains>) and make us change the way we think.

On the biblical view. Evans (2010) relates that what is to be considered is the idea of biblical worldview impacting the hearts and worldviews of individuals, one at a time, leading to changed lives and ultimately to a changed or transformed culture.

On other reflective activities. Reflective activities are found to: improve self-awareness and emotional support (Fook & Gardner, 2007, cited by Roessger (2014)), enhance critical thinking in complex situations (Brookfield, 2000a), advance affective development, increase self-esteem, and improve political and social emancipation. Kevin M. Roessger (2014) asserts that the three-intertwined feature of this intervention program brings hope to alleviating social skills deficiency of at risk student respondents of this program.

This study aims to simulate the thrust of the Department of Education (DepEd) on imposing positive discipline to students at risk: students who might not succeed in their schooling due to their behavior (DepEd, 2016). It intends to address problems on students' misbehavior like non-compliance to assignments, habitual class cutting, absenteeism, and violation of school rules. Likewise, it also means to serve as a continuous improvement program for students who are at risk.

Aside from reflective activities, inculcation is utilized in the intervention program. It is a method in teaching values to instill or internalize certain values in students (SAMEO, 2012; Reyes, 2013). Absolute biblical principles and values such as good stewardship, listening, vision, diligence, and sacrifice are selected because they are deemed to be very relevant to the success of the students in their studies.

2. Purpose of the Research

The CREATE intervention program intends to improve the social skills of at risk students by lessening, if not eradicating, misbehavior in the classroom. It also intends to add to the existing body of knowledge on the effect of the intervention programs as alternative ways of resolving misbehavior in the classroom. Specifically, this study attempted to identify which are

the best enabling activities for the students at risk, support the principle of the positive discipline in everyday teaching through the intervention program, and structure the various conceptions of the students at risk on the enabling activities.

3. Research Problems

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the common behaviors of at risk students in BBEMNHS?
- What enabling activities are most effective to selected at risk students of BBEMNHS?
- What are the conceptions of the at risk students in BBEMNHS on the intervention program?
- What is the significant difference of the status of students' social skills before and after the intervention program?

4. Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses:

- There is no significant difference in the respondents' conceptions in the use of activity mediation.
- There is a significant relationship between the promotion of social skills, which is often linked to the continuation of an inclusion attitude in education, and reduction of behavioral problems as predictor of student academic achievement.

5. Theoretical Framework

Effective social skills instruction or intervention appropriate for the social skill deficiency is based on operant, social learning, and cognitive-behavioral approaches (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2006; Elliott & Gresham, 1993, cited by Dobbins, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Tincani, 2010). John Dewey is perceived by many authors as the founding father of reflection in education. He claims that reflection starts with experience, not with theory. On systematic reflection, he further says, "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory, simply because it is only in experience that any theory has viral and verifiable significance" (John Dewey 1933, cited by Visscher-Voerman & Procee, 2007).

Generally, the combination of the three functions that characterize systematic reflection (self-explanation, data verification, and feedback) leads to a greater willingness (motivational

effect) and ability (cognitive effect) to draw lessons from prior experiences. These motivational and cognitive effects eventually lead to behavioral change (behavioral effect) (Ellis, Ganzach, Castle, & Sekely, 2010; Villado & Arthur, 2013, cited by Ellis, Carette, Anseel & Lievens, 2014).

5.1 Conceptual Framework

The study is premised on the belief that reflection is crucial to helping students make sense of real-life scenarios. The conceptual framework is built around the cognitive and affective responses of students to the enabling activities. The expected responses of the respondents are perceived in binary opposites (Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1958, cited by Assaf, Cohen, Danesi, & Neuman, 2015). This study asserts that reactions of respondents can be in binary opposites. The respondents may accept or deny, resolve or maintain the status quo, and apply or defy the principles embedded in the enablers' activities. The research simulacrum is presented in Figure

