

Creating an Effective Social

Skills Intervention

by

Amy J. Quaschnick

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Barbara Hon Ph. D.
Research Advisor

Committee Members:

Cynthia C. ...
Scott ...

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

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**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Quaschnick, Amy J

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ABSTRACT

Social skills are thought to be amongst the most important skills one can acquire; they are linked to success in school and they are also necessary for daily functioning in society. The research on social skills interventions has provided inconclusive results. Yet, because it is so important for students to learn appropriate social skills, there is a need to determine what the components of an effective intervention are and how to implement this intervention in a school setting to increase the social competence of students with social skills deficits. This study consisted of a six week small group intervention for elementary students. The results suggested that the students did generalize some skills into the classroom setting. It also suggested that the students and the adults valued the same social skills, and the value the students placed on the skills may be linked to the frequency with which they display the skills.

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deficient and lead to not only academic difficulties but also the possibility of problems with psychopathology and adjustment issues later on in life (Elliott & Gresham, 1991).

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman (1995) stated that an “emotional quotient,” which is closely related to social competence, is a more reliable predictor of success in life than an intelligence quotient. He stressed the importance of teaching people emotional and social skills because these are the skills that assist people in achieving satisfaction and contentment in their lives. Along these lines, it is highly important for children and adolescents to have peer interactions in their lives. These interactions lead to emotional and behavioral adjustment and the development of a sense of belonging. Without these interactions, adolescents have a difficulty establishing a support system, maintaining a healthy level of self-esteem, and developing social and moral values (Christopher, Nangle, & Hansen, 1993). Furthermore, social skill deficits have been linked to internalizing behavior disorders, such as depression. In addition, social isolation and withdrawal often produce a downward spiral of isolation and limited opportunity for social interaction. Once the opportunity for social interaction is limited, one does not even have an opportunity to practice or improve their skills, which leads to further isolation (Hansen et al., 1998).

Psychological functioning is also related to social skill development. While children are growing up, they are faced with many developmental challenges that they must overcome, such as puberty and transitioning from childhood to adulthood. It is essential that these children develop the ability to interact with others and deal with their challenges in the healthiest way possible to avoid succumbing to other harmful influences that may face them. Studies (Christopher et al., 1993; Hansen et al., 1998) have found

that peer influence is a critical factor in one's beliefs and actions regarding substance abuse and smoking. This is one of many reasons why schools have adopted programs to teach students positive coping strategies in the face of harmful influences (Christopher et al., 1993). Those students with social skills deficits may experience even more difficulties coping with life's challenges and be at an even higher risk for maladaptive behaviors. For example, delinquency, teen pregnancy and substance abuse have been linked to a lack of social skills (Hansen et al., 1998). Furthermore, social impairment was found to be the only significant predictor of alcohol abuse, substance abuse, and smoking. A minimal level of alienation and impairment may be illustrated by some substance abuse, but as the individual spirals further down more alienation is present along with more severe substance abuse patterns. Seeking out these children in early years may provide an opportunity for early intervention and hope of reducing the child's risk of developing a substance abuse disorder (Greene et al., 1999).

As previously noted, there are many shocking and sometimes frightening activities that have become commonplace in our schools. Daily challenges regarding preventing violence, drug abuse, suicide, and teen pregnancy are some of the obstacles facing educators and scaring parents. For these reasons among others, there is a need for schools to provide more direct instruction in social skills training.

The development of social skills begins in infancy with the nurturing an infant receives from his or her caregiver. As children grow into adults, they continue to build on the skills they have previously acquired. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that a child learns appropriate skills early on to set the stage for further development later in life (Goleman, 1995). In the past, it has been assumed that children will learn good listening

and communication skills by example. However, the research suggests that this is not the case and there is a need for instruction (Baty, Sorenson, Pancini, & Pasier, 2000). One possible reason research results have indicated this is due to the structure of today's families. The changing demands of the working world make it less common for children to be raised in families that sit down to dinner each night; often times parents are forced to work shifts that are not always conducive to raising children. It is also more common than ever for both parents to be working outside of the home. The structure of today's families has also changed. Children are being raised in less traditional homes and are not receiving the type of attention and education about life that they need to become well adapted, successful adults. This change in family systems and the changing demands placed on working parents has led to a decreased responsibility and/or opportunity by parents to have the ability to instruct their children in social skills, and as a result the social skills of children are suffering (Baty et al., 2000).

There are many reasons why it is important to teach social skills in the school setting. First, major pushes toward inclusive classrooms have highlighted the need for social skills instruction for students with developmental delays and disabilities (Guglielmo & Tyron, 2001). In addition, schools are also faced with the challenge of making schools safer against acts of violence, which is often began by teaching social competence to students (Schwartz, 1999). One final reason is the fact that the school setting is the place where students tend to display the most problematic behaviors. Often times, these are related to peer relations. Parents also express the most concerns about this setting; therefore, it would make the most sense to intervene in this setting (Evans, Axelrod, & Sapia, 2000).

There is no doubt that there is a need for students to receive social skills instruction in the school setting, and there are many advantages to teaching social skills in this setting. The biggest advantage to instructing students in this setting is generalization. Generalization is the major challenge associated with social skills training. If a student learns a new skill in the same environment that the student is expected to display the skill in, it is more likely the student will exhibit the skill in the desired setting (Cartledge, 2005; Christopher et al., 1993; Evans et al., 2000). Within the school day, many social opportunities are present and provide optimal opportunities to teach social skills in a naturally occurring context. The adults in these situations also have control of the situation, creating a valuable learning context. Within this context, social reinforcement can be used often and in many situations throughout the school day (Sheridan, Hungelmann, & Maughan, 1999).

Another advantage of social skills interventions in the school setting is the fact that curriculum based approaches can be very efficient. They are affordable and can meet the needs of many students at one time and, of course, in their natural environment (Guglielmo & Tyron, 2001).

In response to the need for teaching social skills, numerous programs and approaches have been developed, with inconclusive results as to the successes of the programs (Elliott & Gresham, 1993; Kavale & Mostert, 2004). It appears as though the major criticism concerning all interventions is the lack of generalization. Many social skills instructors teach social skills in a setting that is far removed from the environment that the skills need to be applied in. Studies have shown that the maintenance and generalization of social skills beyond the intervention setting is limited. This factor along

with a comprehensive assessment regarding what skills a particular child is lacking and the ability to provide social validation appear to be some important considerations for designing and effective social skills interventions (Hansen et al., 1998). It is necessary to examine the importance of utilizing all the above mentioned components related to generalization, social validity, and the information related to individual skill deficits and take them into consideration in order to develop an intervention that is successful at teaching students the social skills that they need to know to be successful in life. In doing so, the hope would be that we can remedy the social skill deficits before they lead to further complications in a student's life.

Statement of the Problem

Social competence is a critical factor in one's ability to function effectively in today's society. It is important not only to one's educational experience but also to his or her psychological functioning. Due to the changing world we live in, it has become the schools' responsibility to provide this social skills instruction to students. This study will attempt to determine if a small group social skills intervention in the school setting can be effective in helping students gain social competence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study will be to examine the effectiveness of a social skills intervention in the school setting. It will examine the extent to which the students generalize the targeted behaviors outside of the intervention setting, the frequency with which the skills are displayed, the social validity of the skills from the students' perspective, and also the possible impact of student perceived social validity on the frequency with which the skills are displayed. This study took place with an already

existing social skills group at an elementary school in the Midwest. Surveys were completed for the students to fill out at the close of each session and the teachers to fill out at the close of the intervention. The intervention and data collection took place in the Spring of 2007.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined as such for the purposes of this study.

Generalization- Ability to apply what is learned to numerous situations.

Social competence- Ability to use social skills effectively as judged by significant others.

Social skills- “Acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses and assist in avoiding negative responses” (Elliott & Gresham, 1993, p. 287).

Social validation- Acceptability and feasibility of goals, treatment, and outcomes of an intervention (Hansen et al., 1998).

Limitations of Study

This study is limited by several factors. The size of the sample does not allow the results to be generalized beyond this study. The surveys created for the study were not tested for reliability or validity. Finally, because the students in this study were chosen from an already existing group, preintervention data are not available.

Methodology

The following chapters begin with a brief overview of social skills intervention history and research, highlighting some key components to creating an effective intervention. The third chapter discusses the specific methodology for the study,

including the selection of the students, the design of the data collection tools, the intervention procedures, the data analysis methods, and the limitations of the study. The fourth chapter will discuss the detailed results of the study. The fifth chapter discusses the limitations of the current study, a summary of the results, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The following literature review will focus on previous research related to social skills interventions. It specifically addresses research recommendations for selecting students, addressing social validity, and programming for generalization.