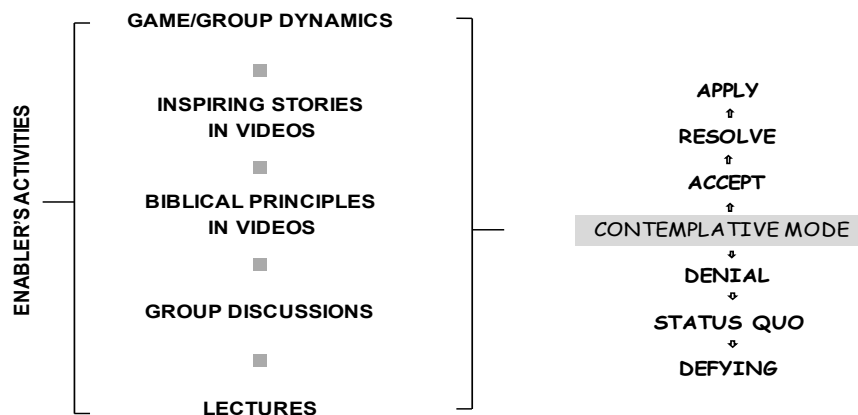


Figure 1: *Research Simulacrum*

6. Method

Action research is the term which describes the integration of action (implementing a plan) with research (developing an understanding of the effectiveness of this implementation) to improve teaching. The original concept is sometimes attributed to Kurt Lewin (Coghlan & Jacobs, 2005).

The mixed method approach was utilized in this study. The pre-test and post-test design (Newgent et al., 2010) was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention program quantitatively, while phenomenographical analysis was used to process qualitative data. Hence, the variation of the program's effects on the students is structured this way.

6.1 Sources of Data

Social Skills Questionnaire (SSQ). The social skills questionnaire created by Gresham and Elliott (1990) was utilized in this study (Elliott & Busse 1991, cited by Comedis, 2014). Only selected portions of the SKQ (student's part) were used. These were translated in Filipino so that students can easily understand the survey. Reliability and validity were assessed by an expert before the survey was administered with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.9279.

The Focus Group Interview Guide. It is semi-structured based on the principles of processes of change (Lane, Wehby, Menzies, Doukas, Munton, & Gregg, 2003) and systematic reflective as apriori. According to Polkinghorne (2005, as cited by Susuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007; Robbins & Vandree, 2009), interviewing is one of the most important strategies and a key source of collection of qualitative data.

6.2 Data Gathering Procedure

The data were gathered from the pilot stage of the intervention program of Benjamin B. Esguerra Memorial National High School (BBEMNHS). Ten sessions were proposed for the piloting of the intervention program for the students at risk of BBEMNHS. The sessions were scheduled before or after class to ensure that their regular classes were not disrupted. Focus group interviews were prearranged. The students in focus groups were given briefing about the purpose of the interview; only those who were willing to participate were interviewed. The interviews were done after each session. Each focus group was interviewed in an informal setting so that students can freely answer the questions in Filipino or in English and express their real emotions. In this manner, resonance of feeling was considered, where the researcher was also particular with non-verbal movements, hesitation, and pause. If there was hesitation, follow up questions like "can you give examples" and "can you explain further" were asked. Clarifications made were marked as important as the answers of the informants. Using the interview guide, each focus group interview was done for about 20-35 minutes. An iPhone audio recorder was used as it gives clear output despite the uncontrolled noises within the interview area.

6.3 Subjects of the Study

The respondents of this study are at risk students in one public school in the Philippines. Perceived classroom misbehaviors of the respondents are not submitting projects/homework, cutting classes, absenteeism, and violating school rules. The Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (EsP) team identified the behavior of students at risk through examination of their status based on their EsP teachers' class records and deliberation of the team. From these respondents, twelve (12)

focus groups consisting of five to seven members each were interviewed. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the respondents' classroom misbehaviors according to year level.

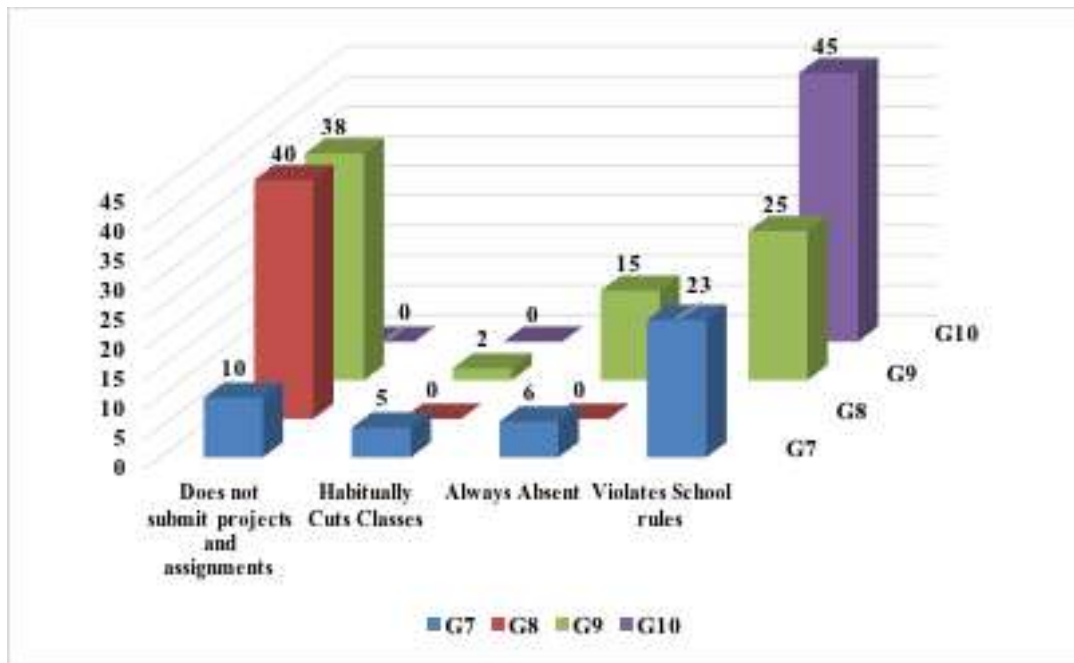


Figure 2: Number of Students at Risk (CAR) According to Year Level

6.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data. Phenomenographical research is strictly a data driven analytic method. The analytic process resembles the grounded theory of Galser and Strauss (2009). Hence, unit and thematic analysis were done in the focus group interview. Protocols were observed to facilitate the search of conception patterns among students in the intervention program. To determine the hierarchical clusters of similarities of the students' conceptions, a dendrogram was utilized.

Quantitative data. Results from the questionnaires were processed in Microsoft Excel using t-test paired sample.

The findings of this study gained credibility by utilizing multiple data sources, such as interview transcripts, video clips during classroom observations, and lesson plans. The study's dependability was established through the use of multiple coders, discussions (when coders were uncertain), and careful records of the coding process. To ensure that the coding was appropriate, the principal researcher conducted the intra-rater reliability test by repeatedly coding the significant statements from the transcribed data until they fell under the right code. Furthermore,

the member responsible for checking also ensured that the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the codes given to the significant text units were correct.

7. Findings

Students' misbehavior is associated to social skill deficiency, where children without adequate social skills are at risk for difficulties including behavior problems and poor academic achievement. Hence, the intervention program (CREATE) aspires to improve the social skills of at risk students. Baseline data (Savitz-Romer, Rowan-Kenyon, & Fancsali, 2015) and the SSQ (Gresham and Elliott, 1990) were used to survey the social skill levels of the respondents. This study also aimed to identify which enabling learning activities are more likely to make students reflect and respond by thinking of changing their classroom misbehaviors while increasing their social skill. The following findings were revealed:

7.1 The Common Behaviors of at Risk Students

Among the respondents' common misbehaviors, it is important to note the following trends:

- Most of the Grade 8 and 9 students have the habit of not submitting homework/project;
- Grade 7 students have the most number of habitual cutting classes;
- Grade 9 has the most number of students who are absent; and
- Grade 10 has the great number of school rules violators.

Figure 3 indicates the distribution of the respondents' classroom misbehaviors of the respondents according to year level.