Over the years, a great deal of research has been done on social skills training programs. The research has shown mixed results as to the effectiveness of these programs (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Guglielmo & Tyron, 2001; Hansen et al., 1998). Many factors can interfere with the effectiveness of a social skills intervention. Some of the factors may be beyond the control of the facilitator alone. For example, family problems, influences from peer groups, externalizing behavior disorders, and cognitive ability are all factors that cannot be controlled for within the treatment setting. They are also factors that cannot be remedied by social skills interventions alone. However, they do play a role in judging the effectiveness of an intervention (Hansen et al., 1998). In addition to this, Gresham et al. (2001) found that there were five main variables that contributed to the effectiveness of an intervention. These variables were the characteristics of the populations used, whether or not the treatment was matched to the type of deficit, assessment, generalization, and treatment integrity.

With regard to the above variables related to effectiveness, it appears as though there is little significance in what approach is used to teach social skills. The majority of social skills interventions will fall within four categories, operant conditioning, modeling, coaching, and social cognitive approaches. When data from all four approaches were analyzed, no one approach was found to be more effective. The effectiveness varied dependent upon subject differences related to type of deficit (Elliott, Sheridan, &

Gresham, 1989) and individual student need (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan & Tribe, 2006).

Selection of Students

The first step in creating an intervention involves identifying the students who will participate. Research has suggested that some common ways of identifying students are through teacher nominations, social skills rating scales, and a documentation of deficits on an Individualized Education Plan (Lane, Menzies, Barton-Arwood, Donkas, & Muntion, 2005).

It has been thought that social skills can be taught at any point in time (Goleman, 1995); however, others have suggested that after age eight one can only hope to manage behavior rather than remediate it (Kazdin, 1987 as cited in Gresham et al., 2001). Therefore, beginning an intervention early on in a child's life may lead to more appropriate behavior in later years.

When looking at creating a small group intervention, it is suggested that some students who are not exhibiting deficits be included in the group to help model and coach other students in the group (Lane et al., 2005). These students can also serve as a common stimulus in other environments, which has been seen to promote generalization (DuPaul & Eckart, 1994). In addition to that, group sizes should be kept small to allow for maximum opportunity for practice and feedback (Lane et al., 2005).

Social Validity

Social validity is another important component of a social skill intervention that ultimately contributes to its success or failure. Social validity refers to "the acceptability of the goals, procedures, and outcomes of an intervention" (Hansen et al., 1998). In other

words, social validity refers to the ways in which a person's functioning is changed in all environments as the result of an intervention. All aspects of an intervention must be acceptable to participants and lead to a meaningful change in person's life in order for an intervention to be socially valid (Kennedy, 2002). It is important that the facilitator is tuned into the teacher's, family's, and the student's expectations for an intervention, which will increase social validity.

Social validity has been typically assessed in two ways. Subjective evaluation involves asking others to describe changes in a child's behavior since an intervention has taken place. This can be done with checklists and rating scales. Social comparison can be done by comparing a child to another peer who exhibits appropriate behaviors. This would be done through observation. The problems with this type of an assessment of social validity is that the assessment is done by people who are not the child's peers and do not have as much understanding as to what behaviors are valid. Therefore, the intervention may appear to be socially valid to adults but not with the child's peers (Fox & McEvoy, 1993; Sheridan & Walker, 1999).

Lane et al. (2005) recommended that social validity be assessed both prior to an intervention and after an intervention. This allows for one to determine how receptive participants are to the intervention, and it also provides a framework for interpreting the results of an intervention. Rating scales are suggested for the assessment of this component.

Generalization

The most common failure of social skills training is the inability of the programs to show evidence of generalization. The reasons suggested for this are due to their failure

to program for generalization and teaching the skills in settings that are far removed from the natural environment, such as pull out, small group settings (Gresham et al., 2001).

Very few of the standardized curricula program for generalization. Instead, many use the “train and hope” (DuPaul & Eckert, 1994, p. 117) philosophy. This approach is focused on providing an intervention and training behaviors in a treatment setting and then measuring behaviors to see if they have been generalized after treatment. This has been proved to be the least effective strategy (DuPaul & Eckert, 1994; Hansen et al., 1998).

One problem associated with generalization that cannot be as easily programmed for is the possibility of competing behaviors. It is possible, especially in students with disabilities, that a new skill will be overpowered by a competing behavior because it is more efficient than the new skill. In this case, professionals need to look at altering environmental contingencies that allow this competing behavior to continue and focus on reinforcing the new behavior (Gresham et al., 2001).

In order for generalization to occur, interventionists need to be aware of its necessity and plan for it throughout the intervention process, beginning with assessment. The training process should provide a variety of opportunities and situations for the students to practice in. The more information one has about the natural environment the better one will be able to program for generalization (Sheridan et al., 1999).

In order for social skills interventions to be successful, facilitators need to focus on programming that directly strives for generalization (Hansen et al., 1998). Eventually, students will need to be able to use their skills in the real world. In preparation for this, adults should be trained to assist the child in finding the environments where the skills

should be used. It is possible that these adults may need to coach a child with this until it becomes natural (Sheridan et al., 1999).

If skills are taught in their natural environment, their generalization to that environment is more likely to occur even after treatment is complete. Incidental learning may be an effective strategy for generalization. In this situation, naturally occurring events are used to teach and reinforce behaviors (Fenty, Miller & Lampi, 2008; Gresham et al., 2001). Sheridan et al. (1999) suggested other strategies for providing a training environment that is conducive to generalization. Programming common stimuli involves incorporating common activities and situations from the natural environment into the treatment environment. General case programming is also suggested. In this scenario, students are taught skills that may be appropriate in numerous settings. The skill is highlighted in many different contexts with the students practicing how to adapt it to each situation.

Some school-wide/classroom based programs are examples of training that occurs in a natural setting. Usually the focus of this training is directed at skills that are necessary for school success (Sheridan et al., 1999). Planning an intervention that takes place in natural environments is essential to the success of the intervention. Schools provide many opportunities for teaching not only academics but also social skills. Implementing some of the strategies named above is very feasible within the school setting (Fenty et al, 2008), the key is to program for generalization from the onset of treatment.

Assessing Intervention Effectiveness

The final portion of an effective social skills intervention is assessing the effectiveness of the intervention. Sheridan et al (1999) provided numerous suggestions for using observation strategies for assessing student behavior following the intervention period. In addition to direct student observation, the most common ways of assessing student behavior are teacher rating scales and self report rating scales (Lane et al., 2005).

Conclusion

Research supports the importance of teaching social skills to children and the value of doing so in the school setting. The research also points out that there is no one specific program or approach to teaching social skills that is effective with all children. Some common elements in various approaches are thought to lead to more successful outcomes. Among these elements are social validity and generalization. Students need to believe that the intervention is worth their time and the skills they are learning are essential for their success. It is important for facilitators to take into account the student's environment and their perspectives when planning what skills to teach and how to teach them. Facilitators also need to understand the importance of teaching the students skills that they can transfer beyond the treatment setting. The more closely the treatment setting reflects the students' natural environments and the more opportunities for practicing skills in "real world" situations, the more likely the students will be to generalize the skills to multiple settings.

Even though the school setting provides many opportunities to teach and reinforce social skills within the classroom on a daily basis, some students require additional direct instruction and practice utilizing these skills. It is necessary to determine if a small group

intervention can have an effect on the frequency in which students display the targeted skills. Furthermore, it is necessary to determine if the students' opinions related to the social validity of the intervention are related to their use of the skills.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter includes information related to the sample selection, a description of the sample, and the data collection tools, procedures, and analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with the methodological limitations of the study and an outline of the group lessons.

Subject Selection and Description

This study took place within a rural school district comprised of just over 1600 students districtwide. Participants for this study were chosen from one of the district's four elementary schools. District wide the elementary schools served primarily Caucasian students (97%), and less than one-third (27%) of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch programs. About 10% of the students received special education services for an educationally related disability. The elementary school where this study took place housed early childhood through fourth grade students, with between two and four classrooms per grade level and approximately 230 students in the building.

The students participating in this study were participants in an already existing group facilitated by the school guidance counselor, the school psychologist, and the speech therapist. Prior to this study the group was focused on identifying and labeling feelings. Upon the start of this study, the weekly lessons were planned by the researcher with input and feedback from the school counselor and the speech therapist. This study did not follow any particular curriculum, materials and lesson plans were created by the facilitators. All of the students in this existing group were invited to participate and consented to participate in this study. A total of four students from two kindergarten rooms and two different classroom teachers participated in the study. Three of the

students were from one classroom and one student from the other classroom. The group consisted of three female students and one male student. All of the students were Caucasian. Three of the students received special education services, two under the category of autism spectrum disorders and one under the category of speech and language impairment. These three students were referred to the counselor for group time due to a determination of need by their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team. The fourth student was referred by the classroom teacher due to perceived delays in school readiness and social interactions.