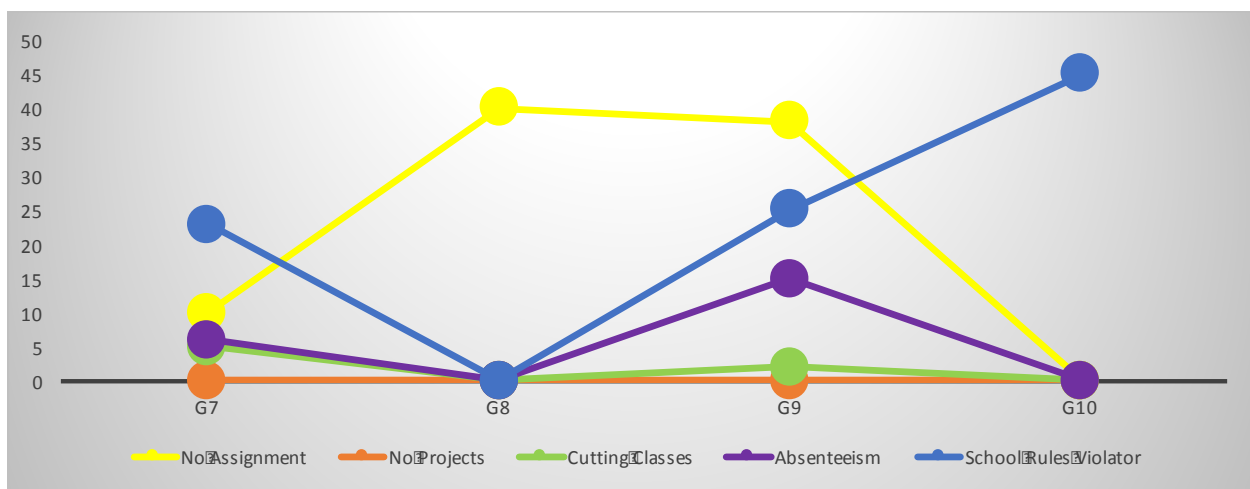


Figure 3: Distribution of Classroom Misbehaviors of the Respondents

7.2 The Enabling Activities of the Intervention Program

To determine the most effective enablers' activities to select at risk students of BBEMNHS, the focus group transcripts were analyzed, and respondents' answers were tallied and presented according to frequency of occurrences. Particular attention was given to sample verbalizations of respondents.

In interactive games, one student mentioned "The tower game" while another student stated the "hot potato game". Inspiring real-life and bible-related videos had the same number of 'likes' by the students. One student mentioned "the video of Nehemiah" while "the video about the story of the carpenter" was the most frequently cited by respondents. Remarkably, lecture was never mentioned by the students. Figure 4 shows the likability of the enablers' activities where interactive games were the most frequently mentioned as enablers, followed by inspirational and bible-related videos, and group discussions. Lecture was never mentioned as an enabling activity by the respondents.

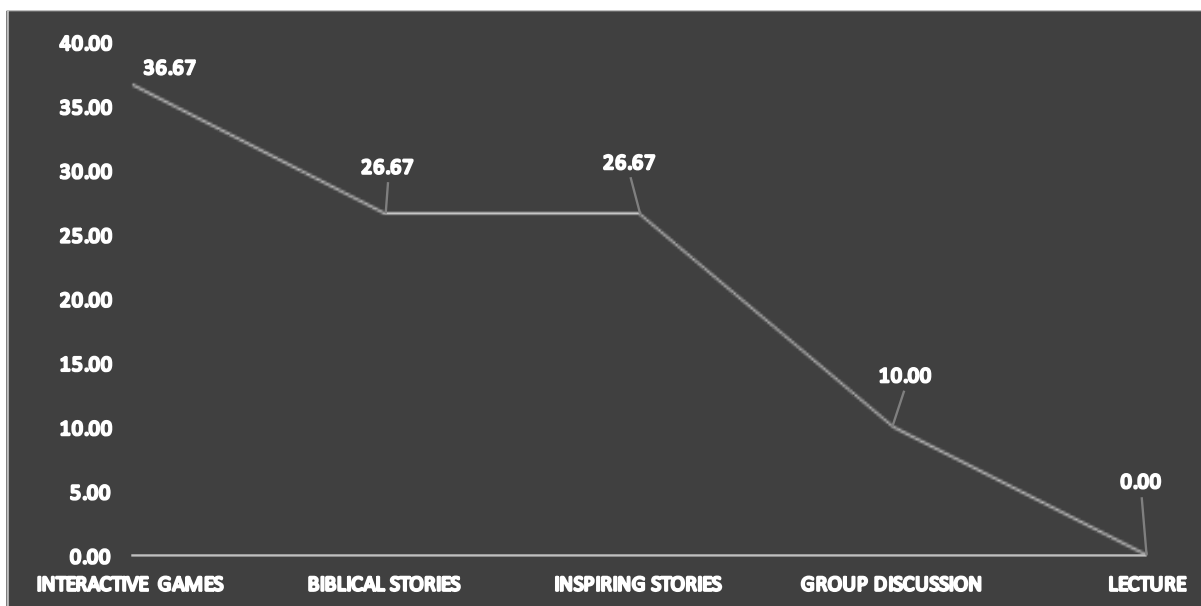


Figure 4: *The Enabling Activities Perceived to be Effective to At risk Students*

7.3 The Conceptions of at risk Students on the Intervention Program

The analyzed transcribed data of the focus group interviews reveal that the activities utilized in the intervention program enabled students to reflect on their misbehavior. Their reflections were classified under the theme tag "contemplative mode" since the students provided a variety of responses that enabled them to reflect because of the enablers' activities. Significant statements underwent cool and warm analysis via a dendrogram which showed contemplative

mode responses namely, (a) accept (b) resolve and (c) apply (tagged as “thumb ups” in this study); and (a) denial, (b) status quo, and (c) defying (tagged as “disapproved” in this study).

Statements of students like “I will not tease again my teachers” fall under “apply” while those saying “I need to cooperate now with my classmates” or statements that support the probability of exploring resolutions and adhering to the idea were categorized as “resolve”. Statements such as “You should listen to your parents because they will not suggest anything that will lead you to danger” were considered as “accept” contemplative mode. Conversely, statements like “mam I am not like that” were deemed as “denial” contemplative mode.

These statements are usually from students who wanted to be in the intervention program but ended up leaving while the program is going on. The students who are still in the program but just sit and do nothing are considered to be in the “status quo” mode. There were also statements which appear to go from bad to worse like this one: “Ma’am, I have changed my vision. I used to want to be a military, but would I love to be a police now. It’s hard to be in the military because you kill many people, but as a police, becoming rich is easy.” Although the negative conceptions are all isolated cases, such initial assessment warrants more regular classroom sessions for validation. Figure 5 shows the variations of the enabling activities’ effects to the respondents.