This particular group was chosen for inclusion in this study due to collaborative efforts between the school counselor, the school psychologist, and the speech therapist. The group was facilitated in many ways in accordance with social skill research recommendations. For example, the group of students was in kindergarten, with social skill research suggesting that the best time to target skills is prior to age eight. Also, the students were selected based on a documented need. Some of the students had undergone special education assessment and a need was identified based on this data and an IEP team decision. Also, teacher recommendation was considered in the placement of all the students. Some steps were also taken to plan for generalization. A classroom aide was involved in group activities when possible so that the skills and behaviors could be reinforced in the classroom setting. Role plays comparable with classroom situations or mirroring classroom situations were used whenever possible. Social stories were also frequently written and used to apply to specific areas of need. These stories also provided specific phrasing and behavioral responses for the students to use in a given situation.

The speech therapist also spent some time in one of the classrooms servicing students and was able to model and reinforce the skills taught in group in that setting.

Furthermore, this group was chosen because the needs of these particular students reflect the needs of a growing number of students entering the public school setting. Therefore, it was deemed important to gather information related to the effectiveness of the group to better guide the facilitation of future groups.

Instrumentation

The surveys used for this study were created by the researcher for the purposes of this study. They consisted of a student report and a teacher report. The surveys are located in Appendix A and B. The student report survey aimed to assess the acceptability of the group activities and the social validity of the targeted skill from the students' perspective. It consisted of two questions to which the students could respond, by choosing from an array of three choices paired with visual faces depicting their meaning. The choices were aimed at determining the students' opinions as to whether or not they supported, disagreed with or were indifferent to the activities and the importance of the skills.

The teacher survey consisted of seven questions and was completed at the end of all the group sessions to assess the frequency with which the students were observed to be exhibiting the target behaviors in the classroom. The teachers were asked to respond in the form of a four point Likert scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always).

Intervention Procedures

The first week of the data collection consisted of a lesson on telling the truth versus telling a lie. This lesson was triggered by teacher concern about a student in group

who was struggling in the classroom because the student was accusing others of wrongdoings that they did not commit. On occasion, the student indicated that he or she was telling a joke, but adults were unable to distinguish the comments as jokes or truths. The lesson this week consisted of reading a story about the importance of telling the truth, followed by discussion and examples of truths and lies, then a role play of the consequences for the accuser and the accused when someone tells a lie.

Week two consisted of a review of an earlier lesson on feelings and how they are related to voice tone. The group read a social story about how voice tone can tell others what you are feeling and why it is important to use a “nice” tone of voice to speak to others when you are asking a question or requesting something. The students first observed the facilitators role play different situations using both appropriate and inappropriate voice tones. The students were asked to comment on the appropriateness of the voice tone and also how those on the receiving end responded to requests with either voice tone. The students were then asked to role play different situations using an appropriate voice tone for the situation. Most of the students were able to point out the inappropriate voice tone for the situation, but it was more difficult for them to express which voice tones were appropriate for which emotions. For example, someone talking in an excited tone about something sad was recognizable as inappropriate, but it was difficult for the students to verbalize that a high pitched rapid voice tone portrayed happiness or excitement instead of sadness.

The third week’s lesson was again prompted by a classroom need for some of the students in group to learn how to ask a question for assistance rather than struggling through an assignment or giving up on one. The activities started with a review of

feelings related to asking a question (frustration, confusion, embarrassment). It then focused on how to ask a general question of someone, including voice intonation and question words. A social story was read on when and how to ask the teacher a question. The students then were asked to engage in a very difficult game where they were required to build something, but were not given all the information or pieces necessary to do so, therefore having to frequently ask one another or an adult for what they needed. The students showed the capability to appropriately and frequently ask the adults for help in difficult situations. They were aware of how to ask a question and use an appropriate voice tone. Several of them were also able to effectively communicate what their specific challenge was.

Following up with question asking, we discussed answering questions that are posed to us during week four. This was an area of weakness for at least one student in group who often chose not to respond to others' inquiries. The group started out with reviewing feeling words related to the topic and then read a social story about answering when the teacher asks you a question. The students practiced answering questions and were provided with some coaching and examples of phrases they could use to respond to questions, such as, "If you do not have an answer you can say, 'I don't know' or 'Can you come back to me later?'" The majority of the students in group appeared pleased with being given the language to express themselves when they were unsure of an answer and used the phrases effectively. One student in particular shied away from any responses, even the rehearsed phrases, without considerable coaching.

Week five consisted of a lesson on compromising. This lesson was prompted by some observation of the students in group struggling to play interactively with others due

to an unwillingness to engage in any activities suggested by another student. The group discussed what the word compromise meant and watched the facilitators role play a situation where they had to compromise. The students then were allowed an opportunity to participate in a role play where they needed to compromise with one another. They were coached and provided with examples of phrases they could use to help them come to an agreement. Following the role playing, they were allowed ten minutes of free time to draw a picture together, but they all had to agree on a theme for their picture. This activity proved very challenging for the students. They were unable to compromise and ended up not drawing anything because they ran out of time. One student in the group took a leadership role and facilitated the discussion and attempted to get the other three students to agree, without success. Two of the other three students had specific ideas in mind of what they wanted to draw (princesses or a zoo) and were unwilling to budge on their opinion or find a way to mesh the two ideas. The fourth student didn't want to draw at all; this student rejected all the other students' ideas and continually suggested abandoning the idea to play a game. The students appeared very frustrated at the close of group. The one student who attempted to facilitate the difficult discussion, despite her frustration, had demonstrated a strong grasp of the day's lesson and very appropriate skills for facilitating a compromise between peers.

The final week of the intervention consisted of a feelings review and a review of compromising. A feelings lotto game was played and the students discussed different situations that elicited different emotions. Following this review, compromising was reviewed along with phrases and ideas for reaching a compromise. Then the students were allowed some time to practice by choosing a game they all wished to play together.

This week the students were able to come to an agreement within only a few minutes. They utilized some of the suggestions provided by the facilitators prior to discussion and they were successful. Due to the fact that this week's compromise went so smoothly, it is possible that the challenging week before which resulted in no activity for anyone was a frustrating challenge but also a challenge that may have resulted in learning lesson.

During the final week of school, the group was provided with an opportunity to go to Dairy Queen as an informal opportunity to practice their social skills in a "natural setting." No data collection took place this week, but informal observations by the facilitators were encouraging. The students freely engaged in reciprocal conversation with one another using appropriate voice tone and an excellent demonstration of question asking and answering behaviors. The facilitators did not feel the need to do any prompting or coaching and were shocked at some of the skills exhibited by the students, as they were not being consistently displayed in the group or classroom setting, yet the majority of the students appeared to have the necessary skills for using these behaviors more often.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting any data, the researcher distributed consent forms to all the parents and/or guardians of the students in the sample. The consent form is included in Appendix C. Once parent consent forms were returned, the students were also asked for their verbal consent to participate in the study. The script used for requesting student consent is located in Appendix D. All the parents/guardians and students gave their informed consent to participate.

Student surveys. The students were administered the two question survey to report their perceptions about the acceptability of the group activities and the importance of the skills (Appendix A) at the end of each group session. The students were distributed surveys marked with a number to ensure anonymity to all but the researcher. They were read the questions to the survey and asked to circle their response.

Teacher Surveys. The teachers were administered the seven question survey about observed social skills after the group wrapped up for the year. Their surveys were also coded with a number, but they were told which number referred to which student so they could respond based on individual student behaviors.

Data Analysis

The data collected from this study were analyzed and reported qualitatively by single case. Results are presented regarding each individual student's reported perspectives of the group acceptability and social validity and also the teachers' reported opinions as to the frequency with which each student applied the skills in the classroom setting. Additionally, the combined results are presented as they relate to each research objective.

Limitations

This study was limited by several factors. One significant limiting factor was the number of participants. The results are not generalizable to a larger population of students. The qualitative nature of the data analysis also limits generalization. Some of the results may be informative for planning future groups based on similar topics if there are some participant similarities, but the same results should not be expected nor should they be considered as reflective of a larger population.

Data collection and data analysis may have been more informative had a pretest been administered to determine the frequency with which students exhibited the target behaviors prior to participating in group and if this improved after the group intervention.

The instruments used in this study also limited the study. The surveys were created by the researcher and were not previously assessed for reliability or validity.

A final limitation of this research is a common limitation of all social skills research. The skills taught in this group were taught in an unnatural setting (guidance office) as opposed to being taught, practiced, and reinforced in the child's natural setting, such as, the classroom or playground environment.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will qualitatively discuss the results of this study. It will look at each individual student by providing some brief background information followed by what that student's reported perspectives were on the acceptability of the group and the social validity of the skills. It will also include the ratings provided by each student's teacher regarding the frequency with which they were performing the desired behaviors. Finally, it will discuss the overall results of the study related to the initial objectives of the study.