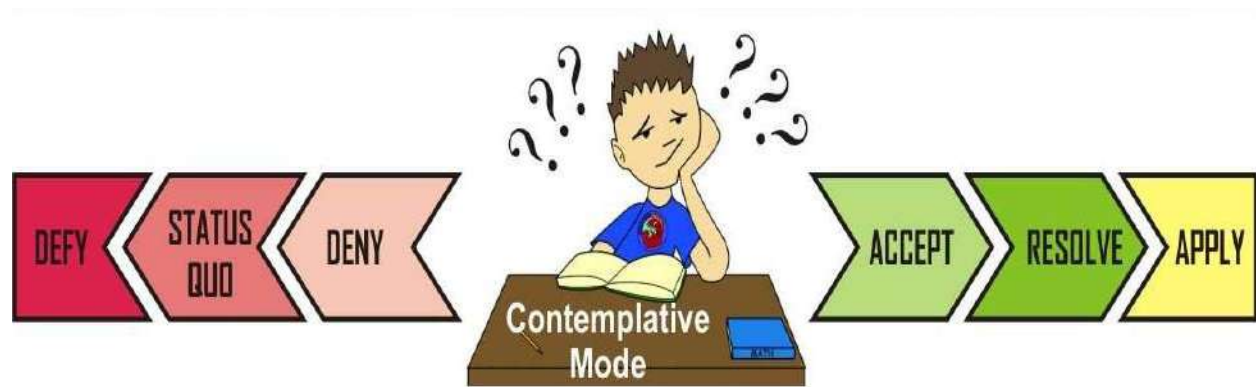


Figure 5: *Conceptions of Respondents on the Enabling Activities*

7.4 The Perceived Difference of Students’ Social Skills Before and After the Intervention Program

The null hypothesis was rejected at .05 critical level, with the p value of 2.475. A comparison between the pre-test and post-test results of the students under the intervention program shows that there is significant difference before and after the activity mediation. Figure

3 shows that games were the most mentioned enabling activities by students probably because students realize their misbehavior as they enjoy and participate in them.

8. Discussion

The effectiveness of this intervention program is supported in the study of Steiner and Remsing (2007, cited by Denault & Déry, 2015), where an intervention program regarding social skills showed evidence of reducing behavior problem. The instructional design of having a learning process which intimately intertwines reflection and action is supported by Garvin (2003).

In classroom misbehaviors, failure to submit assignments is corroborated in the study of Sun and Shek (2012), which they report to be common among their students. Absenteeism is also identified in the study of Cook (2010), where “Friday mentality” is cited as the common reason for not going to school. The same issues were observed in this study.

That enabling activities develop behavior was supported in the study of Bessant, Caffyn, and Gallagher (2001), where they suggest that variation of enablers can be used to achieve the same ends of behavior development.

This study’s findings regarding the effect of inspiring real-life stories to help students reflect on their classroom misbehaviors are corroborated by the study of McCarthy (2008), where he relates that inspiring stories inculcate effective storytelling and proves to be effective in dispersing values. Likewise, the study of Thiel-Stern, Mazarella, and Hains (2014) assert that storytelling strengthens commitment and motivates students to imitate what the main character of the story did.

In terms of utilizing games in teaching values, Koh, Kin, Wadhwa, and Lim (2012) note that incorporating games in teaching values has potential in enhancing learning. The cultural stories based on biblical characters continue to be in the heart of a person’s behavior, values, and beliefs (Evans, 2010). In the study of Johansson (2011), group discussion is considered the most prominent approach to teaching and transmitting moral values. According to him, this results to students becoming engaged in moral activities (Johansson, 2011). Surprisingly, group discussion was the least recognized by students among the enabling activities.

9. Conclusions

Students' misbehavior may be modified by inculcating positive values through enabling activities such as games, biblical-related videos, inspirational stories, and group discussions. Majority of at risk students who attended the training believe that the intervention program is helpful in solving their social skills deficiency. The program encouraged them to improve themselves by applying the virtues and values that they have learned in school.

There is a high correlation between the intervention program and its perceived effects on the students' social skills. That the enablers in the intervention conditioned the students to accept, resolve to change, and apply what they learned are indicators that the intervention conducted in this study is effective. Thus, there is a strong indication that the intervention program can be useful in addressing the problem of classroom misbehaviors.

The research was limited to a small sample but it was supported by the qualitative analysis. Further studies should be conducted based on the results of this baseline research such as the analysis of the results of the program implementation according to grade level and gender. Another related research may focus on other underlying causes of misbehavior in the classroom other than lack of social skills.

10. Recommendations

The following recommendations are given:

- The school administration should provide the necessary support and resources which are not limited to the following:
 - additional teachers;
 - student workbooks;
 - dedicated room for intervention program sessions; and
 - budget allocation for meal allowances.
 - intensify partnership with the NGOs to fund the research intervention program.
- The school's effort to nurture positive attitude and behavior among students at risk should be supported by the home. Parents should work with the teachers by encouraging their children to participate and complete the intervention program.
- If approved and implemented, the CREATE intervention program stakeholders (school, home, and community) should validate its applicability and perceived effectiveness by tracking and reviewing the periodic results (quarterly and yearly). Enablers' activities

which are proven to be effective in real-life settings should be the only ones utilized in the intervention program.

- The CREATE intervention program implementers should examine the factors contributing to low attendance turnout among students at risk.

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