Student 1

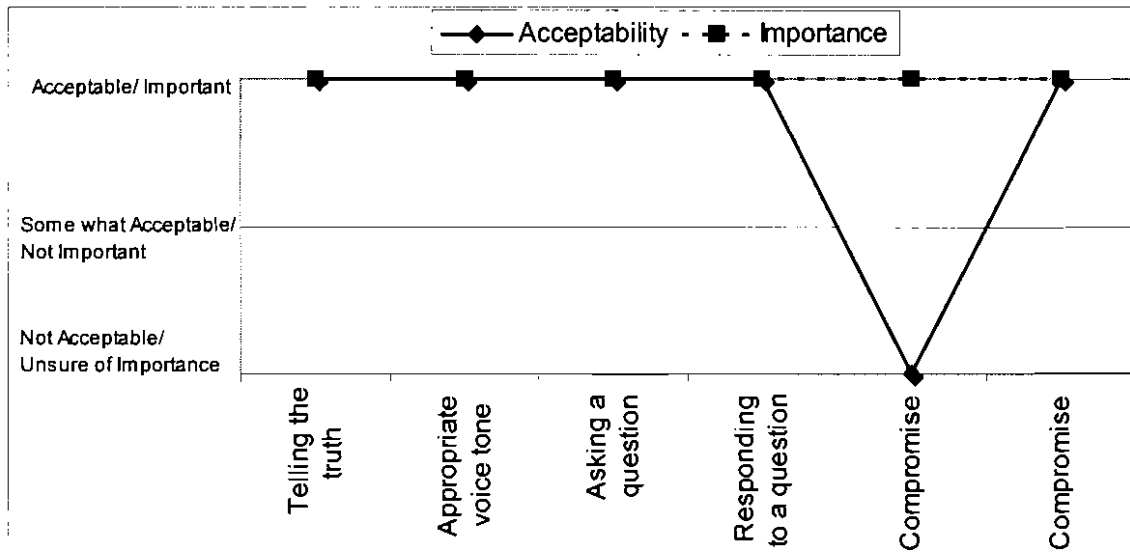
The first student participating in this research was a female student. She received special education services under the category of speech and language impairment due to severe articulation delays. The majority of this student's utterances had been unintelligible to others. Her peers and her teacher struggled to understand her as her articulation errors were not consistent and she often refused to provide verbal responses when prompted. Additionally, the student demonstrated some opposition to teacher direction and classroom participation, possibly due to frustration with communication. This student was referred for group participation due to an identified need by her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team. The team believed she would benefit from practicing both socialization and articulation skills in a small group setting in addition to her one on one speech therapy time.

Based on the responses provided by this student, the majority of the group activities were perceived as acceptable or "fun" by the student (see Figure 1). She indicated her enjoyment with the activities for all but one week of the study. The one week of the study where the student reported not being interested in group activities

pertained to a lesson on compromising, which was difficult and frustrating for all students as outlined above. This particular student was one of the two who had a specific idea of what she wanted to do and was not willing to let go of that idea.

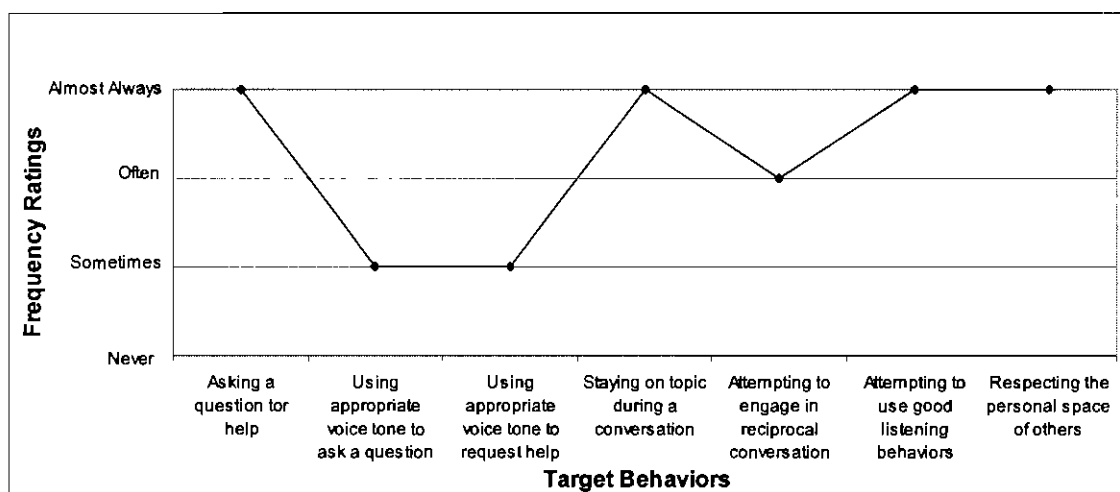
This student reported that she believed all of the skills taught and practiced in the group setting were important (see Figure 1). Her behaviors in the group setting also reflected the fact that she most likely believed the lessons were important. She was attentive to the facilitators and mostly cooperative with the activities. Occasionally, she needed significant coaching to produce a verbal response when prompted. She tended to be more willing to produce this response if a response was modeled for her and expectations were held high. For example, in a role play situation if she failed to respond verbally to a question or conversation she would be provided with coaching such as, “You can say, ‘Yes, I want to do that’ or ‘No, I want to do something else.’” She was also held to the expectation that group would not progress until she provided a verbal response if this was a necessary component of the activity. The student was not provided with corrections on her articulation errors but rather commended for attempting the verbalizations. Her willingness to provide both spontaneous verbalizations and verbal responses to prompts dramatically increased throughout the course of the group, as noted by informal observations. Her teacher indicated this in the classroom as well. This may have indicated this student’s need for this group more as a tool for practicing socialization and becoming more comfortable with using words, as opposed to the individual skills being taught.

Figure 1

Student 1 Acceptability and Importance Ratings

The teacher survey completed for this student indicated that she is often or almost always engaging in five of the seven targeted behaviors (see Figure 2). Those areas where she only sometimes engaged in the desired behaviors are most likely related to her speaking habits rather than inappropriate social skills. Her teacher reported that she does not consistently use an appropriate tone of voice to ask a question or request help.

Figure 2

Teacher Ratings of Student 1*Student 2*

This participant was a female student who previously received early childhood speech and language services for articulation delays. She had since been dismissed from services due to developmentally appropriate skills, however, her classroom teacher expressed concerns related to her ability to participate in and follow a conversation. This student is very eager and interested in socializing with others; however, she often does not demonstrate the ability to carry on a conversation fluently. She struggles to stay on topic with a particular conversation and also does not consistently engage in reciprocal conversation, but rather carries on telling stories that jump from one topic to another. This student's teacher also reported some concerns with her academic readiness skills, and it is possible that this student struggles with conversational activities due to some delays in this area as opposed solely to a lack of social skills.

This student reported varying levels of acceptability for the activities of the group (see Figure 3). Those group activities that the student reported as acceptable or "fun"

were those activities that included more facilitation and discussion by the group leaders as opposed to those where the students were asked to engage in problem solving behaviors and try the skills on their own. This may be due to this student's comfort level with individual activities versus teacher directed activities. After a skill was taught and the students were asked to practice a skill, this student would often look to the facilitators for guidance when she was stuck. It appeared to be a source of frustration for her if she did not receive complete guidance and was left to her own to solve the problem.

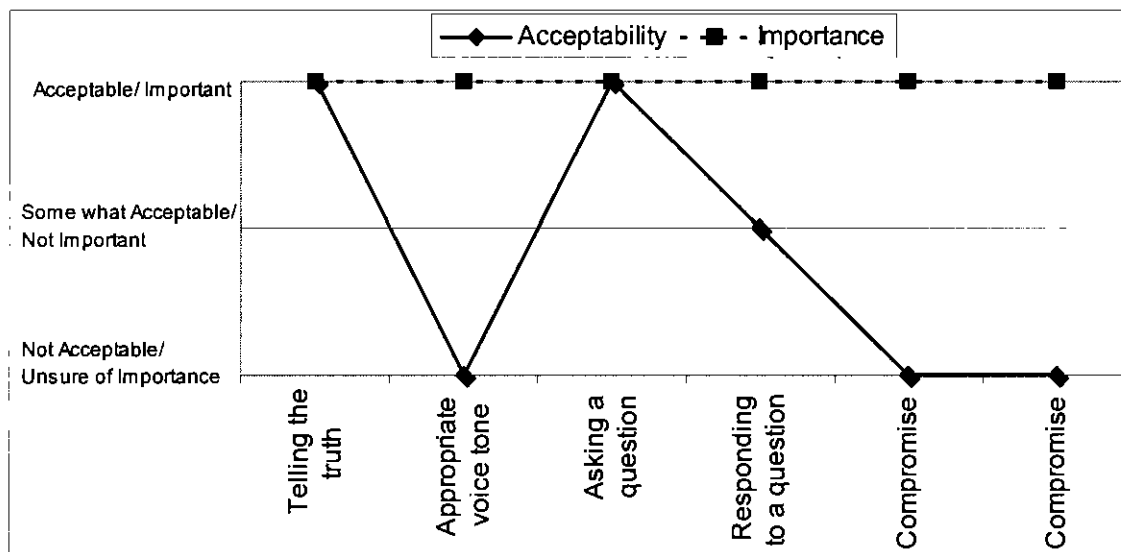
Interestingly, she never displayed any outward signs of dislike toward group activities. She always was eager and willing to come to group and she often volunteered to answer every question or participate in every activity, so her responses to some of the activities being "not fun" was somewhat surprising. One factor that may have influenced these ratings is this student's difficulty to stay on task with the directed activity. If she was involved in an activity and a topic of interest to her arose, she would often begin telling a story to the facilitators about the topic. For example, if the students were learning about feelings and identifying pictures that depicted a feeling word. This student may have seen the word happy and then began on a story about going to the fair last summer, which led to a story about cows, and then a story about her dad, and so on. She needed significant coaching and redirections to return to task only to begin the same tangent a few moments later.

This student reported that she perceived all of the skills taught in group to be important (see Figure 3). When the students were provided with the question of what it means when something is important, this student provided the response, "It means you have to listen to what the teacher is saying." The facilitators attempted to further explain

what it meant for something to be important, but it is unclear whether or not this meaning was received by the student or not. In which case, her identification of something being important may have been impacted by her knowing that you must pay attention to what an adult is saying, which she always did in group.

Figure 3

Student 2 Acceptability and Importance Ratings

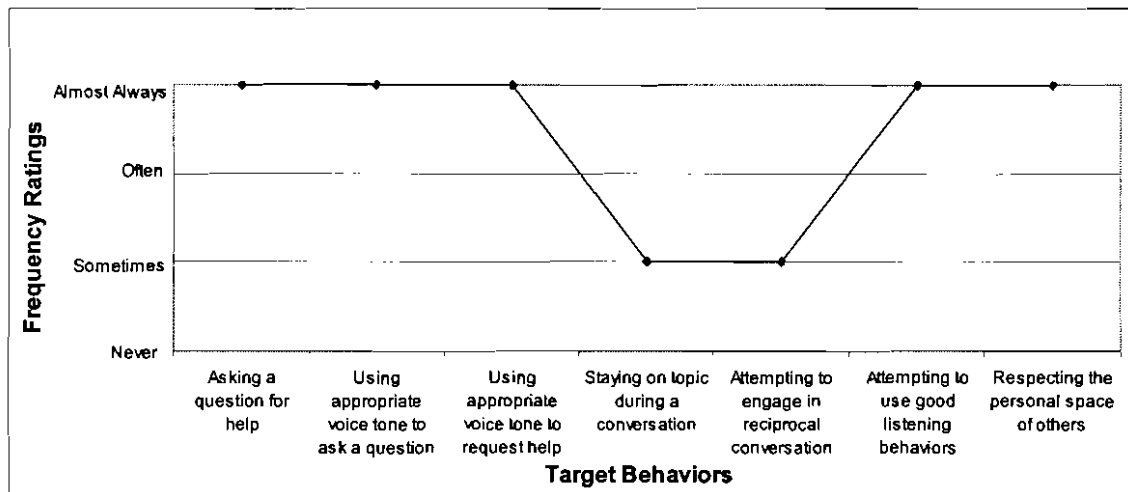


The teacher ratings for this student indicated that she is almost always engaging in five of the seven desired behaviors (see Figure 4). She received ratings of only sometimes demonstrating the ability to stay on topic during a conversation and sometimes attempting to engage in reciprocal conversation. These reported areas of further need are very much reflective of what was seen in the group setting as well. Although this student is very social and desires a great deal of social interaction, she tends to dominate the conversation by wanting to do more “telling” than listening or questioning the others involved. She also tends to get easily led astray during conversations. Some of her challenges with not staying on task during a conversation may be related to some of her

academic difficulties as she may not always understand all of the vocabulary used in conversation making it difficult to completely follow along with a conversation and meaningfully participate.

Figure 4

Teacher Ratings of Student 2



Student 3

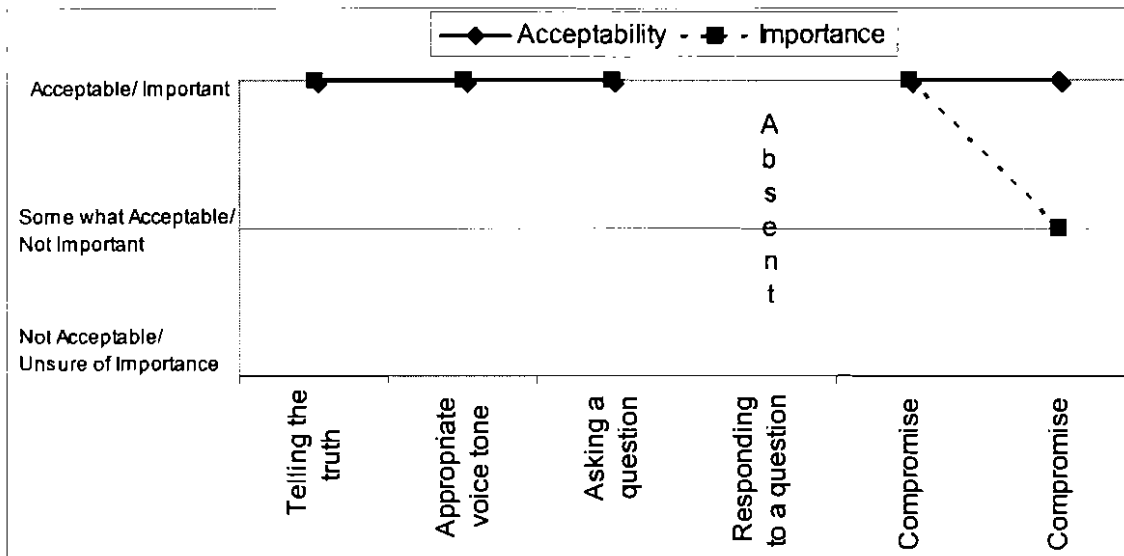
This student is a female student who received special education services under the category of autism spectrum disorder. This student had been receiving early intervention services since she was a toddler due to suspected social communication delays. The services began through Birth to Three programs and continued through early childhood special education programming. She now continues to receive this support as a kindergarten student and has been identified as having an autism spectrum disorder. This student is familiar with the group process and has had a great deal of experience being coached in social situations. In the classroom, this student receives visual supports and some accommodations for difficult situations, but is fairly independent and capable of

age appropriate tasks. She was referred for group due to an identified need by her IEP team.

This student reported that all of the group activities were acceptable or “fun” (see Figure 5). She always willingly participated in the activities and responded favorably to any coaching or prompting provided by the facilitators. She also often served as a group leader and role model for responding to facilitator direction and working to apply the new skills. During the week where all other students reported disliking the activities, this student responded with favorable ratings. During that week this student took on a leadership role in attempting to get the other students to compromise on an activity. Her attempts were resisted by the others and ultimately unsuccessful with this group of students, however, she demonstrated an understanding of and strong skills for working within a group.

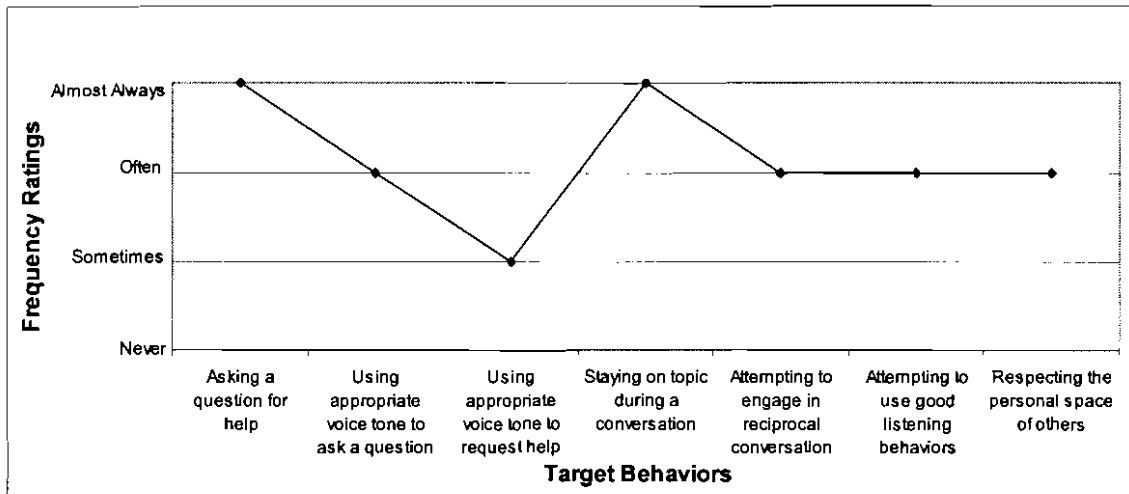
This student reported that she believed all of the skills targeted in group were important for her to learn except for the final week’s skill (see Figure 5). This final week consisted of refocusing on compromising, due to the previous week’s challenges. This student again took on a leadership role in helping the others compromise and her efforts were much better received this week.

Figure 5

Student 3 Acceptability and Importance Ratings

This student's teacher reported that the student is often to almost always engaging in six of the seven desired behaviors (see Figure 6). The one area where the teacher believed she was less frequently displaying the behavior was related to using an appropriate tone of voice to request help. Overall, this teacher informally reported many positive remarks about this student's progress over the course of the year and her ability to respond to redirection and coaching, which has allowed her more success in the classroom.

Figure 6

Teacher Ratings of Student 3*Student 4*

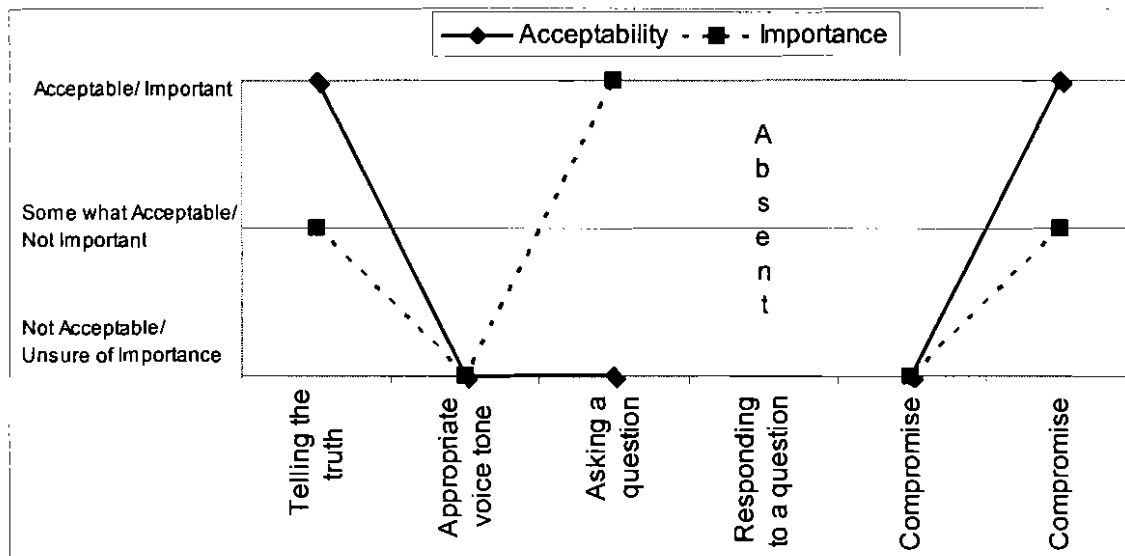
The final participant in this study was a male student who received special education services under the category of autism spectrum disorders. He also receives speech and language services for articulation delays. This student also progressed through the early childhood special education program. He receives a significant amount of support in the classroom for academic, behavioral, and communication delays. The student benefits from having visual cues for demonstrating appropriate behavior and also understanding what is being asked of him. One of this student's major challenges in the classroom was related to his inability to consistently distinguish between reality and fantasy in both his actions and his words. He often enjoyed telling jokes to others but did not understand when this was appropriate or not appropriate and also did not understand that joking around can be perceived as a lie. He struggled to confess to telling a falsehood when confronted for either fear of a consequence or failure to understand the consequences of telling such a story. This student also often perceived that he was the

sole target or focus of lessons or prompting even in a large group situation. This perception often caused him to become defensive and resistant to activities until he was assured that he was not the sole focus of the activity

This student reported a low level of acceptability of group activities (see Figure 7). He was only present for five of the six group sessions and provided responses that indicated he did not like three of the five activities. During group time, this student continually requested engaging in fun activities as opposed to the group activity. He often struggled to stay on task with group activities and also resisted any coaching or prompting by the examiners. On occasion, he would shutdown and with coaching indicated that he was upset and did not wish to answer or continue with the activity.

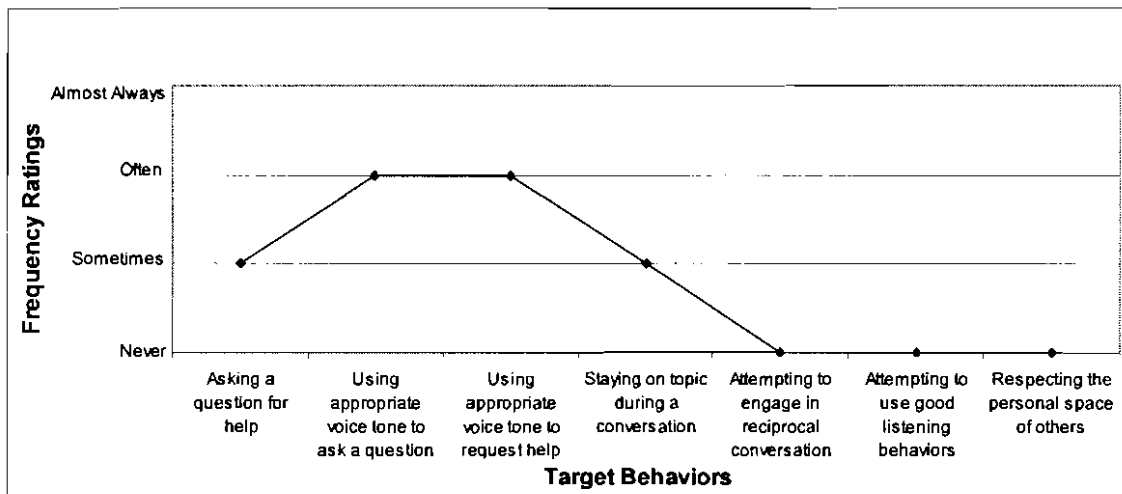
This student reported some variability in his perception of how important the group lessons were (see Figure 7). He reported that it was important for him to learn how to ask for help and not important for him to learn about telling the truth versus telling a lie. He reported compromising and working together was not important one week and he was unsure of its importance the next week. He also reported that he was unsure of the importance of using an appropriate voice tone to speak with others.

Figure 7

Student 4 Acceptability and Importance Ratings

This student's teacher reported that he is often engaging in two of the seven desired behaviors, sometimes engaging in an additional two of the seven behaviors, and never or almost never, as she wrote in on the survey, engaging in three of the seven target behaviors (see Figure 8). In the classroom, the teacher reported that those desired behaviors that the student fails to consistently engage in are related to engaging in reciprocal conversation, using good listening skills, and respecting personal space. This student does struggle with attention concerns and some sensory integration techniques are helpful in assisting him with managing his attention but adult support is also necessary for him to focus and sustain his attention, which would likely justify some of the difficulty he has with displaying good listening behaviors.

Figure 8

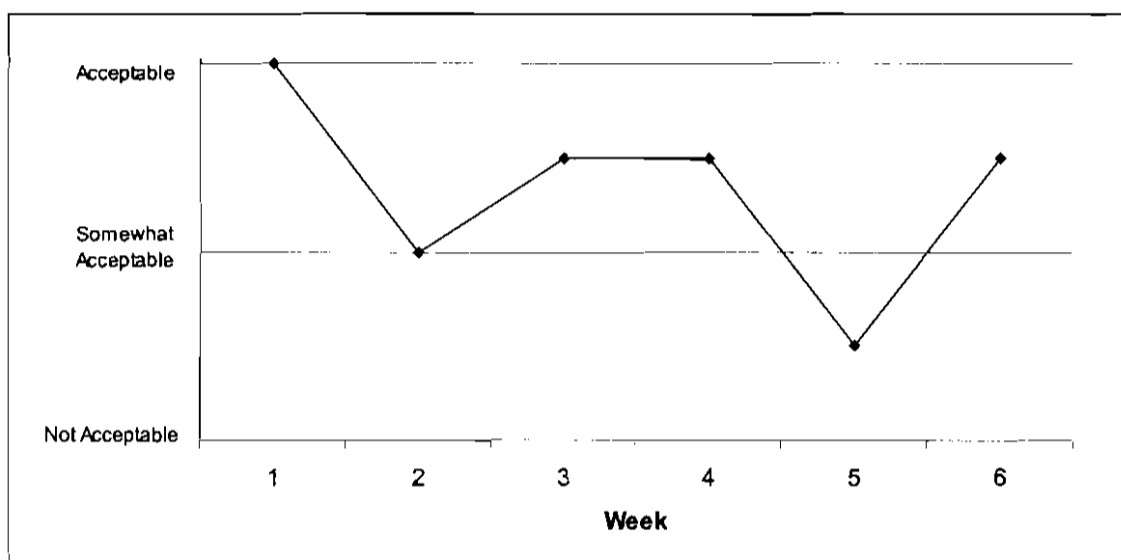
Teacher Ratings of Student 4*Research Objectives*

The first research objective was to determine the effectiveness of this already existing social skills intervention. The results of this are inconclusive due to the fact that the study did not contain a teacher survey prior to the group intervention. Therefore, it is unknown how much improvement, if any, the students made over the course of the group. The teacher ratings suggested that the students were exhibiting a number of positive social skills in the classroom setting on a relatively frequent basis, but it is unknown how frequently they were exhibiting these skills prior to intervention. Based on the fact that the students were referred for group by either their teacher or their IEP team the chances are that the students were not exhibiting these skills on a consistent basis prior to group, in which case the group may have had an impact on the frequency with which they displayed the skills. This, however, is difficult to conclusively infer without preintervention data.

Another measure of the effectiveness of the group may be related to the students' acceptability ratings of the weekly activities. Although they do not directly measure the outcomes of the group, the students ratings provide insight into how engaged the students were in the group; therefore, giving some measure of developmental appropriateness. The mean acceptability ratings for each week suggest that the majority of the students found the group activities to be somewhat to completely acceptable for five of the six weeks (see Figure 9). Due to the small sample size this data cannot provide significant analytical values, but it can help illustrate the acceptability ratings from a practical standpoint.

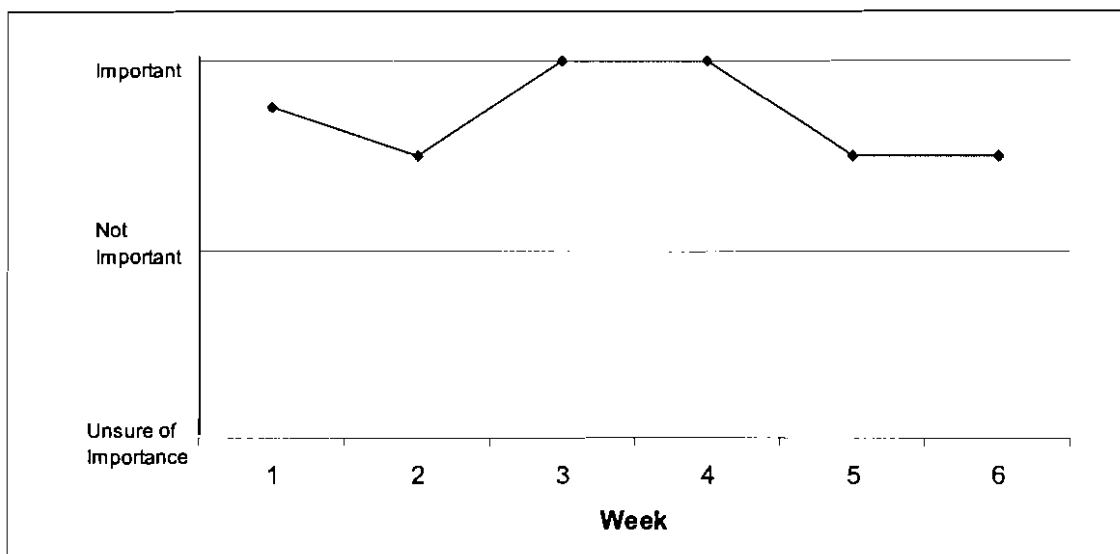
Figure 9

Mean Acceptability Ratings by Week



The second research objective is related to determining if those skills which adults feel are important are also socially valid to the students. This study determined that the majority of this group of students also reported perceiving the adult chosen skills as important for them to learn. In looking at the group as a whole, the majority of students rated each week's skill as important for them to learn (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Mean Importance Ratings by Week

Based on this information and given the assumption that the students had some understanding of the meaning of something being important, the majority of the students felt that they were being taught skills that were important for them to learn.

A third research objective was to determine whether the students were generalizing the skills taught in group to the classroom setting. A design flaw in the study does not make this objective clearly measurable, as the teacher surveys did not exactly match the group topics due to the fact that different student needs arose after the design of the surveys. However, the teacher surveys still provide information about whether or not these students were transferring the skills taught in group to the classroom setting.

The teacher surveys indicated that many of the targeted skills were being frequently applied in the classroom setting by three of the four students. The teacher reports confirm that these students were capable of demonstrating many of the target behaviors outside of the group atmosphere, suggesting that this group had some positive

impact on their ability to generalize their skills to their natural environments. Those skills that were not being consistently exhibited by these three students were most closely related to referral concerns and the personal struggles of the child. For example, Student 1 struggled with articulation skills, and the lowest ratings provided by her teacher indicated a continued need for more consistency in using appropriate voice tone for asking a question and requesting help. This is likely a performance deficit related to this student's lack of confidence in her speaking abilities and frustration with not being understood, as opposed to an actual social skill deficit. Student 4 was reported to be displaying the least consistent transfer of skills to the classroom. This student struggled significantly with social communication skills, as is the nature of his disability, and it appears as though the learning of these individual skills and also the generalization of these skills is going to be a continued need for this student in particular. Even though the group did not remediate all of the students' individual challenges, it appears to have had some positive effect on the students' abilities to demonstrate some of the targeted social skills. It is likely that many of the students in this or any other classroom do not always demonstrate the target behaviors on a consistent basis, some of this being due to their individual struggles or personalities. The students in this study may have stood out as having deficits in their skills, but arguably all students vary in their ability to consistently perform adult desired behaviors.

The final research objective was related to determining if the students' opinions of the social validity of a skill were related to the frequency with which they exhibited the skill in the classroom. Although a direct comparison cannot be made between the skills taught in group and the skills that the teachers completed surveys on, some examination

of the behaviors the students found to be important and teachers' ratings of those skills may be valuable for examining.

Students 1, 2, and 3 all provided consistent responses of the importance of the skills taught in group. Their teachers also provided relatively favorable ratings of their abilities to frequently display the appropriate target behaviors in the classroom. It is possible that these students have some understanding of what behaviors are important for success in the classroom and are able to display these behaviors at a level that helps them get their needs met in this setting.

Student 4 provided lower endorsement of the importance of the skills taught in group. Many of this student's responses indicated he did not feel the skills were important or he did not know if they were important. The teacher ratings also suggested that this student struggled to display many of the targeted behaviors on a consistent basis. Interestingly, this student was reported to often be using an appropriate tone of voice for question asking and asking for help and sometimes displaying the skill of asking for help when he needs it. The student had reported that asking a question was one skill that was important for him to learn and he was unsure of the importance of voice tone. It is possible that the student has realized the importance of knowing when and how to ask for help and therefore displays it more consistently. Additionally, because he tends to use an appropriate voice tone often, according to his teacher, he may not have understood the importance of such a skill because he was already using this skill appropriately and was not sure of its importance because he didn't know it any other way.

Therefore, it appears as though there may be some suggestive evidence that the social validity of a skill has an impact on student performance of the skill. The teacher

ratings suggest that the students who believed a specific skill was important also tended to demonstrate that skill more often.

Overall, and despite the previously mentioned limitations, the results of this study support the intervention as somewhat effective based on the fact that the teachers reported that the students were using these skills in the classroom with reasonable frequency and the majority of the students endorsed enjoyment of the activities. The results also suggest that the skills the facilitators of this group thought were important to learn were also perceived as important to the majority of the students. Generalization of the target skills seemed to occur for most of the students, as their teachers reported they were using the skills and the students displayed the skills in informal activities. Finally, it is possible that the students' perspective of the social validity of a skill is related to the frequency with which they display the skill.

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter consists of a review of the limitations of this study along with a summary of the results. It concludes with some recommendations for future social skills research and also recommendations for practitioners conducting social skills groups in a school setting.

Limitations

This study consisted of several limitations that interfered with the interpretation and generalization of the results. The first and likely most significant limiting factor is due to the small sample that was used for this research. Due to the fact that there was such a small number of participants in the study, the results are unable to be generalized to a larger population; therefore, limiting the utility of these results for future purposes.

Secondly, the limited amount of data collected poses some concern for interpretation of the results. Had a pretest been administered, additional meaningful information could have been gained related to whether or not the students exhibited an improvement in their skills over the course of the group. This data collection was not possible in this study, as the group was selected from an already existing group. Therefore, the interpretation of the effectiveness of this intervention based on growth over time is suggestive only. Data analysis may have also been more meaningful had there been additional data collected to supplement the surveys. Some sources of this data may have been facilitator notes related to each weekly lesson, classroom observations, and teacher reports.

The surveys used for data collection were limited by a factor that became apparent during the study. The student surveys were limited in the sense that they asked

students to rate a skill's importance, but the facilitators did not feel the students had a strong grasp on what it meant for something to be important. For example, students were asked if they felt the lesson was "important," but the students were not easily able to describe what it meant if something was important. Therefore, some additional teaching needed to be done to ensure the students understood what the survey was asking. This additional teaching consisted of a discussion of the meaning of "important" prior to completing the survey each week, but it is unknown if the students were able to clearly understand and apply this to their responses.

For this study, the teacher surveys were prepared based on the facilitators' original group plan; however, some pressing student behaviors in the classroom led to a need to alter these plans to better meet the students' current needs. The teacher surveys could have been matched to the group lessons so more comparisons may have been drawn between student opinion and classroom behaviors. Many of the skills planned for in the lessons were inadvertently taught and reinforced when the lessons were focused on other topics; however, direct teaching of the skills themselves and practicing the skills in isolation did not always occur as was initially planned. Although this may have interfered with the original group intent, it also allowed for more naturalistic teaching and the opportunity to coach, reinforce, and commend the students during naturally teachable moments rather than facilitator staged experiences.

Finally, additional programming for generalization may have also been beneficial to this research. Knowing that generalization of skills is a continued challenge to the effectiveness of social skills research, more time focused on classroom intervention and the recreation of natural settings may have proved more valuable for student outcomes.

Some steps were taken to assist with generalizability. For example, a paraprofessional in one of the classrooms occasionally participated in group and then reinforced and followed up with the skills in the classroom setting. The guidance counselor sought to reinforce and encourage the use of these skills in the classroom setting when she was in that setting for whole group lessons. The speech therapist also reinforced and modeled the same skills while servicing students in the classroom setting. Additionally, during the final week of school, the group was taken to Dairy Queen for an end of the year wrap up and an opportunity for the facilitators to observe and coach in a natural setting.

This group appears to have been effective in helping students maintain and practice skills that they were already performing with some level of consistency. It also may have been effective in helping them improve upon deficit areas, although this is inconclusive due to the lack of pre-group data.

Summary

This study did provide some valuable information about the perceptions of students related to group activities and social validity. The majority of students found the group activities favorable; however, less acceptability was reported on those weeks when the individual students struggled with the skill being taught. The majority of the students also reported that they believed the skills were important for them to learn, suggesting the social validity of these results. The three of the four students who received the most favorable ratings from their teachers were also the three students who reported the most engagement in group activities and the highest level of validity for the behaviors. It is possible that these findings share some linkage.

Recommendations

Future researchers may want to consider further research on the student perspectives of social validity. It may be valuable to consider the impact of the students' perspectives on the effectiveness of the social skills instruction. It may also be valuable to find effective ways of teaching students the importance of certain social skills that adults value as important to social competence. Researchers may also want to consider incorporating additional data collection methods to gain additional information which may supplement survey data.

Further research on the composition of social skills groups may also be valuable. Some research has shown that a mixture of students who are capable and less capable is valuable. However, further research revealing any differences in outcomes based on the ratio of males to females and vice versa may be informative.

Finally, research needs to continue to explore additional practices for incorporating generalization into social skills lessons. These practices need to be efficient and practical for working within a school setting where time and resources are limited.

Practitioners should continue to facilitate social skills groups doing their best to incorporate the recommendations of social skills research. It will be important for them to use all available sources of information (students, parents, and teachers) and collect pre-intervention behavioral data in order to plan and monitor group procedures. Collecting some ongoing observational data along with teacher reports may be beneficial for informing practitioners as to their students' progress and current struggles. Collecting even informal student feedback may also be valuable to help the practitioners appeal to

the students' interest enough to keep them engaged in the group. It may also provide opportunities for the practitioners to teach students the value of learning skills.

Practitioners need to continue to strive to plan for the generalization of the skills to the students' natural settings. This may include incorporating some time in the classroom for coaching and modeling or enlisting the help of others who are frequently in the classroom setting to assist with this process. It may also be beneficial to incorporate informal activities such as trips to a local restaurant, eating a snack together, or having a group play time into the group lesson plans. These activities could be used to simulate natural settings where the facilitators can coach the students. Another suggestion would be occasionally allowing the students in group to invite other peers from the classroom to join group.

Incorporating the use of social stories may also be a technique that practitioners want to consider in their group work. Although outside the scope of this study, there is research backing the use of social stories for students with disabilities, and the social stories used in this study were a helpful tool for the facilitators in portraying the group message. Students in this group seemed to appreciate the straightforwardness of the story and the fact that it clearly gave them the words and actions they may be struggling to find. Another advantage for this group was the fact that because social stories are written in the first person, the younger students, in particular, are more easily able to identify with the situation and understand that the story applies to them, versus having to draw that inference and application from a story about another child in a similar situation.

Overall, this study provided some insight into the perspectives of students related to the acceptability and importance of learning social skills deemed important to adults.

Although there were some limitations, it still provided some valuable information related to the particular students involved in this study. The effectiveness of the intervention cannot be clearly judged due to a lack of preintervention data. Based on the teacher surveys, however, it appears as though all of the students are displaying some of the targeted skills in the classroom setting; therefore, some benefit was likely to be gained from participation in this group. Additionally, information from the study regarding the individual students' continuing challenges will assist with future group and individual student planning.

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Appendix A: Student Survey

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Student Survey

Today we learned about how to _____.

I thought this activity was



Fun

Ok

Not fun

I think _____ is important for me to learn.



Yes

No

I don't know

Appendix B: Teacher Survey

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Teacher Survey

Please rate the frequency with which you observe the student to be displaying the following behaviors.

	1- Never	2- Sometimes	3- Often	4- Almost Always
1. Asking a question when he/she needs help.	1	2	3	4
2. Using an appropriate tone of voice to ask a question.	1	2	3	4
3. Using an appropriate tone of voice to request help.	1	2	3	4
4. Staying on topic during a conversation.	1	2	3	4
5. Attempting to engage in reciprocal conversation.	1	2	3	4
6. Attempting to use good listening behaviors. (quiet body, faced toward speaker, eyes focused near your face)	1	2	3	4
7. Respecting the personal space of others.	1	2	3	4

Appendix C: Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As you know, your child has been participating in a social skills group as a part of his/her educational program at Hillcrest Elementary School.

I am currently working on a research project for a graduate school course and would like to use this social skills group as the focus of my project. The focus of neither the group nor the group activities will change as a result of this. My hope was to continue running the group as it is now (along with the guidance counselor, classroom aide, and speech therapist, who are presently involved in facilitation). However, I would also like to survey the students' opinions of our activities and gain information about whether or not they are transferring the skills into the classroom setting. The procedures I would use for this are having the students complete a short survey at the end of group and then asking their teacher to complete a short survey about the skills they are using in the classroom.

The risks associated with student participation are minimal. A possible risk includes heightened attention to the students for leaving the classroom for group. The students' confidentiality will be maintained, as no identifying information will be included in my project. No additional educational information will be collected on students who participate, nor will any additional information be placed in their educational file. Some benefits of participation in this study include: an opportunity to help school staff improve their ability to understand what behaviors and activities are important and enjoyable for students and which activities provide the most beneficial outcomes for students.

Participation in this study is voluntary and the students, as well as, you, their parent/guardians, have the right to withhold or withdraw consent at any time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have or provide any additional information, as well as a copy of the results at the close of the study. This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: Amy Quaschnick, 715-273-3911, quaschnicka@ellsworth.k12.wi.us

Advisor: Barb Flom, 715-232-1343, flomb@uwstout.edu

IRB Administrator: Sue Foxwell, 715-232-2477, foxwells@uwstout.edu

On the following page is a consent form indicating whether or not you are willing to allow me to include your child in the study. Please indicate your preference and return the form to me as soon as possible. Again, please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time,

Amy Quaschnick
School Psychologist
Ellsworth School District

Consent for Participation

_____ I give consent for my child to participate in the social skills evaluation project conducted by Amy Quaschnick.

_____ I do not give consent and for my child to participate.

Parent/Guardian

Date

Appendix D: Student Consent Script

(To be presented to students upon receiving parental consent)

Today we are going to have group just like we always do, but before we start I want to ask you if you would like to help me with a project I am doing for the school I go to. If you decide you want to help me here is what will happen, when group is over, I will give you a sheet of paper that has two questions on it. The questions will ask for your opinion about what we did in group that day. I will read you the question and then I would like you to circle your answer. I want to ask you these questions so I can learn more about what kindergarteners think is important and fun to do in group. I will also ask your teachers to answer questions about if they think you are practicing our group lessons in the classroom.

You get to choose if you want to answer the questions or not. You can say yes or no. If you say yes and later decide you want to say no, that is okay too. You will still get to be in group and do all the same things we do each week, even if you don't want to answer the questions. I am going to use the information from your questions and your teachers' questions to help us learn how to make groups enjoyable for students and also make sure they learn things that help them in school.